Evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project
Final Report
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Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
Evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the important role that engaged family can play in supporting children who are in the child welfare system, the 84th Texas Legislature approved funding for the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) pilot project to test promising practices for a more comprehensive approach to engaging family in child protection cases in Texas. Through the CFE pilot project, Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Texas Child Protective Services program (CPS) within the Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) are working collaboratively to implement an adaptation of the Family Finding model, a structured approach for extensively searching for and engaging caring and supportive adults to support children who are in foster care. The CFE pilot project adapts the Family Finding tools and meetings to support a team-based approach wherein local CASA programs and CPS staff identify and engage family and fictive kin. CFE has two primary objectives: 1) To increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) To strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care.

Collaborative Family Engagement was implemented in three local CASA programs in its first year and in six additional CASA programs, or nine sites total, in its second year. During the first two years of CFE implementation, the nine sites used the CFE approach to serve a total of 282 children and 144 families. Texas CASA, in partnership with local CASA programs and CPS, trained 649 stakeholders at Overview Trainings and 606 people at Tools Trainings in Years One and Two. During the two-year pilot, CFE teams conducted 122 Team Meetings and 132 Blended Perspectives, Decision Making, and Lifetime Network Meetings.

Texas CASA worked with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to conduct a two-year implementation study of the CFE project. The primary purpose of this report is to describe the evaluation findings related to two broad research aims: 1) Assess the ways in which the CFE model enhances standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin to support children and parents; and 2) Examine the extent to which the new CFE model facilitates effective collaboration between CASA and CPS.

In Year One, CFRP found that: 1) Collaborative Family Engagement provides a framework and tools to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS; 2) CASA and CPS focused on building implementation capacity and aligning the CFE approach with CPS processes and timelines during Year One; 3) CASA and CPS identified many components of CFE that can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration; 4) CASA and CPS staff reported that using the CFE approach increases meaningful family engagement, enhancing case management and planning; and 5) CASA and CPS identified many components of CFE that can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration. In response
to CFRP’s Year One Report, Texas CASA made several adjustments to the CFE approach, primarily by emphasizing to implementers in Year Two that they should consider CFE a flexible approach, rather than a model that must be applied with strict fidelity. The CFE activities and timelines can be adapted to meet individual case needs. Reframing CFE as an approach allowed the Texas CASA CFE Manager and each CFE Coach to work with sites to develop their own processes and guidelines for CFE to best serve the children and families in their programs.

Building on these findings, the current report is informed by data collected through interviews, training observations, focus groups, meeting tracking logs, and surveys. The key findings from Year Two are summarized below and discussed in more detail in the findings section of this report.

1. Stakeholders value the Collaborative Family Engagement approach for collaboration and family engagement, and offer suggestions on how to improve CFE.
2. In Year Two, CASA and CPS implementers increasingly integrated the CFE approach into their existing casework practices to mitigate key Year One challenges.
3. CASA and CPS find the CFE approach useful across a wide variety of case circumstances. Texas CASA can provide support by distinguishing between core elements and flexible options and focus on site-level resource constraints.
4. The CFE approach supports increased collaboration between CASA and CPS, but the existing interagency relationships and leadership’s familiarity with the approach influence a site’s ability to implement CFE.

Based on the findings above, CFRP recommends that Texas CASA consider the following:

- Support CFE trainees by focusing in-person training on the details of the CFE approach and the practical, day-to-day implementation steps. Incorporate additional online training modules that provide supplementary training content.
- Encourage tool use by supporting CASA and CPS to apply the CFE tools and framework to a wide selection of their cases and consider funding additional Seneca Searches.
- Clarify the CFE approach by calling the CFE meetings “Family Meetings” to avoid confusion about the specific meeting names, referring to CFE as an “approach” rather than a “model,” and clearly distinguishing between the core, critical activities that define CFE and optional, as-needed activities.
- Support the expansion of CFE at existing sites by training each CFE Coach to focus on mitigating resource and personnel limitations at their sites.
- Enhance the CFE approach by establishing clear guidelines on implementation decisions for new sites and for communication within the CFE Team in between CFE meetings to maintain momentum and progress.
- Select sites for CFE with strong working relationships between CASA and CPS and plan to provide extra support to new sites when they are the first site in their region to use CFE.
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Purpose

Texas CASA worked with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to conduct a two-year evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) pilot project. CFE is a Texas-specific family engagement approach that uses the Family Finding model to enhance standard family engagement practices in child welfare cases. Ultimately, the goal of the initiative is to provide Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Texas Child Protective Services program (CPS) with resources and skills to create a network of support for families and to foster legal and emotional permanence for children during and after their time in substitute care.

The primary objectives of CFE are to:

1. Increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin, and
2. Strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care.

CFRP’s evaluation examined the implementation of CFE from September 2015 through August 2017 to provide Texas CASA and CPS with an understanding of the extent to which CFE enhances collaboration and family engagement practices in child welfare, and to identify how CFE can be used to inform CASA and CPS’ approaches for working with families across the state.

The evaluation has two primary research aims:

1. Assess the ways in which the CFE approach enhances standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin to support children and parents; and
2. Examine the extent to which the CFE approach facilitates effective collaboration between CASA and CPS.

CFRP surveyed almost 300 CASA and CPS training participants, many of whom used the CFE tools and/or meetings on their cases during the year. CFRP also met with more than 100 CASA and CPS stakeholders in focus groups at five CFE sites, observed CFE Overview and Tools Trainings, and worked with each CFE Coach to track family meetings and case progress. The results and recommendations presented in this report summarize findings from each of these data sources and focus on examining the extent to which the CFE approach facilitates family engagement and collaboration, as well as how to mitigate any challenges encountered in Year Two to improve the CFE approach in Year Three.
Child Welfare in Texas

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

In Texas, the Child Protective Services (CPS) program within the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is responsible for investigating reports of abuse and neglect of children, providing services to children and families in their homes, placing children in foster care, providing services for youth in foster care, and placing children in adoptive homes. As the state child welfare agency, CPS is charged with the following responsibilities related to cases of confirmed abuse and neglect:

1. Preventing further harm to the child and keeping the child with his family when possible;
2. Providing permanence for a child in substitute care by resolving family dysfunction and returning the child to the family; and
3. Providing permanence for a child who cannot return to the family by recommending permanent placement of the child with another family or caretaker.

In fiscal year 2016, of the 58,644 children in confirmed investigations of abuse or neglect statewide, CPS removed 19,079 children from their homes. After a removal, most often CPS places a child in substitute care with family (kinship care), in a residential treatment facility, or in foster care. During this period, referred to as Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC), parents have approximately 12 months to complete court-ordered services and plan for permanent placement of their child through a series of court appearances, as well as meetings and conferences with CPS. The primary goal during this TMC period is to return the child to his or her parent’s custody if the parent complies with his or her service plan and CPS determines it is safe. Legally, this case outcome is referred to as reunification.

When reunification is not possible, CPS begins pursuing an alternative permanent placement for the child, which may include placement with a relative, adoption, or permanent custody granted to DFPS. If the court terminates parental rights and the child is not adopted (by family or other adoptive parents), the child is placed in Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC), which can be granted to a relative or to the state.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES (CASA)

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are community volunteers who serve as advocates for children who have been removed from their parents’ custody and are in substitute care. Although practices vary in CASA programs across states, in Texas, CASAs are volunteers who are

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\(^a\) The timeline for the Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) period of the case can be extended to 18 months at the discretion of the judge.
appointed by the judge to advocate for the needs of children, monitor placement conditions, and speak in court on behalf of the children on the case. Most CASA volunteers are also the guardians \textit{ad litem} on the child protection case. CASA volunteers are tasked with promoting the best interest of the children on the cases to which they are assigned and with looking out for the children’s wellbeing during their time in substitute care.

Texas CASA is a statewide organization that provides financial support, training, and services to local CASA programs, with the mission “to support local CASA volunteer advocacy programs and to advocate for effective public policy for children in the child protection system.”\(^\text{4}\) There are 72 local CASA programs across the state of Texas. In 2016, over 9,100 volunteer advocates served nearly 28,000 of the more than 47,400 Texas children in substitute care, nearly 31,950 of whom were living in foster care (including children in TMC and PMC).\(^\text{5}\) CASA volunteers can play a critical role in supporting CPS to ensure child safety and facilitate timely permanent placements for children who have been removed to substitute care.

The rationale for collaborative interagency partnerships, such as the relationship between CASA and CPS, is grounded in child welfare best practice. Since the mid-1980s, many child welfare agencies have increasingly implemented collaborative practices to align uncoordinated service delivery systems to improve outcomes for children and families.\(^\text{6}\) Generally, best practices in child welfare focus on interagency collaborations and family-centered services, with an emphasis on professional cooperation and communication among providers.\(^\text{7}\) As a result of enhanced communication, flexibility in role structure, shared expertise, and renewed enthusiasm, public-private agency partnerships have been able to improve permanency outcomes for children.\(^\text{8}\) In addition to improving outcomes for children, organizational partnerships also strengthen workforces by fostering ongoing learning and sharing of diverse perspectives.\(^\text{9}\)

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ON CHILD PROTECTION CASES**

Over the last decade there has been an increased emphasis on the value of engaging extended family and fictive kin (close friends or other adults who have been closely involved in the child’s life) in child welfare cases. In particular, the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act in 2008 signaled this greater focus nationwide.\(^\text{10}\)

Connections to family and other supportive adults can benefit children while they are in foster care, as well as once legal permanency is reached. Connections are defined as extended family and fictive kin who are close to or care about the children and family. These connections are particularly important for youth aging out of foster care, for whom a caring, long-term relationship with an adult or mentor can lead to a more successful transition out of foster care and into adulthood, and result in improved feelings of self-worth among the youth.\(^\text{11}\) Research
shows that having larger networks of support is associated with a reduced likelihood of children in foster care experiencing psychological distress.\textsuperscript{12}

Connections with family and fictive kin can also benefit caregivers or parents whose children are removed by CPS. For example, a comparison of mothers’ social connections found mothers who had neglected their children had fewer instrumental resources, such as babysitting assistance, and fewer emotional resources, such as companionship and decision-making assistance, compared to mothers who had not neglected their children.\textsuperscript{13} Further, greater social support for caregivers has been associated with children displaying fewer severe behavioral issues (internalizing and externalizing behaviors).\textsuperscript{14} In addition, when child welfare caseworkers believe a caregiver has less social support they may be more likely to place children outside the home.\textsuperscript{15} A stronger level of social support for the parents has been associated with an increased likelihood of reunification and lower chances of subsequent neglect.\textsuperscript{16}

Family engagement can also enhance case planning and management by strengthening the relationship between caseworkers and families, promoting family buy-in to the case plan, and building family decision-making skills.\textsuperscript{17} When compared to standard child welfare case management practices, family engagement approaches have been shown to increase the involvement of noncustodial and incarcerated parents, and strengthen relationships between family members.\textsuperscript{18} Active involvement of parents, extended family members, fictive kin, and the community nurtures a support system that further “promotes safety, increases permanency options, and can provide links to needed services.”\textsuperscript{19} Most family engagement approaches work to improve communication with and among the family in a way that addresses family dynamics and cultural differences to best meet the needs of the family and children.\textsuperscript{20} For example, a family team may meet to create a plan on how the team can support the parents in completing their service plan as they work towards reunification with their children. The plan could include identifying family members who will give the parents a ride to parenting classes, call parents to make sure they attend mandatory counseling or drug treatment appointments, or drive the children to visits. In this way, families are able to “recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in working toward change.”\textsuperscript{21}

**THE FAMILY FINDING MODEL**

The Family Finding model, developed by Kevin Campbell in 2001, offers a promising approach to increasing family engagement in child protective cases. Family Finding is a structured approach and set of tools for extensively searching for and engaging a network of adults to support the legal and emotional permanence of a child who is in substitute care. Family Finding aims to support timely legal permanency by engaging family and fictive kin who will support parents as they work toward reunification and serve as placement options for children. However, the model is not focused solely on legal permanency. Instead, Family Finding emphasizes providing a child
with emotional permanency regardless of the legal outcome of the case, by fostering life-long relationships with adults who commit to unconditionally care for, support, and maintain contact with the child throughout the child’s life, and involving these adults in case planning. This approach to family engagement represents a shift in practice and philosophy within the child welfare system. Traditionally, caseworkers engage extended family and fictive kin solely as a way to identify a suitable placement for the children on a case. The Family Finding model has been used with children who were recently removed from their homes, as well as with children who have been in foster care for an extended period of time.

Family Finding provides child welfare practitioners, typically CPS caseworkers, with a framework and set of tools to find biological relatives and fictive kin and engage them in a process of making concrete commitments regarding the ways they will support the child. This support network collaboratively develops and implements a plan to support the child’s emotional and legal stability. Family Finding can be a resource to identify legal permanency options for a child with a relative through adoption or legal guardianship when a child will not be reunified with his or her parents.22

In 2011, the Federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded Family Connection Discretionary grants to 12 sites to implement and evaluate Family Finding models. A 2015 review of 11 of the federally-funded models and two privately-funded Family Finding studies found substantial variation in the effectiveness of the programs. Of eight experimental evaluations, which included treatment and control groups, three studies found positive impacts of the program on legal permanency, and the one evaluation that assessed emotional permanency found positive impacts in this area.23 The evaluations did consistently find, however, that children who received Family Finding services developed more meaningful connections with family and fictive kin than children in the control groups. In several of the studies, short follow-up periods limited the ability to track child and family wellbeing outcomes. It is unknown if connections were maintained over time or if there were any longer-term effects on wellbeing. The review concludes that inconsistent implementation is likely a major reason for the variation in outcomes. Implementation challenges cited in the studies include lack of stakeholder buy-in, negative attitudes toward relatives among child welfare workers, lack of communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and high caseworker workload.24

Prior research emphasizes the importance of thoughtful case planning and management to facilitate successful Family Finding interventions. One important step in this process is for program staff to consider workload and capacity constraints at the start of implementation to plan to work around these limitations. Another best practice recommendation is to stagger case assignments and consider the complexity of a case when making assignments.25 Adding multiple new cases to a caseworker’s workload at once can make it difficult to implement the model.26
Experts recommend integrating elements of Family Finding into larger management systems and institutional practices to promote buy-in and facilitate better understanding of processes.27

Family Finding specialists use fidelity monitoring tools to track variation in program implementation. Program implementers often find that maintaining fidelity to the Family Finding model, or to their adapted model, is one of the primary challenges in their programs.28 Variation in implementation may impede the effectiveness of the program, and also makes it difficult or impossible to understand whether the program is achieving its intended outcomes. Evaluations of Family Finding programs indicate that earlier components of the model are often delivered with greater fidelity, and that variation is more prevalent in the later stages of the model.29 Researchers have begun to examine the association between program fidelity and outcomes, such as commitments to legal and relational permanency and permanency readiness,30 but to date the findings are inconclusive.31

Collaborative Family Engagement

The 84th Texas Legislature funded Texas CASA through DFPS to implement a two-year Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) initiative in partnership with CPS, from September 2015 through August 2017. The CFE pilot project adapts the Family Finding tools and meetings, described in the next section, to support a team-based approach wherein local CASA programs and CPS staff identify and engage family and fictive kin, beginning when children are initially placed in TMC. Because collaboration was identified as a barrier to success in previous evaluations of Family Finding, Texas partners intentionally designed CFE with a focus on strengthening collaboration between CASA and CPS.

Under CFE, each case is supported by a team consisting of the CPS conservatorship (CVS) caseworker and CASA volunteer assigned to the case, as well as the CPS supervisor, CASA volunteer supervisor, a CPS family meeting facilitator, and potentially other professionals such as the attorney ad litem and additional CPS caseworkers. The team members work together to use Family Finding tools and techniques to find and engage family members and other important people in a child’s life, known as connections. The CFE team meets with these connections to develop a shared plan for supporting the child and, as appropriate, to involve these connections in case planning while the child is in TMC. The logic model shown in Figure 1 presents the CFE elements and activities, as well as the short-term outcomes targeted by CFE, including outcomes related to family engagement and collaboration between CPS and CASA.

The 85th Texas Legislature funded Texas CASA to continue implementing CFE in the existing nine locations, as well as to expand funding to additional CASA programs, from September 2017 through August 2019. In Fall 2017, Texas CASA will work to expand the Collaborative Family
Engagement logic model to include medium and long-term outcome targets in preparation for the third year of CFE implementation.

**Figure 1: Collaborative Family Engagement Logic Model**

As shown in Figure 1, CFE has two primary objectives: 1) To increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases, by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) To strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care, with the ultimate goal of achieving legal and emotional permanency for children as soon as possible. The CFE approach includes both the use of tools for finding and engaging family and fictive kin and the use of meetings with the family and fictive kin. Below are descriptions of the tools and meetings that are used with the CFE approach.

During the first two years of CFE implementation, nine sites used the CFE approach to serve a total of 287 children and 145 families. Texas CASA, in partnership with local CASA programs and CPS, trained 649 stakeholders at Overview Trainings and 606 people at Tools Trainings in Years One and Two. During the two-year pilot, CFE teams conducted 125 Team Meetings and 132 Blended Perspectives, Decision Making, and Lifetime Network Meetings.

**COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS**

CFE provides CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers with a number of tools for finding and engaging a support network for children and parents involved with the child welfare system, described in more detail in Table 1. Search tools, including Quick Finds & Diligent Search, Seneca Search, Find
Families in Mexico (FFIM), and internet/social media searches are often used as a first step to identify and contact family and fictive kin. Reviewing case records, or file mining, is another common activity undertaken by caseworkers and CASA volunteers to gather names of family and fictive kin. Although some of the search tools are frequently used by CPS outside of CFE, under CFE, CASA volunteers also have access to and training on the search tools.

Another category of tools made available to CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers under CFE are connection tools, which are used to engage children and parents in an interactive process to identify family and fictive kin who may not have been found through more traditional search tools. Whereas interviews may be intimidating, particularly for children, mapping tools such as Genogram or Ecomap, offer a creative alternative to interviewing that can enhance the relationship between the child or parents and the CASA volunteer or CPS caseworker.

**Table 1: Collaborative Family Engagement Tools**

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<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quick Finds &amp; Diligent Search</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seneca Search</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find Families in Mexico</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genogram</td>
<td>Visual representation of family tree used to map family and fictive kin relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecomap</td>
<td>With the child or parent at the center, surrounding circles map different spheres of influence with important people from each sphere listed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connectedness Map</td>
<td>The child and/or parent is at the center surrounded by connections. If few connections are listed, this indicates an urgent need for connections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circles of Trust</td>
<td>Circles represent connections to the child or parent, who is at the center. Circles are placed in proximity to represent closeness to the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility Map</td>
<td>A visual timeline in which the child or parent illustrates and reflects on important people and events at each place they’ve lived.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tree of Life</td>
<td>The child draws her hopes, dreams, gifts, people, and other important things in the areas she thinks they fit on a tree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid Appraisal</td>
<td>Participants create an inventory of resources for all participants to help them determine their role in the safety and permanency planning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rescue and Engage 100</td>
<td>Participants think of 100 ways to support and engage the child and decide which of those things they can commit to doing and create an action plan.</td>
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*Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Manager, Texas CASA*  
*Notes: Connections are defined as extended family and fictive kin who are close to or care about the children and family.*
COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS

The CFE meetings were originally designed as part of the Family Finding model and adapted for Collaborative Family Engagement. The objective of the CFE meetings, described in Table 2, is for the CFE Team to work collaboratively to meet the child’s immediate needs while she or he is in TMC and plan and prepare for permanency, progressively engaging family and fictive kin connections in this process. Four meetings define the CFE approach: the Team Meeting, Blended Perspectives Meeting, Decision Making Meeting, and Lifetime Network Meeting. Each meeting can occur more than once if the CFE team or family need more time to talk and plan, or if case dynamics change unexpectedly. Table 2 outlines the meeting structure and key activities that take place at each meeting. Each site establishes guidelines for the timeline of when each meeting should occur, and the CFE Team can often adjust these timelines based on the needs of a case.

Table 2: Collaborative Family Engagement Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFE Meeting</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Key Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Team Meeting                    | Once case is designated for CFE and CASA is assigned. (Typically at Post Removal Staffing) | The CFE Team meets to discuss the needs of the child and family and develop a plan for finding and engaging family and fictive kin connections. | • Share information  
• Set goals of work  
• Measure commitment  
• Define needs of children and family  
• Divide responsibilities for finding and engaging connections  
• Schedule the first family meeting |
| Blended Perspectives Meeting    | Within 45 days of removal (Often at Family Group Conference) | The CFE Team and connections meet to develop the family service plan and identify ways to support the plan and to identify the biggest unmet need of the children. | • Define the biggest unmet need for each child in the case  
• Develop the family service plan and/or identify ways for connections to support service plan  
• Use CFE tools to identify other potential connections (as needed) |
| Decision Making Meeting         | Within 60-180 days of removal (Often at Permanency Conference) | The CFE Team and connections develop action plans to meet the needs of the children and support the family in completing the service plan. | • Develop plan of support for connections to assist family with completing service plan; and to meet unmet need statement of child. |
| Lifetime Network Meeting        | Around 180 days after removal       | The CFE Team and connections who commit to becoming a part of a lifetime support network for the family meet. They revise the plans of support as needed and ensure the support network is sustainable. | • Commit to a lifetime of support for the children and family.  
• A connection co-facilitates and network members take responsibility for support planning, when possible.  
• Ensure that support is sustainable. |

Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Manager, Texas CASA
Note: Timeframes are flexible and can be adapted by the sites or on a case-by-case basis.
Under CFE, CPS meeting facilitators, who normally conduct CPS Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings are trained to schedule and administer the CFE meetings along with a co-facilitator. Local CASA staff and volunteers are encouraged to co-facilitate. A key feature of the CFE meetings is the facilitation style used at the meetings. The CFE Team prepares for the meeting by placing chairs in a circle or semi-circle, without any tables, to create a more open environment among participants. The Team ensures that the ratio of family and fictive kin connections to CFE Team members is at least 70/30 so that the family voice is the dominant voice at the meeting. Last, during the meeting the facilitator ask participants to each answer the same questions, going around the room so that everyone can speak. Together, these facilitation strategies are intended to build trust and rapport among the group and help everyone to focus on the child and his or her needs.
IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Sites

Texas CASA and DFPS chose three local CASA programs for the first year of the CFE pilot project (Year One sites) and six additional sites for the second year (Year Two sites), as shown in Table 3.

In Year One, Texas CASA and DFPS selected CFE sites with strong working relationships between CASA and CPS, strong family engagement practices, and sites in which the majority of CPS cases in the CASA program’s area of operation are assigned CASA volunteers. In Year Two, Texas CASA selected sites with more mixed characteristics to assess how the CFE approach functioned across more diverse settings. Additional information about the Year One and Year Two pilot sites, including the percentage of children in substitute care served by CASA, rate of confirmed abuse and neglect, and county child population are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Implementation Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASA Program</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Children Served by CASA</th>
<th>CPS Region</th>
<th>Rate of Abuse or Neglect (per 1,000 children)</th>
<th>County Child Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of the Coastal Bend</td>
<td>Nueces</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>88,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Advocates of Fort Bend</td>
<td>Fort Bend</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>205,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>144,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Hidalgo County</td>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>290,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Liberty/ Chambers Counties</td>
<td>Liberty Chambers</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>14.24/4.92</td>
<td>20,569/10,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Johnson County</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>14.78</td>
<td>44,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Hood &amp; Somervell Counties</td>
<td>Hood Somervell</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>23.40/14.59</td>
<td>11,282/2,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA- Hope for Children</td>
<td>Parker/Palo Pinto</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>13.17/35.19</td>
<td>33,414/7,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Tarrant County</td>
<td>Tarrant</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>533,833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implementation Timeline

YEAR ONE

From April through August 2015, Texas CASA and CPS selected the Year One sites (Nueces, Montgomery, and Fort Bend Counties) and developed the training and implementation plan for Year One, which spanned from September 2015 through August 2016. Texas CASA also consulted with Family Finding model author, Kevin Campbell, regarding Family Finding implementation strategies and hired a CFE Manager, Candice Dosman. The CFE Manager developed the CFE implementation approach and curriculum, conducted trainings at each pilot site, and provided ongoing coaching and support throughout the year.

Between November 2015 and January 2016 each Year One site received four days of training on the CFE approach, including one two-day Overview Training and one two-day Tools Training. The Overview Training presented the CFE approach, including the theory behind the development of the CFE approach, and broadly described the meetings and tools. The Tools Training provided CASA and CPS with additional instruction on the specific tools, meetings, and activities used in CFE and allowed participants to practice the skills. More than 260 CASA and CPS personnel and other community stakeholders were trained in Year One, as shown in Table 4. CASA and CPS participants included CPS conservatorship caseworkers from the units participating in CFE implementation, other CPS caseworkers, CPS supervisors and program directors, CASA volunteers, CASA casework supervisors, and CASA program directors from the three local CASA programs. Other stakeholders trained included members of the legal community and child placing agencies.

Table 4: Year One Collaborative Family Engagement Training Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overview Training</th>
<th>Tools Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASA &amp; Other</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Training sign-in sheets, Texas CASA
Note: Most of the 111 Tools Training participants also received the Overview Training.

In addition to these trainings, the CFE Manager and Texas CASA staff held regular planning meetings and teleconferences with each of the local CASA programs and their respective CPS counterparts at the pilot site locations. Planning elements included when and where each CFE meeting would occur, agendas for the CFE meetings, and how the CFE tools would be used.

In January 2016, the Year One sites began selecting cases to serve using the CFE approach. Nueces County and Montgomery County began assigning CFE cases in January 2016 and Fort Bend County
assigned their first CFE case in early March 2016. In the first year of CFE implementation, CFE served 20 families and 48 children across the three pilot sites.

The Texas CASA CFE Manager conducted ongoing coaching activities to support CFE implementation. Coaching activities are tailored to the needs of the sites and include case consultations, participating in and/or facilitating the CFE meetings, and guiding CASA volunteers, CASA staff, and CPS staff through the approach and the various tools.

YEAR TWO

In Spring 2016, Texas CASA and CPS selected the six Year Two sites (Hidalgo, Liberty/Chambers, Johnson, Hood/Somervell, Parker/Palo Pinto, and Tarrant Counties). Throughout Spring 2016, the CFE Manager held regular work days and planning meetings with Year One CFE implementers to learn about successes and challenges to inform the Year Two planning. CFE Year Two spanned from August 2016 through August 2017, and the goal for each CFE site was to use the CFE approach on cases that served at least 27 children by the end of September 2017.

Between September 2016 and May 2017, Texas CASA held five Overview Trainings and seven Tools Trainings for CASA and CPS participants. Texas CASA held an additional Overview Training for members of the legal community. More than 730 CASA volunteers, CASA staff, CPS staff, and other community stakeholders attended at least one Overview or Tools Training. From CPS, 326 staff attended at least one of these trainings, and 307 CASA volunteers and staff attended at least one. The remaining 101 participants were primarily from child placing agencies (or CPAs) or serve as attorneys for children or families at a CFE site. In total, 387 people attended an Overview Training and 495 people attended a Tools Training in Year Two. Most training attendees were from Year Two sites, but many CASA and CPS personnel from Year One sites also attended to learn additional skills or because they were not able to be trained in Year One.

Throughout the year, Texas CASA and local CASA programs hosted many supplementary trainings. These additional trainings ranged from two or three hour in-services to full workdays and were dedicated to refreshing participants trained in Year One on their CFE knowledge, working to brainstorm and mitigating site-level challenges, and providing in-depth knowledge and practice in using the tools and facilitation strategies incorporated in the CFE approach.

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b To track attendance across the Year Two CFE Trainings, CFRP entered participant names, emails, and site information from each training sign-in sheet provided to CFRP by the CFE Manager. CFRP categorized attendance into “Overview Training” and “Tools Training” categories. Participants who attended more than one Overview Training or more than one Tools Training were only counted once.
Table 5: Year Two Collaborative Family Engagement Training Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overview Training</th>
<th>Tools Training</th>
<th>At Least One Training (Overview and/or Tools)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASA</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Training sign-in sheets, Texas CASA
Notes: Some participants attended both Overview and Tools Training and others attended only one. The third column represents the total number of people who attended at least one CFE Training in Year Two, or the total number of people trained.

Children and Families Served by Collaborative Family Engagement

Across Year One and Year Two, local CASA programs and CPS identified 282 children and 144 families to serve using the CFE approach. Of the 144 CFE cases, 122 CFE Teams held a Team Meeting by the end of Year Two, and 73 families received at least one family meeting (See Table 7). In total, CFE Teams held 257 CFE meetings during the two-year pilot, as shown in Table 8.

Table 6: Number of Children and Families Served by Collaborative Family Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Families Served</th>
<th>Children Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood and Somervell Counties</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson County</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty and Chambers Counties</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueces County</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker and Palo Pinto Counties</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarrant County</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>144</strong></td>
<td><strong>282</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Meeting Tracker, September 13, 2017
Table 7: Number of Cases with CFE Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Meeting</th>
<th>At Least One Family Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood and Somervell Counties</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson County</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty and Chambers Counties</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueces County</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker and Palo Pinto Counties</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarrant County</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Meeting Tracker, September 13, 2017

Table 8: Total Year One and Two CFE Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year One Sites</th>
<th>Year Two Sites</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Meeting</td>
<td>Blended Perspectives</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Meeting Tracker, September 13, 2017

Of the 19 Year One cases that have closed, 9 had a final outcome of PMC to a guardian (47%), including to grandparents or fictive kin. On most of the cases in which a guardian received PMC, the children’s parents planned to be involved in their life. Other case outcomes include four family reunifications, two adoption cases, one case in which PMC was granted to the State, two cases in which Join Managing Conservatorship was granted to a parent and relative or fictive kin connection, and one case in which the child aged out of care, after reconnecting with her brother through CFE.

Table 9: CFE Case Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reunified</th>
<th>PMC to State</th>
<th>PMC to Guardian</th>
<th>JMC</th>
<th>Adopted</th>
<th>Aged Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueces County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Meeting Tracker, September 13, 2017

Notes: “JMC” refers to Joint Managing Conservatorship, or shared conservatorship, between a parent and a relative or fictive kin connection.
COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

Texas CASA contracted Dr. Cynthia Osborne and CFRP to conduct a two-year evaluation of the CFE pilot project. The evaluation examined the implementation of CFE from September 2015 to August 2017 to provide Texas CASA and CPS with an understanding of the extent to which CFE enhances family engagement practices in child welfare and ways in which CFE can be used to inform CASA and CPS’ approaches for working with families across the state.

The evaluation focuses on understanding the components of CFE (inputs and activities as described in Figure 1) that enhance the standard practices of CASA and CPS related to family engagement and interagency collaboration, and understanding variation in the way CFE is used to enhance practice across the CFE sites. The study assessed whether the two-year implementation of CFE accomplishes the two primary objectives of: 1) Increasing the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) Strengthening collaboration between Texas CASA and CPS to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care and their families.

The evaluators examined the extent to which the CFE approach leads to increased family engagement in supporting case planning, including the number of connections identified for children in TMC and the quality of engagement of these connections. To assess collaboration, the evaluators examined whether CFE allows CPS caseworkers to share components of their workload with CASA and more effectively work with CASA volunteers to identify and engage family and fictive kin during the conservatorship period. Although at this time the study is not able to assess the extent to which CFE is associated with better case or child outcomes, the evaluation identifies the ways CFE can be used to enhance standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin, provides an understanding of the extent to which CFE improves collaboration between CASA and CPS, and provides recommendations for Texas CASA to consider for future implementation.

The Current Report

The current report summarizes the findings from Year One of CFE pilot implementation and presents new findings from Year Two. The focus of this report is on early implementation, specifically on participants’ perceptions of and experience with CFE training, use of the CFE tools, planning for and attending CFE meetings, and the perceived value of CFE as an approach for facilitating increased interagency collaboration and family engagement. The report presents early findings related to family engagement and collaboration between CASA and CPS and it is important to remember that the Year Two sites have been implementing CFE for less than one year and many cases are still in the early stages.
Data Sources and Analytic Approach

The current report is primarily informed by qualitative data collected by the evaluators during Year Two through interviews and meetings with implementing partners at state and local levels; observations of CFE trainings; and focus groups with the front-line CASA and CPS staff delivering the approach. A shared online spreadsheet, referred to as the meeting tracker, collected basic CFE case information from the CFE coaches. Each of these items was used in Year One.

CFRP added several data sources in Year Two to collect quantitative and qualitative data. CFRP surveyed CASA volunteers who worked on CFE cases at three time points during Year Two through the Bi-Monthly Surveys, which allowed evaluators to assess the elements of the approach used in each CFE case, the quantity and quality of family engagement at the case level, as well as collaboration between CPS and CASA. Second, CFRP surveyed training participants before training and again three to eight months after training through the Pre and Post Training Surveys. The Pre and Post Surveys provide quantitative data to allow the evaluators to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice associated with the CFE approach. The current report presents both qualitative and quantitative data collected during Year Two with particular emphasis on the focus groups and Post Survey.

DATA SOURCES

The data sources CFRP used to inform this Year Two report are described in detail in this section. Year Three data sources will be added to allow evaluators to assess outcomes related to CFE implementation, including outcomes related to permanency and child and family wellbeing.

Observations

To collect information on the CFE approach, the evaluators observed the Overview Training in Weatherford in September 2016 and the two-day Tools Training in Liberty in October 2016.

Focus Groups

CFRP conducted semi-structured focus groups with CASA and CPS staff at many of the Year Two CFE sites from April to June 2017. CFRP visited new CFE sites to learn about early implementation and returned to Year One sites to learn how CFE implementation had adapted and developed during the year. CFRP used a focus group instrument designed by the evaluators for this study that asked participants about the usefulness of the CFE approach, examples of how they used the tools and meetings, and their goals for how to use CFE over the year. Through the focus groups, CFRP collected qualitative data from 49 CASA volunteers and staff and 63 CPS staff, shown in Table 10.
**Table 10: Year Two Focus Group Participants by Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>CASA</th>
<th>CPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberty/Chambers Counties</td>
<td>April 11, 2017</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>April 11, 2017</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County</td>
<td>April 12, 2017</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators (combined sites)</td>
<td>May 2, 2017</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>May 3-4, 2017</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood/Somervell Counties</td>
<td>June 8, 2017</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarrant County</td>
<td>June 8, 2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Focus Group Transcripts. N=112

**Interviews and Meetings**

To understand the elements of CFE and the ways in which the approach is enhancing family engagement practices, CFRP conducted interviews and meetings with CASA and CPS staff responsible for CFE implementation at the state and local level on an ongoing basis during Year Two. Through the interviews, CFRP collected data on staff perceptions of CFE and the successes and challenges during Year Two. The evaluators conducted initial phone interviews with the CPS supervisors and CASA program directors overseeing local implementation of CFE at several new sites in November 2016. The evaluators also held regular stakeholder meetings with the CPS and Texas CASA leadership overseeing CFE implementation throughout Year Two and will continue having these meetings regularly during Year Three.

**Bi-Monthly Surveys**

During Year Two, CFRP launched a survey once every two to three months called the Bi-Monthly Survey. CASA volunteers assigned to CFE cases completed the survey multiple times throughout the year. CFRP developed the Bi-Monthly Survey to learn which elements of the CFE approach CFE teams used on their cases, assess the quantity and quality of family engagement, and learn about collaboration between CASA and CPS at the case level and over time. CFRP sent out Bi-Monthly Surveys in November 2016, February 2017, and May 2017 and the response rates are outlined in Table 11.
Table 11: Bi-Monthly Response Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sent</th>
<th>Responses Received</th>
<th>Response Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2016</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>91.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>70.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79.72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP

CFE Survey (Pre and Post Training Survey)

The evaluators developed the Collaborative Family Engagement Survey (CFE Survey), an original survey instrument designed for the evaluation that was administered to all CASA and CPS staff who attended CFE trainings at two time-periods during Year Two, directly before attending the CFE training (Pre Survey) and between three and eight months after training (Post Survey). The evaluators administered a short Post Training Survey after staff completed the second two-day training to collect data on trainees’ understanding of CFE and intentions to use the CFE components. The CFE Surveys provide data to allow the evaluators to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice associated with the CFE approach during Year Two.

Texas CASA and the evaluators administered the Pre Training Survey at each of the five Overview Trainings between September and March 2017. As a result, most survey respondents work at Year Two CFE sites. Pre Survey response rates are detailed in Table 12. CFRP sent out the Post Training Survey in two waves, one in May 2017 and one in June 2017, to survey participants near the six month post-training period. Because of the wide time range during which Overview Trainings occurred, CASA and CPS staff completed this Post Training Survey approximately three to eight months after their initial Overview Training. In total, 96 CASA volunteers and staff responded to the survey and 199 CPS staff completed a survey. Of the total surveys sent to training participants, 64 percent of CASA volunteers and staff responded and 82 percent of CPS staff responded. See Table 12 for the complete breakdown of CFE Surveys sent and received in Year Two.

^ Not every CASA volunteer or staff or CPS staff who attended training is represented in the number of total Post Surveys sent. Some trainees were removed from this list because they were on extended leave at time of the survey or because they left CPS or CASA before survey administration. Other trainees were removed because CFRP could not obtain accurate email addresses for these individuals.
Table 12: CFE Pre and Post Training Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre Surveys</th>
<th>Post Surveys Sent</th>
<th>Post Survey Responses</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CASA</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>64.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>81.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>72.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Pre and Post Surveys, CFRP

In Year Two, not all CFE Survey participants worked on a CFE case, though many used the CFE tools on their cases even if it was not a case on which the CFE meetings were held. CASA volunteers who worked on a CFE cases also received the Bi-Monthly Survey.

Table 13 describes the percentage of CFE Post Survey responses from each CFE site. Nearly half of the CASA Post Surveys came from Liberty/Chambers and Tarrant Counties. One-third of the CPS Post Surveys came from respondents in Tarrant County and another one-fourth came from Hidalgo County. The fact that several counties are overrepresented in the CASA and CPS survey samples indicates that results of the survey may not be representative of all of the CFE sites.

Table 13: Post Survey Responses by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFE Site</th>
<th>CASA</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Percent of</td>
<td>Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.21%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24.12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hood and Somervell Counties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.03%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty and Chambers Counties</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.96%</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueces County*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.21%</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.06%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker and Palo Pinto Counties</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.46%</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarrant County</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.88%</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32.16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.63%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>199</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP. N=295

Notes: *The Pre and Post Training Surveys were primarily intended for participants from Year Two sites; only a small number of new CFE participants from Year One sites participated.
Tables 14 and 15 describe the role of survey participants within their respective agencies. For this measure, we expected that survey participation would be unequal across roles. Many of the Post Survey questions were only answered by CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers, and it is useful therefore that these respondents comprise the majority of our sample.

**Table 14: CASA Post Survey Responses by Position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position at CASA</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casework Supervisor</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP. N=96*

**Table 15: CPS Post Survey Responses by Position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position at CPS</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caseworker</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>70.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Administrator</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Facilitator</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>199</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP. N=199*

**Meeting Trackers**

CFRP developed a shared online spreadsheet to track the assignment and progress of CFE cases across all sites. The meeting tracker captures basic information about ongoing CFE cases, such as the names of CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers on the case, dates and important notes from CFE meetings, and case outcome information. CFE coaches update the logs on a regular basis to track progress over time. The Meeting Tracker allows CFRP, as well as Texas CASA, to regularly monitor the number of children and families served by CFE over time.
ANALYTIC APPROACH

The findings presented in this report are informed by the data sources described in the previous section, with a focus on the qualitative data collected by CFRP through focus groups and the survey results collected from CASA volunteers, CASA staff, and CPS staff.

The evaluators analyzed the data from focus groups by creating a conceptual coding schema organized by key research topics and sub-topics and then coding each focus group transcription using an iterative process to categorize the findings. Multiple researchers coded the data to reduce bias using the qualitative coding software MAXQDA.

CFRP conducted descriptive analyses of all survey data, including the CFE Surveys and the Bi-Monthly Survey. Key analyses assessed quantity of family engagement, CASA and CPS perception of the quality of family engagement, as well as frequency and quality of collaboration, and overall perceptions of the value of the CFE approach to child protection work.
SUMMARY OF YEAR ONE FINDINGS

In December 2016, CFRP provided Texas CASA, the Department of Family and Protective Services, and the Texas Legislature with a report on the evaluation findings from the first year of the Collaborative Family Engagement pilot program. That report was primarily informed by data collected by the evaluators during Year One, in particular focus groups with the front-line CASA and CPS staff. The information gathered during the Year One evaluation can be summarized into the five key findings described below.

Collaborative Family Engagement provides a framework and tools to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS.

CASA and CPS staff reported that CFE helped them move beyond a mindset of engaging kin solely to find a placement for the child, toward believing that family engagement can enhance case outcomes by creating a support network for both the children and parents. CFE resources, including tools and meetings, allow for enhanced family engagement and more collaboration on cases. Another key benefit of CFE is that the CASA volunteers are equipped to help with finding and engaging family.

During Year One, CASA and CPS focused on building implementation capacity and aligning the CFE approach with existing CPS processes and timelines.

CFE trainings were instrumental to learning the approach, but time to practice and hands-on experience using CFE were necessary to develop competency in the new approach. Sites also focused on key adaptations that would allow them to better integrate CFE into their local context in the future, such as scheduling CFE meetings at the same time as other required case meetings, having CASA volunteers play a larger role in inviting family to CFE meetings, and using a CASA meeting facilitator in addition to the CPS facilitator at CFE meetings.

CASA and CPS identified many components of CFE that can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration.

The greatest strength of CFE is that the tools and strategies can be adapted based on local needs and limitations, as well as at the case level. Specifically, CASA and CPS noted enhancements in practice associated with the CFE tools, the more intensive role of CASA volunteers, the facilitation style used at family meetings, and the coaching provided by the CFE Manager.
CASA and CPS staff reported that using the CFE approach increases meaningful family engagement, enhancing case management and planning.

CFE cases involve extended family and fictive kin connections in family meetings, service plans, and the overall case process in ways that non-CFE cases do not. Identifying family and fictive kin connections, inviting them to CFE meetings, and creating an environment in which everyone can have a role in the case process allows family members to build on their strengths to support one another to meet the needs of the child while he is in care and create a lasting support network.

CASA and CPS staff identified ways that CFE improved local collaboration during Year One.

Across all three Year One pilot sites, CASA and CPS reported that CFE provides them with resources and skills to collaborate more effectively. They described more information sharing, better division of tasks, and more intentional communication with one another in their CFE cases. Though the degree to which collaboration reportedly increased varied by site and across cases, CASA and CPS also described that there is a different, more positive and team-oriented dynamic between the CPS caseworker and CASA volunteer on CFE cases.

Overall, the results from Year One suggested that CFE shows great promise for strengthening collaboration between CASA and CPS to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care. Building on these findings, the Year Two report presents findings from the second implementation year. Year Two findings identify the specific ways that CFE works to increase collaboration and family engagement, assess the types and quality of family engagement activities occurring under CFE, and provides recommendations and considerations to inform future implementation.
YEAR TWO FINDINGS

In Year Two, CFRP finds that Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) facilitated increased family engagement and increased collaboration between CASA and CPS among Year One and Year Two sites. Considerable variation exists across sites in how CFE is used, how often CFE is used on cases, and on the degree to which CASA and CPS collaborate, especially at sites that were just beginning to implement CFE in Year Two. Despite this variation across sites, participants value CFE as an important tool to increase family engagement and collaboration. The following findings focus on how CASA and CPS are using CFE, progress between Year One and Year Two as well as ongoing challenges and barriers to implementation, and key recommendations for Texas CASA to consider in preparation for Year Three.

FINDING 1: Stakeholders value the Collaborative Family Engagement approach for collaboration and family engagement, and offer suggestions on how to improve CFE trainings and meetings.

CASA volunteers and staff, CPS staff, and other local stakeholders including attorneys, judges, and child placing agencies value the CFE approach as a tool to increase interagency collaboration and family engagement. Each of the key components of CFE, including the trainings, tools, and meetings, play a role in facilitating collaboration and family engagement that stakeholders value. Below we share CASA and CPS’s perceptions of the trainings, tools, and meetings, including key benefits and challenges, with recommendations for future implementation.

CFE Overview and Tools Trainings

CASA and CPS participants emphasized in surveys and focus groups the importance and value of CFE training to their work. CASA and CPS reported that the Overview and the Tools Trainings provided important content that allowed each agency to better serve children and families. On the Post Survey, conducted in May and June 2017, approximately 90 percent of CASA and CPS respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the material in the Overview and Tools Trainings was relevant to their daily work, equipped them for finding and engaging families, and provided new information about childhood trauma and healing (see Figures 2 and 3). On each of these measures, CASA and CPS responded very similarly; there were no important differences between the agencies on any measures of how relevant or beneficial they found the trainings.

Across measures from the Overview and Tools Trainings, there were differences between items that measured participant learning and participants’ reported application of their learning. Consistently, as shown in Figures 2 and 3, more respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they learned new and valuable information than agreed or strongly agreed that they applied their learning daily. Not all of the CFE trainees worked on CFE cases in Year Two, and it may take more
time and support for additional trainees to move from having the knowledge of family engagement to truly integrating engagement in their casework practices.

**Figure 2: Takeaways from CFE Overview Training to CASA and CPS Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Takeaway</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned new information about the impact of childhood trauma.</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better able to look at the children and families I work with through a lens of trauma and healing.</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I apply what I learned at the Overview Training in my daily work.</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP
Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended a CFE Overview Training in Year Two.

**Figure 3: Takeaways from CFE Tools Training to CASA and CPS Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Takeaway</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am better equipped to search for connections.</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better equipped to engage connections.</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I apply what I learned in my daily work.</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see new ways to collaborate with CPS/CASA.</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP
Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended a CFE Tools Training in Year Two.

Respondents were also asked to describe the most important thing that they learned at each training. CASA and CPS participants commonly described that their most important takeaways included the impact of trauma (or abuse and neglect) on children, the importance of establishing family support networks for children and families, and the need to be persistent, have an open mind, and “never count anyone out” when finding and engaging family members. Respondents
from CASA and CPS also frequently reported that learning how to use the wide variety of tools to find and engage family was the most important part of training.

In addition to valuing how the training provided them personally with new tools, CASA and CPS respondents felt that their counterparts from the collaborating agency learned valuable skills and lessons. As shown in Figure 4, more than three-quarters of CASA and CPS respondents reported that after the training, their counterparts from the partner agency are better equipped to operate through a lens of trauma and healing as well as to find and engage family. Specifically, CASA personnel who attended each training reported that the CPS caseworkers they work with are better equipped because of the training; CPS staff responded similarly that the CASA volunteers they work with are better equipped to engage with family as a result of the training. Consistently across the collaboration measures more CPS staff agreed that their CASA counterparts were more equipped after training relative to CASA’s assessment of the benefits of training for CPS. The differences in responses between CASA and CPS, though relatively small, likely indicates that the CFE trainings are relatively more valuable for CASA than CPS because CASA volunteers and staff often do not learn how to search for and engage extended family and fictive kin outside of CFE.

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP

**Figure 4: Perception of Impact of CFE Training on Collaborative Partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a result of CFE Training...</th>
<th>CPS: The CASA volunteers I work with are better equipped to engage connections as a support network. N=111</th>
<th>CASA: The CPS caseworkers I work with are better equipped to engage connections as a support network. N=55</th>
<th>CPS: The CASA volunteers I work with are better equipped to search for connections. N=111</th>
<th>CASA: The CPS caseworkers I work with are better equipped to search for connections. N=56</th>
<th>CPS: The CASA volunteers I work with are better able to look at children through a lens of trauma and healing. N=104</th>
<th>CASA: The CPS caseworkers I work with are better able to look at children through a lens of trauma and healing. N=64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.7% Strongly Agree, CPS</td>
<td>66.7% Agree, CPS</td>
<td>14.5% Strongly Agree, CPS</td>
<td>69.1% Agree, CASA</td>
<td>22.5% Strongly Agree, CPS</td>
<td>61.3% Agree, CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.9% Strongly Agree, CASA</td>
<td>62.5% Agree, CASA</td>
<td>19.2% Strongly Agree, CASA</td>
<td>63.5% Agree, CASA</td>
<td>15.6% Strongly Agree, CASA</td>
<td>62.5% Agree, CASA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended a CFE Tools Training in Year Two.
Feedback provided in focus groups with CASA and CPS across sites supported these survey results; CASA and CPS participants expressed that the broad scope of learning about trauma, the emphasis on the importance of family connections, and the instruction in using new tools and meetings were useful and relevant. In focus groups, CASA and CPS specifically emphasized that it is very important for CASA volunteers to have the opportunity to learn about the impact of childhood trauma across the lifespan. CPS staff learn this information as a part of their job training, and many also have degrees in social work or psychology that allow them to view their work through this lens. In contrast, CASA volunteers do not always have this context surrounding their work, and several CASA volunteers described that when they learned about the impact of childhood trauma it was as though they could finally put words to what they saw occurring in the lives of the children and families with whom they work. Learning about child protection work through this framework allowed participants, especially CASA volunteers, to better understand the lives of the children they serve, the urgency surrounding permanency, and even provided a new lens through which to understand the parents, because they gained an understanding of the cycle of trauma that some families experience over the course of multiple generations.

During CPS focus groups, the most commonly reported downside to CFE training was the length of time they were expected to spend in training. Most CPS focus group participants only attended one of the two trainings (i.e., they had spent two days at an Overview Training or two days at a Tools Training) and they emphasized that even this amount of time was “too much” to spend away from their caseload. Overall, the same CPS participants (who felt the trainings were too long) supported the intervention and felt the training was important. These participants provided feedback on how to tailor the trainings that CPS attends to target new information about the approach and recommended saving other information for CASA-only portions of training.

Numerous CPS focus group participants reported that they already knew much of the theory and background underpinning the CFE intervention, specifically the information about the impact of childhood trauma, and felt frustrated from taking time away from their caseload to hear information they already knew. CPS consistently recommended shortening the amount of training that CPS staff attend to ease the burden and opportunity cost of attending training. They noted that CASA could spend the additional time practicing using the tools and learning more about childhood trauma, but CPS could focus on the components critical to implementation.

This feedback from CPS aligns well with Texas CASA’s plan to move portions of the CFE trainings online rather than hold them all in person in Fall 2017. Moving portions of training online would allow CPS staff to attend more of the trainings on their own time as best fits their schedule. Feedback from Year Two suggests that the lessons on day-to-day CFE implementation would be best provided in person to allow for question and answer sessions and hands-on learning, whereas the segments on the history of the child welfare system, for example, could be held online.
In Year Three, when some of the CFE training will be held online, Texas CASA should consider adding optional online training modules covering additional topics more in-depth. These topics could address challenges faced by particular sites or cover specific challenges that might arise on a case. Then, participants could watch these modules as needed, but the additional topics would not take time away from teaching about the central features of the CFE approach during in-person trainings.

For example, in Hidalgo, one challenge reported was that many family meetings need to be held in both English and Spanish, and meeting facilitators suggested that a training to help them think about how to hold meetings in Spanish would be very useful. Additionally, Texas CASA should consider adding training segments on how to provide trauma-informed care to children and families as a way to build upon the introduction to trauma and healing provided through the Overview Training. For more details on CFRP’s recommendations for optional training modules, please see Page 66.

**Search, Connection, and Facilitation Tools**

The CFE tools are useful to CASA and CPS, and CASA’s training and leadership role in the Family Finding and engagement process is especially important. When CASA participates in, or takes the lead on, finding and engaging family members, more family and fictive kin connections can be found and invited to participate in the case, as potential placement options and as sources of support for the child and family, without increasing the workload of the CPS caseworker. CASA and CPS perceive that the CFE tools are useful for helping them to find and to engage with family members. Key reasons that CASA and CPS often provide for the usefulness of the tools include that they allow the CFE team to uncover background information and new connections. The Connection Tools are important because they provide a way to build trust with the children while also learning more about their lives.

Overall, consistent with the findings from Year One, participants reported in focus groups that their favorite CFE tools are the Seneca Search, Genogram, and Mobility Mapping. On the Post Survey, CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers reported on which, if any, CFE tools they used since CFE training. To better understand how CASA and CPS are using the CFE tools, CFRP grouped the tools into three categories, Search Tools, Connection Tools, and Facilitation Tools, based on how they are typically used on a case. CFRP grouped Quick Finds & Diligent Search, social media searches, File Mining, the Genogram, the Seneca Search, and Find Families in Mexico into the category of “Search Tools.” “Connection Tools” consist of the Connectedness Gram, Culturagram, Ecomap,

“I feel like it’s somewhat helping me. I’m not having to run to the finish line to get this information because I have a certain amount of time before the next court hearing... With CASA being on my cases, it’s like I’ve got this information [that] wasn’t here [that] helped me build my list.”

-CPS caseworker
Fairies and Wizards, Mobility Map, and Three Houses. Last, the “Facilitation Tools” consist of tools typically used during family meetings and include Rapid Appraisal, Research & Engage 100, the Fire House Intervention, Tree of Life, and calendaring.

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP. CASA N=41; CPS N=128
Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended at least one CFE Overview or Tools Training. CASA volunteers reported tool use on their current or most recent case and CPS caseworkers reported tool use on their current caseload.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Post Survey Respondents who used CFE Search Tools**

Of the 41 CASA volunteers and 128 CPS caseworkers who attended a CFE training and responded to the Post Survey, 30 CASA volunteers (73%) and 117 CPS caseworkers (91%) used at least one Search Tool. Nine CASA volunteers (22%) and 50 CPS caseworkers (39%) used one or more of the Connection Tools. Seven CASA volunteers (17%) and 27 CPS caseworkers (21%) used at least one Facilitation Tool (See Table 15).

Of the CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended training and participated in at least one CFE meeting (indicating that they are using the CFE approach on at least one of their cases), tool use is higher than among CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who did not participate in any CFE meetings. Table 15 compares the reported tool use among participants who worked on a CFE case and participants who did not. The largest differences between the CFE-case and non-CFE-case groups are found in CASA’s use of the Connection and Facilitation Tools; use of Connection and Facilitation Tools was 13 to 18 percentage points higher among the CFE-case group than among CASA volunteers who did not work a CFE case.
**Table 15: Tools Use Among Participants With a CFE Case**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Trainees</th>
<th>1+ CFE Meetings</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CASA (N=41)</td>
<td>CPS (N=128)</td>
<td>CASA (N=17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Tools</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Tools</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation Tools</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP

Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who attended at least one CFE Overview or Tools Training. CASA volunteers reported tool use on their current or most recent case and CPS caseworkers reported tool use on their current caseload.

Focus group participants often reported that a main benefit of the CFE approach is that CFE equips CASA volunteers to play a role, or often take the lead, on family engagement on their cases. This role could include directly using the tools independently, with the CFE Team, or with the child or family. Family engagement activities also include contacting relatives through letters, emails, and phone calls, inviting connections to family meetings, and preparing for the meetings. Reports of tool use among CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers do not indicate that CASA volunteers are using the tools *instead of* the CPS caseworker using them. Rather, survey results, in combination with focus group results, indicate that both CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers are using the tools, and then CASA can take over many of the time consuming follow-up engagement tasks, such as sending letters to all identified contacts or trying to reach connections by phone, that would likely fall to the CPS caseworker outside of CFE.

Overall, CASA and CPS Post Survey respondents found the CFE tools valuable to their work. Figure 6 and Figure 7 on the following pages show the percentage of tool users who rated each tool “very valuable” to provide a picture of the tools most valued by CASA and CPS relative to one another. Tools that were used infrequently are not displayed. There were no important differences between CASA and CPS responses.

“CASA has been able to take the parts that they’ve done, and they committed to doing at the beginning, and carry those forward. The tools. The Seneca Searches. They take over 100 percent of that. And we have been so thankful that they’re able to because [it] really enriches a case.”

-CPS caseworker
As shown in Figure 6, more than half of respondents found each Search Tool, except for the Genogram, “very valuable,” indicating a high level of satisfaction with these tools. Of the Connection and Facilitation Tools, the Connectedness Gram and Three Houses were rated the highest, though the majority of users also rated each of these tools as “valuable” or “very valuable” (see Figure 7).

*Figure 6: Percentage of Users Rating CFE Search Tools as “Very Valuable”*

![Bar chart showing the percentage of users rating each search tool as very valuable.](source)

During focus groups, CASA and CPS respondents emphasized the importance of Seneca Searches. Users of the Seneca Search reported that it makes the finding and engaging process much more efficient because the CFE Team can easily obtain many possible names, and investigate them further through social media or through asking relatives and fictive kin about those individuals. Tools such as the Seneca Search can also be important because family may strategically omit certain relatives from discussions when asked who could provide support for the children, and in some cases the omitted relatives might be more appropriate than other people in the circle of connections who are already involved in the case.

Overall, CASA and CPS emphasized that having funding for Seneca Searches on all cases, beyond even all CFE cases, would be extremely valuable. They feel that the cost of the search is far outweighed by the time saved through having the list of names as a starting point for further searching and engagement. Rather than take the place of personal conversations and more...
organic connecting work, participants reported that wider application of Seneca Searches would be a head start in the process. The biggest obstacle to the utility of Seneca Searches is that they require a social security number, and therefore in situations in which family members do not have a social security number they are less useful.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Users Rating CFE Connection and Facilitation Tools as “Very Valuable”**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of users rating CFE connection and facilitation tools as “very valuable.”](chart.png)

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP

Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who used a given tool. CASA volunteers reported tool use on their current or most recent case and CPS caseworkers reported tool use on their current caseload. Connection tools are displayed in green and facilitation tools in red.

**Team Meeting**

The CFE Team Meeting occurs at the start of a CFE case, often during or after the Post Removal Staffing, which occurs after the Ex Parte Hearing, when the State is officially granted Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) of the child or children on the case. At the Team Meeting, the CFE Team discusses the needs of the child and family, develops a plan to find and engage family, and decides on the timeline for the family meetings. In the first two implementation years, 120 CFE Teams held Team Meetings on their CFE case.

To CASA and CPS at each program site, the Team Meeting is a critical piece of the CFE approach. The Team Meeting provides a forum and a framework for collaboration between CASA and CPS. Participants particularly value a few key components of the Team Meeting, as reported through Year Two focus groups. First, simply having a designated time early in the case process for CASA
and CPS to meet lays the foundation for a more collaborative approach throughout the case. Next, the team creates a list of action items, decides who is responsible for each item, and sets a timeframe for each task. This action plan provides the framework for dividing work between the team, particularly between what CASA will do and what CPS will do, and facilitates the creation of timelines. CFE participants often described CFE as a “roadmap” for collaboration, and the Team Meeting is what begins the process. CASA and CPS participants mentioned that this meeting can help bring CPS caseworkers more “on board” with the CFE process because they see that the CASA volunteer is willing and able to take on many of the CFE duties. CPS caseworkers reported that their first Team Meeting eased their fear that CFE will add many tasks to their workload, specifically when they saw that the CASA volunteer was prepared to take the lead role in finding and engaging family members. CPS particularly values when CASA can contact the relatives because this is a time consuming task.

The period just after the Team Meeting appears to be a critical point for the success of CFE on a case. Some CASA and CPS participants described that this period can be a time when the process loses the momentum gained during the Team Meeting, if the Blended Perspectives Meeting does not occur soon after and if communication does not remain consistent among the CFE Team in the interim. This lapse in communication can leave CPS caseworkers feeling as though CFE is “just another new initiative” that will not directly benefit the children they work with or reduce their workload.

Through Years One and Two, the suggested timeline between meetings has undergone several changes and different sites implement the meetings differently. Considering these differences, Texas CASA should consider how they can better foster ongoing communication and continuous action steps among the CFE team to promote continued momentum and excitement for the CFE approach, even if the Blended Perspectives Meeting cannot occur for some time after the first Team Meeting. Findings and recommendations related to increased communication structures within the CFE approach are also discussed in Finding 4. For more details, please see Page 63.

Another challenge for implementers is a lack of clarity regarding the division of responsibilities among the CFE Team and the recommended timeline for the next meeting. Although flexibility continues to be a valued part of the CFE approach, it is important to provide sites enough guidance to feel as if they know when meetings should occur based on the model guidelines and the factors on a case. In other words, directions given through the model and by the coaches...
should include enough flexibility to be implemented according to the needs of a family, but not so much flexibility that participants are left feeling lost and as though they do not know when the “right time” for a meeting is or what team members should do in the interim.

**CFE Family Meetings**

Subsequent to the Team Meeting, the CFE Team works to find and engage family members and fictive kin to be a part of the case process. Sometimes the team will already know many of the family members who will be involved, and other times the team must use the CFE Tools to identify and connect with family members. The family members are then invited to a series of family meetings, beginning with the Blended Perspectives Meeting, where the goal is to share information and form a collective unmet needs statement for the child. This is a preparation meeting, as it prepares the participants to be meaningfully involved in the planning and decision making for the child, starting at the second meeting. The next two family meetings are called the Decision Making Meeting and the Lifetime Network Meeting. The ultimate goal of the family meetings is to create a network of connections who commit to supporting the family for a lifetime. In Year One and Year Two, CFE Teams held a total of 257 family meetings, including 75 Blended Perspectives Meetings, 42 Decision Making Meetings, and 15 Lifetime Network Meetings. Out of the 144 total CFE cases, 73 cases reached at least one family meeting by the end of Year Two.

Overall, CASA and CPS participants reported that the CFE meetings are valuable to the children and families on their caseloads. Meetings serve as a forum to provide support, encouragement, and accountability to parents, to mediate disagreements and learn to put the children first, to identify and mitigate barriers to reunification, and to plan for permanency with input from family and fictive kin who know the children best. CFE family meetings help build networks for support and placement by identifying extended family members and other supportive figures who might not even be aware that a child is in care. Family meetings give parents, extended family, and fictive kin greater ownership over the permanency plans. This process can also help parents to see their own limitations, even when sometimes this means realizing that they aren’t the best permanent home for their children. One CPS caseworker described her experience with family meetings: “We’re at the final stages... we’ve had a Decision Making Meeting, which was extremely positive. The parents were able to recognize their limitations and the fact that they really hadn’t engaged to the services and recognized that the children weren’t going to be able to be coming home with them. We were able to come up with the permanency plan for them and have a lot of buy-in from the parents about what their visits would end up looking like. It still continued to have a very positive overall feel to it.”
CFE family meetings use a facilitation style that is unique compared to other CPS meetings with parents or family, and CASA and CPS find that the CFE meeting facilitation helps to mitigate challenges and barriers to family engagement more than other meeting styles.

Focus group participants often noted that it is easier for families to trust and build rapport with the CASA volunteer than the CPS caseworker, and CFE meetings allow CASA to take more of a leadership role to build this trust. Family meetings also provide time for CASA and CPS to observe the family relationships and gain a better perspective on the family dynamics. In Year Two focus groups, a CPS caseworker noted about CFE family meetings, “There’s a lot that we hear that we don’t in Permanency Conferences or in any agency-driven meetings… [in CFE meetings] the family are more open. They’ve talked extensively more with CASA than they have with us [and] are comfortable.”

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Figure 8: Family Engagement on CFE Cases

Source: CFE Post Survey, CFRP. CASA N=25, CPS N=107
Notes: Survey participants include CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers who used at least one CFE Tool or Meeting.
Figure 8 displays CASA volunteer and CPS caseworkers’ perceptions on family engagement on the CFE cases they worked compared to other non-CFE cases. More than two-thirds of CASA and CPS respondents indicated that extended family and fictive kin connections provided more support for the children and parents, that connections took a more active role in family meetings, and that the children are more likely to remain with family because of CFE. Just over half of CASA and CPS respondents indicated that they identified family on their CFE case that would not have been found on a non-CFE. Consistently, more CASA volunteers than CPS caseworkers agreed with each of these family engagement measures, indicating that CASA volunteers may see more benefit in the CFE approach for family engagement than CPS caseworkers, though the majority of both CASA and CPS respondents reported on each measure of family engagement that family participation and involvement is greater on a CFE case than a non-CFE case.

During a Year Two focus group, a CPS caseworker described how contact between extended family and the child in care can increase as a result of a family meeting: “The [father’s] family all exchanged information with the foster parents at the meeting, and the foster parents brings all of his family, his cousins and all of them to all of their soccer games at the church... his little cousins and stuff are [now] up there with the foster parents watching soccer games every single weekend... And that’s completely independent of me... So the foster parents have developed this relationship with the biological family and this kid is now able to have access [to his family].

Key challenges of conducting family meetings include difficulty encouraging family members to open up and engage, and handling defensive family members or family members who are dominating the discussions, especially if family members are angry, to promote constructive participation. Typically, the meeting dynamics are tense at first, but family members open up later in the meeting or during the second meeting, which is the Decision Making Meeting.

Challenges that are more logistical in nature also exist. It is difficult to schedule meetings at a time that is convenient for family connections, CASA, and CPS. Family and fictive kin who cannot be physically present during meetings, occasionally including parents who are incarcerated, often call in to the meetings, and phone participation creates additional challenges, such as knowing who is speaking and making sure everyone can be heard.

Language barriers present an additional challenge to family meetings, particularly in Hidalgo County. The CPS meeting facilitators all speak English and Spanish, but it is unclear if the CASA volunteers are typically bilingual. Facilitators and participants must translate meeting dialogue between English and Spanish, making the meetings much longer and slow-paced than other meetings. Texas CASA should be aware of this additional dynamic across sites that have a large percentage of Spanish-speakers to ensure that meetings can accomplish the stated goals in a reasonable amount of time and to ensure that CFE coaches hired to serve these sites are bilingual.
The key challenges listed above surrounding engaging with extended family members on a child protection case, specifically in family meeting settings, are the types of challenges that are common in different types of family meetings, including Family Group Conferences (FGCs), and are not challenges unique to the CFE approach. The important message CFRP heard clearly from survey and focus group participants is that the facilitation style used in CFE family meetings helps the CFE team to mitigate these inherent challenges and to create a more productive and supportive environment for parents, caregivers, and extended family or fictive kin.

The two main differences between CFE family meetings and other CPS meetings with extended family participation, such as Family Group Conferences, are that more family and fictive kin connections typically come to CFE meetings and that CFE meetings use a series of strategies to facilitate greater participation from the connections, referred to as CFE facilitation strategies. The section below describes data collected about the attendees and facilitation of CFE family meetings in Year Two.

**Attendees**

Overall, a wide variety of family and fictive kin connections attended CFE family meetings. CFRP collected data on the attendees at 31 family meetings during Year Two from the Bi-Monthly Survey, including 18 Blended Perspectives Meetings, 10 Decision Making Meetings, and three Lifetime Network Meetings. As shown in Table 16, at these meetings, an average of six connections attended out of nine connections who were invited. Further, on average, four connections were active participants in the meeting and four new connections were identified as a result of the meeting.

**Table 16: Average Number of Connections Involved in CFE Family Meetings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Invited</th>
<th>Number Attended</th>
<th>Number Actively Participated</th>
<th>Number Identified at Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blended Perspectives, n=13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making, n=8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifetime Network, n=3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Family Meetings</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFE Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP. N=24

Notes: One outlier was excluded from the average number of connection calculations.

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Through the Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP gathered data on 31 family meetings during Year Two, including 18 Blended Perspectives Meetings, 10 Decision Making Meetings, and three Lifetime Network Meetings. Because there were 257 total family meetings in Year Two reported in the CFE tracker, these results may not be representative of all family meetings. Additionally, because 40 percent of the meetings reported on the Bi-Monthly Survey occurred in Montgomery County, results may not be representative of family meetings at all sites. No family meetings from the Region 3B sites were reported on the Bi-Monthly Survey. The total number of family meetings (the denominator) varies on survey items because some participants skipped questions.
The most common attendee at the CFE family meetings was a grandparent, even more common than a mother or father figure; at 77 percent of Year Two family meetings, at least one grandparent was present and at 56 percent of family meetings, a mother figure and a father figure were present. Other maternal relatives, paternal relatives, foster parents, and other connections, such as pastors or coaches, were present at between one-third and one-half of family meetings. Focus group participants described the vital role that grandparents play in the CFE case process to support children and parents, providing placement, emotional support, accountability, and important sources of information for subsequent Family Finding activities. That grandparents attended family meetings so frequently supports the idea that they can be a critical resource for the CFE Team as the Team works to build a natural support network, independent of professionals, for the future.

**Figure 9: Percentage of Family Meetings Attended by a Connection**

As reported on the Bi-Monthly Survey, children do not typically attend CFE family meetings. Out of 31 meetings, children only attended two. In other words, at 94 percent of family meetings in the CFRP sample no children were present. CASA volunteers and staff, as well as CPS staff,
debated the benefits and challenges of including children in family meetings during focus groups. Focus group participants described the key benefits of including children in the meetings. First, the meetings provide an extra opportunity for the children to see their relatives and family friends. Staff are also provided with an opportunity to see how the children interact with the different family members when children attend. Many CASA and CPS participants, however, felt that ultimately the benefits of having the children present are outweighed by the costs, especially on a TMC case, primarily because the parents’ problems and behaviors that resulted in the children being placed in care are discussed openly. It can also be distracting to meeting progress when the children are young or many children are present. On PMC or TMC cases in which the children were young adults, the decision to include the children has different considerations, but, on cases in which the children are relatively young, CASA and CPS focus group participants generally felt as though the meetings were not an appropriate setting for the children.

In 25 out of 30 family meetings (83%) recorded on the Bi-Monthly Survey, the individuals who planned to be permanent parents for the children were present at the family meeting. In this instance, “permanent parents” could refer to the biological parents or another relative or caregiver who plans to be the children’s permanent home if reunification is no longer the primary goal of the case. Of the five meetings at which the planned permanent caregivers were not present, four were Blended Perspectives Meetings.

Facilitation

Of the 31 family meetings reported in the Bi-Monthly Survey, CASA respondents rated the facilitation as “Excellent” at more than two-thirds of the meetings, as shown in Figure 10. The rest of the meetings were rated either “Good” or “Average.”

*Figure 10: Facilitation Quality at Year Two CFE Family Meetings*

Source: CFE Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP. N=30
CASA volunteers also reported on a variety of more specific measures of quality on the Bi-Monthly Survey related to the quality of family participation, the effectiveness of the facilitator, and effectiveness of the facilitation strategies. At more than 90 percent of the meetings, CASA volunteers reported that the facilitator effectively guided the discussion to meet the goals of the meeting, the facilitation style directly resulted in a more effective meeting, and meeting participants made meaningful contributions during the meeting. Fewer CASA volunteers, but still more than three-fourths of respondents, agreed that there was less tension at the end of the meeting than at the beginning, and that family and fictive kin played a vital role in the meeting. These results indicate that CASA volunteers value the facilitation style used in CFE meetings and believe that meetings are better when these strategies are used than they would be without them. Overall, the majority of CASA volunteers reported that family participation at the meetings is positive, constructive, integral to the meeting, and tension eased throughout the meeting.

The quality of facilitation and integration of facilitation tactics was consistent across CASA and CPS-led family meetings. The following quote from a CASA volunteer demonstrates how, through the participative environment created by the facilitator, meeting participants work together to make decisions at CFE Meetings: “[On one case I have] a child [who is] in care for the second time... We are approaching halfway through the case, six months in and we have already got her intended to be permanent placement with fictive kin and [are] working towards finalizing that... the lady who has the child now came to that [Blended Perspectives Meeting] to express her interest and willingness to be the caregiver for the child, and the family supported it, the parents supported it, and we just moved forward from there.”

Figure 11: Quality of Facilitation and Family Participation at Year Two Family Meetings

- The meeting facilitator was effective in guiding the discussion to meet the goals. N=28
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 100.0%

- Meeting participants made constructive and positive contributions to the meeting. N=28
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 96.4%

- The meeting was more successful than it would have been otherwise because of the facilitation style used. N=27
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 96.3%

- There was less tension among meeting attendees at the end of the meeting than at the beginning. N=28
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 82.2%

- Family and fictive kin participants played a vital role in the meeting. N=28
  - Strongly Agree or Agree: 75.0%

Source: CFE Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP. N=28
Each of the CFE facilitation strategies was used in at least two-thirds of family meetings recorded on the Bi-Monthly Survey. The CFE facilitation strategies refer to a set of tools to create a more open, cooperative environment for the meetings in which everyone gets to speak and the focus is on the children and their needs. One strategy involves removing the tables from the meeting area and setting up chairs in a circle or semi-circle, with participants each facing one another. Facilitators also ask questions around the room to allow everyone to speak and write notes on the boards so that everyone can see them and no one has to take notes individually. The CFE team strives to maintain a 70/30 ratio of professionals to family and fictive kin to ensure that the dominant voice at the meeting is the family’s voice.

These four facilitation strategies were used similarly at each site and when CASA or CPS served as the primary facilitator. In fact, asking participants each to answer the same question, sitting in a circle of chairs, and dictating meeting notes occurred in at least 25 out of 29, or 86 percent, of the family meetings recorded in the Bi-Monthly Survey. The CFE team maintained the 70/30 ratio about 70 percent of the time, or in 20 out of 29 meetings. The relatively lower use of the 70/30 ratio likely indicates that this strategy is the most difficult strategy to use because it requires that a certain number of family attend. The CFE team can have some professional participants sit out of the meeting, or silently observe the meeting to make sure the family voices are heard, but overall, CFE implementers report that maintaining the 70/30 ratio is an ongoing challenge.

**Figure 12: Use of CFE Facilitation Tactics at Year Two Family Meetings**

![Bar chart showing the use of facilitation tactics at family meetings.]

- 93.1% asked key questions around the room to all participants
- 89.7% sat all the chairs in a circle or semi-circle
- 86.2% dictated meeting notes visible to all participants
- 69.0% maintained a 70/30 ratio of connections to professionals

*Source: CFE Bi-Monthly Survey, CFRP. N=29*

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* Different combinations of strategies were used at the family meetings. Out of 29 family meetings, at 17 family meetings (59%) all four facilitation strategies were used, at eight family meetings (28%) three facilitation strategies were used, at three family meetings (10%) two facilitation strategies were used, and at one family meeting (3%) zero facilitation strategies were used.
One of the most frequently heard recommendations surrounding family meetings provided by Year Two focus group participants is to simply call the meetings “family meetings” and refer to them as “Family Meeting 1” or “the third family meeting” rather than use the names “Blended Perspectives,” “Decision Making,” and “Lifetime Network.” CASA and CPS often find the names confusing for the CFE team and for the families, who already have a difficult time understanding the purpose and goals of the family meetings. Referring to all of the meetings as family meetings is simpler and more straightforward to everyone involved.

**Key Recommendations**

- Focus in-person CFE training on details of the CFE approach and provide time to learn the practical, day-to-day implementation skills and processes.
- Create additional times for CASA to practice using the tools through in-services or workdays later in the implementation process.
- Incorporate additional online training modules for participants to view on their own to supplement CFE Overview and Tools Training content.
- Continue to encourage and support CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers to apply the CFE tools and framework to a wide selection of their cases.
- Consider funding additional Seneca Searches.
- Refer to the Blended Perspectives Meeting, Decision Making Meeting, and Lifetime Network Meeting simply as “Family Meetings.”
- Create additional guidelines for the timing and content of communication for the CFE Team in between CFE Meetings to maintain progress and momentum on the case.
**FINDING 2: In Year Two, CASA and CPS implementers increasingly integrated the CFE approach into their existing casework practices to mitigate key Year One challenges.**

Across Year One and Year Two, CASA and CPS participants embraced the key CFE philosophy that family connections and community support are vital for the children and families they work with. In Year One, however, key barriers limited buy-in and implementation of the CFE approach itself. Implementers, especially CPS caseworkers, worried about how to make time for CFE activities given the many competing demands on their time. For example, there was a lot of confusion and tension about how to integrate the meetings into the existing meeting and hearing schedules. In Year Two, implementers felt empowered to adapt CFE suggested timelines and activities to fit local needs, allowing them to more successfully use the CFE approach on their cases.

The following section describes the progress in model integration during Year Two. Texas CASA can best foster continued growth in this area by supporting site leadership and frontline implementers to continue to think of Collaborative Family Engagement as an approach or a strategy to use on their cases, rather than thinking about it as a new model to be implemented in addition to their existing cases.

*CFE sites shifted their perspective to perceive CFE as an adaptable approach to their work, rather than perceive CFE as a model with a series of strict requirements and deadlines.*

In Year One, the evaluators found that CASA and CPS implementers were often concerned with implementing CFE perfectly, including using all the tools and meetings and making sure that all CFE activities occurred in accordance with a firm timeline. In Year Two, CFRP noticed a distinct shift in the way that focus group participants discussed CFE. In Year Two, rather than remain concerned with timelines or using tools perfectly, CASA and CPS implementers focused on how CFE could be best applied to their local site needs and the individualized needs of the children and families that they work with. Local implementers who treated the CFE approach as a series of guidelines and tools rather than a list of rules, more effectively overcame two key challenges to CFE implementation: distributing the family engagement work and aligning the timelines between CFE meetings and Family Group Conferences (FGCs).

*CFE sites mitigated CFE caseworker workload challenges by giving CASA a leadership role in family engagement.*

In Year One, participants most commonly reported concerns about a lack of time for CPS caseworkers to dedicate to preparing for and attending family meetings. Implementers also reported concerns with how CFE practices could be integrated into the meeting and hearing schedule for CPS cases, as required by DFPS policy. In Year Two, focus group participants from Year One sites described how they have learned to adapt CFE practices to mitigate concerns.
First, most CFE sites from Years One and Two worked to establish an optimal distribution of work between CASA and CPS that did not add substantial work to the CPS caseworkers’ workload. CPS participants overall in Year Two seemed much less concerned with how CFE fit into their workload, both because they learned ways to mitigate workload challenges and because they felt that any extra time invested into the case using the CFE approach was worth it because it would lead to better case outcomes.

Figures 13 and 14 show CASA volunteer and CPS caseworker perceptions of the time it takes to use the CFE approach on a case relative to a typical, non-CFE case, along with CASA volunteer and CPS caseworker opinions on whether it would be feasible to apply CFE to all cases with a CASA volunteer. As shown in Figure 13, the majority of all CASA and CPS respondents reported that CFE takes more of the CASA volunteer’s time, more of the CPS caseworker’s time, and requires attendance at more meetings than a non-CFE case. Approximately 50 percent of CASA volunteers and CPS caseworker, though, also reported in Figure 13 that they believed their CFE cases would close, or already had closed, in less time than a typical non-CFE case, indicating that some of the additional time invested into a case would be recovered by achieving faster permanency.

**Figure 13: Implementers’ Perceptions of CFE Cases Compared to Non-CFE Cases**

"Our case closed four months early… then they had that extra time on the end. Even though they may be investing a little bit more time in the beginning in that one extra meeting, we freed up that caseworker for four extra months to go onto another case... we were able to get good outcomes quicker.”

-CASA volunteer
Despite the additional time required from CASA and CPS to use CFE, more than 70 percent of CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers reported that it would be feasible to use the CFE Meetings, Search Tools, and Connection Tools on all cases with a CASA volunteer, as shown in Figure 14. These Post Survey findings support the focus group themes that components of the CFE approach can be time consuming, but CFE can potentially help reach permanency faster (an important benefit for children and families that also conserves agency resources).

Figure 14: Feasibility of Applying CFE to All Cases

CFE sites improved how they integrate CFE into their local policies and practices by adapting the family meeting timeline to fit local needs.

In Year Two, sites seemed much more confident and empowered to adapt the CFE meeting timeline to fit their needs. Different sites came to unique conclusions about how to best time and schedule the CFE meetings, specifically regarding whether to combine the Blended Perspectives Meeting with the Family Group Conference. In Year One, CFE sites reported that it was a challenge to combine these meetings because the meeting would get too long when the CFE Team tried to accomplish the FGC meeting goals and the CFE meeting goals. Further, sometimes it was difficult to find and engage family in time to host the Blended Perspectives Meeting in accordance with the FGC schedule. Ultimately in Year One, sites decided to combine the meetings to minimize the number of events that family members were asked to attend. In Year Two, some sites decided to hold these meetings together and others chose to separate them, and overall there was less tension surrounding this decision. That sites each made their own decisions
in Year Two indicates that messaging by Texas CASA during training and early implementation, as well as individual guidance provided by the CFE Manager and coaches, successfully empowered the sites to adapt the CFE guidelines to best fit their local context.

*Individual CFE sites applied the CFE philosophy to develop unique, promising practices to serve children and families.*

Focus group participants at several CFE sites described the ways that the CFE approach, including takeaways from training, the tools, and the meetings, are changing the way that CASA and CPS approach their work.

In Montgomery County, CASA volunteers are using the CFE Search and Connection Tools on all of their Temporary Managing Conservator (TMC) cases, unless the tools are not needed. Then, the CFE team are deciding later in the case process if the conditions are right to have a family meeting. Cases that use the tools but do not use the meetings are often called framework cases. This strategy allows for the time and resources to go into CFE meetings when they will most benefit the children and families. Using CFE framework cases in this manner also maximizes the use of the CFE tools, because the CASA volunteers are using them widely on their cases, without worrying whether the case is officially designated as a “CFE case.” Whereas at all sites, CASA volunteers are welcome to and encouraged to use the tools on all cases, Montgomery has integrated tool-use, or framework cases, into their practice more systematically than other sites. Establishing the CFE tools as standard practice for the CASA volunteer role can help the tools be used more widely and more sustainably on CPS cases.

The next example of a promising practice at a CFE site pertains to the way that work is distributed to prepare for CFE meetings in Hidalgo County. In Hidalgo, CPS meeting facilitators are responsible for all of the preparation work prior to FGCs (it is unclear to CFRP the degree to which this is true for other sites). Because this preparatory work falls to the meeting facilitators rather than the CPS caseworkers, facilitators do not feel as if preparing for a CFE meeting is fundamentally more work than preparing for an FGC. Although it can be more time consuming to prepare the materials, the CASA volunteer often does much of the locating and inviting of family members, which offsets the facilitators’ prep time because this work would also fall to the facilitators on non-CFE cases. In this system, CPS caseworkers only have to dedicate the extra time that it takes to attend the meeting. This system does assume, however, that the CASA volunteer or a staff member has the capacity to find and engage family members for meetings. It is important to note that Hidalgo had only hosted about six family meetings when CFRP conducted a focus group in the region, therefore follow-up is needed to ensure that this system is still working well.

“[CFE] presents an opportunity for the State to logistically look outside of the traditional policies and find solutions.”
*CPS caseworker*
Last, Liberty County is taking a promising approach to parent engagement by expanding the lens through which they view their work to include both the child and parent. A CASA volunteer’s job, they reason, is to look out for the child’s best interest. In a case for which the permanency goal is reunification, it is in the child’s best interest for their parents to complete all of their services as soon as possible and have support, encouragement, and accountability as they prepare for their children to come home. Liberty CASA volunteers take a broader approach to their work and view themselves as support figures for both the children and parents on their case, while always remembering that their role. They describe calling parents to remind them to go to appointments, following up to ask how services are working for the parents, and even providing the parents transportation to appointments. The CASA volunteers and staff attribute their new and expanded perspective to what they learned at CFE training about the importance of family connections and the impact of trauma on children and families. The volunteers understand now that parents may also have histories of trauma and abuse, and by supporting the parents in this journey to get healthy, they are helping to stop the cycle of abuse and neglect. CASA volunteers also emphasize that they see more clearly after CFE training that the best way to help the child is to help their parents get healthy. CFE provides a framework to help parents identify their strengths and build from there.

**Key Recommendation**

ワイン Continue to support CFE sites to view and teach Collaborative Family Engagement as an approach to use on cases, or a set of resources to pull from when they are helpful, rather than viewing CFE as a model that must be implemented with strict fidelity.
FINDING 3: CASA and CPS find the CFE approach useful across a wide variety of case circumstances. Texas CASA can provide support by distinguishing between the core elements and flexible options of the CFE approach and by focusing on site-level resource constraints.

Overall, CASA and CPS implementers across sites agreed that one of the most useful and important features of CFE is the ability to adapt the approach for application to local, site-level needs, as well as on a case-by-case basis to meet the needs of individual families. Other approaches and models used in child protection are less adaptable, and participants find that this flexibility makes CFE more practical and widely applicable to their cases.

Given the variation in how CFE is implemented across sites, Texas CASA should focus on identifying and clearly communicating to implementers which CFE activities are vital to the approach and which activities are intended to be optional, to ensure that as sites adjust the approach to fit their local context, they maintain fidelity to the key elements of the approach. Additionally, as sites adapt CFE, individualized resource constraints emerge across sites. Coaching support from Texas CASA can focus on addressing these key constraints to ensure continued progress in implementing CFE.

CFE implementers provide insight on how they prefer to target the initiative. These insights can help Texas CASA learn how best to target trainings, set goals for cases and sites, and consider which cases might benefit most from CFE.

The CFE approach can be adapted to use on different types of cases and cases with different characteristics, such as TMC or PMC cases, or cases with young children or teenagers. Distinct themes in how sites choose to target CFE are useful to consider for several reasons. First, the family engagement goals of a CFE case might be different depending on the case circumstances, and CFE leadership can consider how to advise CFE teams based on differing goals or timelines. For example, PMC cases may need a longer period to cultivate connections for a family meeting than TMC cases.

Second, Texas CASA should consider tailoring trainings and in-services provided to a site based on the trends in cases on which they use CFE. Third, sites can consider what types of cases they apply, or will apply, the CFE approach on, to ensure that sufficient caseworkers and CASA volunteers who work on those cases are trained and ready to use CFE. Last, CFE sites do not presently have the capacity to apply CFE to all cases with a CASA volunteer. Therefore, it is important to assess which cases might benefit most from the CFE approach and then target the initiative accordingly. This following section explores the landscape of case characteristics that influence implementers’ decision to use the CFE approach on a case.
TMC and PMC Cases

CASA and CPS participants in surveys and focus groups continually emphasized the importance of CFE to both TMC and PMC cases. These cases have distinct needs that make CFE a well-suited intervention for each. On TMC cases, CFE provides a mechanism for building a support network around parents to allow them to be successful once CPS is no longer involved in the family’s life. If reunification cannot occur, CFE supports the search and engagement process to find family who can be a permanent home for the children and create a support network for the family.

PMC cases tend to be somewhat different. Children in PMC have been in care for longer and often have a higher level of need. It may be more difficult to find family on a PMC case because the child has been in care for years without family contact. Participants also describe a systemic problem within the child welfare system, in which there is no sense of urgency to find a permanent home for children in PMC, and once a case goes into PMC there are fewer check-ins or hearings for the children. One CPS caseworker described the placement challenges of two of their CFE PMC cases: “one case, the child is very unstable... [and] there’s no family members that can actually care for her. The other case is there’s no appropriate family members that don’t trigger some kind of trauma for the kids.” Another CPS caseworker reflected on a PMC case of two years that had “gotten to a point where we’re running out of connections, and families, and resources.” On this case, Mobility Mapping helped the child share their story and uncover possible new connections.

Post Survey results support the focus group findings that CFE is applicable and important to both TMC and PMC cases, and respondents indicate that the approach is not necessarily better suited for one type of case over the other. When asked which case was best for CFE, respondents were almost evenly divided between TMC and PMC cases; 58 percent of CASA respondents selected PMC cases and 52 percent of CPS staff selected TMC cases. Overall, CASA and CPS personnel across CFE sites reported that the intervention is not a better fit for either TMC or PMC cases, but that each type of case has unique needs that make CFE a helpful approach.

[When] implement[ing] with PMC kids... getting the ball rolling [is challenging]. Sadly, most of them don't have any family connections, so we're not going to be at the point of setting that Blended Perspectives Meeting, we just need to get the ball rolling so that we can start utilizing the tools, and identify [people] that we could invite to meetings.”
-CPS caseworker

Reunification and Non-Reunification Cases

In surveys and focus groups, CASA and CPS reflected on the difference between cases with a goal of reunification and cases in which reunification is no longer possible. On the Post Survey, CASA volunteers and staff, as well as CPS staff, reported that CFE is best suited for cases in which reunification is unlikely. The majority of CASA volunteers and staff (64%) and CPS staff (70%) responded that a case is best suited for CFE when reunification is unlikely.
In focus groups, participants expanded the discussion on the advantages of using CFE on different cases. CASA and CPS focus group participants reported that CFE is useful on a case in which reunification is unlikely because the approach provides the opportunity to locate many family members and fictive kin and build a team, while also seeking out one of these connections to be a permanent home for the children. The approach allows for the family member who will serve as permanent placement to be surrounded by community support. For example, the support network might provide rides to sports practice, help with homework, weekend respite, or perhaps care before or after school hours.

Participants also provided important insight into how CFE can be a useful tool in cases with a reunification goal. In particular, participants often noted that CFE is important for cases in which they see a high level of commitment from the parents to complete their service plan and make any necessary behavior changes, but also see a particularly high number of barriers or risks in the parents’ way, in combination with little or no family or community support. CASA and CPS alike felt that the CFE approach is a useful and even critical way to mitigate the challenges facing a family upon reunification. Often, caseworkers and volunteers reflected on previous cases in which the children ended up “back in the system” because parents were not able to overcome the challenges and barriers they faced upon reunification. These staff and volunteers commonly believe that the families could have been successful if there had been a way for CASA and CPS to intervene to build a network of support for the family.

*Level of Relative Involvement*

Overall, CASA and CPS reported that CFE is most important for cases in which few or no extended family members are involved in a case. On the Post Survey, 60 percent of CASA volunteers and staff and 63 percent of CPS staff reported that CFE is best if used on a case with few known relatives. Particularly if reunification cannot occur and there are few known relatives, CFE provides the tools to locate and bring family to the table, and CFE provides meaningful ways for connections to participate in the case process.

Some CASA and CPS focus group participants described that CFE can be a useful way to organize family participation in the process on cases in which there are many families members who want to be involved at the start of a case. They note that the presence of many family members can create disorganization, family members can spread inaccurate information, and this lack of structure can even impede the progress of a case. With CFE, however, they feel that hosting family meetings can allow the family members’ voices to be heard in a productive setting to work toward permanency together.
Age and Number of Children on a Case

CASA and CPS reported on the Post Survey that they prefer to use CFE on cases with many children and older children, but discussions in focus groups provide insight on the importance of intervening early in children’s lives to build family and community support.

CASA (59%) and CPS (73%) respondents reported that CFE is best used on cases with many children (rather than few children). Reasons provided in focus groups for targeting CFE toward cases with more children include that larger families can face exacerbated challenges in finding adequate childcare, living arrangements, providing for more children, and parents face an acute need for support upon reunification. CASA and CPS participants in focus groups also connected this issue to placement; when a family with many children comes into care, it is very difficult to find kin placements for each child, or any placements in which the siblings can be together. The CFE tools and meetings can be a way to cultivate additional short-term and long-term placements, to allow the children to be with family until reunification, as well as beyond the length of TMC if reunification cannot occur.

On the Post Survey, the majority of CASA volunteers (70%) and CPS staff (63%) agreed that a case is best suited for CFE when the case involves older children. However, more nuanced conversations in focus groups commonly explored the tension between implementers’ desire to intervene early in a child’s life, to avoid subsequent time spent in care, and to intervene with teens in care, who desperately need connections to support their transition to adulthood.

Focus group participants across multiple sites described cases in which children have been in care for a long time as most urgently needing CFE. They recognize the importance of making CFE work for older children, particularly for those children who are close to aging out, but also point out that CFE is important for cases involving younger children, to reduce future populations of older youth in custody. One CPS staff member from Hidalgo remarked, “I [work with]... a lot of kids that are older and I have a lot of kids that we haven’t found families for... So I’ve kind of shifted a little bit, and think that it might be more beneficial to find them early on than it would be when they’re already older. We’re not going to [stop] trying for the older kids, but if our focus was when they’re first coming in to CPS, then... we would eliminate the older kids being here that long.”

Texas DFPS has implemented a variety of interventions around the state for older youth in care to support connection-building and preparation for independent living. Texas CASA should consider how the CFE elements that are most beneficial for older youth, including tools to engage with teens and extended family, as well as the facilitation tools for family meetings, could be incorporated into existing programs for teenagers in care. This strategy would combine existing promising practices occurring across the state with the valuable resources from the CFE approach to better serve teens, while also minimizing the additional resources needed to implement CFE, resulting in more children served at a site.
Texas CASA should clearly identify for implementers the key components of the CFE approach compared to the flexible components to ensure fidelity.

As CFE expands into new CASA programs, particularly at a time when many state and regional changes are occurring within DFPS, it is important that Texas CASA consider and clearly message to implementers the difference between key elements of the approach and flexible options or add-ons. CASA and CPS implementers of the approach should have a clear understanding of what steps they must incorporate into their case process in order to use the CFE approach. Similarly, implementers should clearly understand the additional tools and resources that they can use as needed. For example, key components of the CFE approach include inviting family and fictive kin to a series of family meetings at which the team builds a lifetime network for the children. CASA and CPS may use the CFE tools to locate family, such as a Seneca Search or a Genogram, but those tools are supplementary resources rather than core components. Some tools may be essential on some cases, but unnecessary on others with different needs and circumstances. Further, some tools may be used more by CASA and other tools may be used more by CPS.

Identifying and outlining the core activities that define the CFE approach also becomes more important for the third evaluation year, when CFRP will examine outcomes of children and families who receive CFE. For CFRP to answer the question “is CFE working?” the CFE approach must have a clear definition that remains consistent across sites and across cases. Texas CASA should focus on balancing the flexibility CFE offers—one of the main assets of the approach—with the need to ensure fidelity to the core elements of the approach.

As local CASA and CPS programs work to implement CFE to fit local needs, different resource constraints emerge across sites.

Across the CFE sites, varying resource constraints and factors can keep CASA and CPS from implementing CFE on more cases. In Year One, it seemed that the primary resource concern was the CPS caseworkers’ time to invest in planning for and attending CFE meetings. In Year Two, the concern about time was not voiced as often, and when it was, participants referred more to scheduling conflicts and logistical challenges rather than a fundamental lack of time for CFE.

As implementers of CFE learned and adapted to CPS’ constraints, they placed more of the work on the CASA volunteers and staff to accommodate for these limitations in CPS caseworker capacity. As a result, constraints in the resources that CASA can provide have emerged. At one site, local CASA staff are maxed out in terms of the support that they can provide to CFE cases. Here, staff, along with a dedicated family finding volunteer, take on many of the finding and engaging duties associated with CFE, which limits the number of additional cases that can be assigned to CFE. At this site, Texas CASA can support the local program to build volunteers’ capacity and confidence in using the search and connection tools so that volunteers can act more independently of the CASA staff.
At another Year Two site, tensions over resources look different. In this area, CASA volunteers tend to be young adults who are in college or are early in their career. At other CFE sites, the CASA volunteers working on CFE cases are most typically retired adults or adults who do not work, many of whom consider their work as a CASA volunteer to be a central role in their life. The young age of the volunteers creates unique constraints for the site with young volunteers, because their volunteers are less able to attend meetings during the workday and cannot dedicate as much additional time (outside of the typical expectation for CASA volunteers) to finding and engaging family on a CFE case. In contrast to the recommendation above to shift more of the workload to volunteers, this site would benefit most from increasing CASA staff capacity for finding and engaging with family members, as well as creating processes to allow staff to attend more daytime meetings.

Resource constraints at the two CFE sites referred to above are quite different and require different solutions. Because CFE is a flexible approach and sites can choose to implement in different ways, it is likely that sites will continue to face different resource constraints that limit their implementation capacity. One vital role for the CFE Manager and coaches is to help sites think creatively about how to address their limitations to serve more children and families, and move forward in the case process on existing cases. Texas CASA should train and equip new and returning CFE coaches to view the CFE sites they work with through this lens.

**Key Recommendations**

- Clearly distinguish between the core, critical activities that define the CFE approach and optional activities that implementers should use as needed.
- Train CFE coaches to focus on mitigating resource and personnel limitations at their CFE sites to ensure the CFE approach can be used widely at each site.
- Consider trends in characteristics of CFE cases to best target trainings and in-services and to set goals for cases and sites.

“I think there has been a shift in CPS ... initially they saw it as more work... Having benefited going through some of the cases and the positive outcomes that have happened because of CFE, there's a generated interest now that I see from CPS... there's more interaction between CASA and CPS in that the supervisors and the volunteers and the caseworkers go, ‘this is a really good one. What can we do and how can we get started?’”

-CASA volunteer
**FINDING 4: The CFE approach supports increased collaboration between CASA and CPS, but the existing interagency relationships and leadership’s familiarity with the approach influence a site’s ability to implement CFE.**

The CFE approach provides CASA and CPS with a “roadmap” to collaboration, enabling more teamwork through establishing specific times to meet, providing a framework to divide tasks and set deadlines among the team, and through providing CASA with training and preparation to participate in or lead family engagement activities. Collaboration differs widely, though, across different sites, as well as on different cases. CFRP identified factors that impede collaboration and ways to better facilitate collaboration in the future.

**CFE facilitates increased respect and teamwork at CFE sites with strong interagency partnerships, but sites with weak interagency partnerships have more difficulty adopting the CFE approach.**

The pre-existing relationship between CASA and CPS at the start of CFE implementation was a key factor in how well the agencies collaborate to use CFE, and thus was a key factor in the success of CFE at a site in Year Two. The working relationship between CASA and CPS varies considerably across the CFE sites, especially the Year Two sites. At some sites, CASA and CPS maintain a strong relationship characterized by cooperation, frequent communication, and mutual respect. At other sites, tension and even hostility between the agencies is apparent.

The degree to which these sites successfully adopted the CFE approach and began applying CFE to their cases also varied widely. Sites where CFE served the most children and families are the sites with the best working relationship between CASA and CPS. CFE sites that reported relationship tensions between CASA and CPS struggled in Year Two to implement the approach.

Sites with strong CASA-CPS relationships reported that CFE training and implementation provided them with new ways to work together on a case and a new level of respect for the other. CFE helped CASA and CPS partners to move the mark toward increased collaboration, more task-sharing, and increased respect for the partner agency’s work. Working more closely has allowed CFE participants to see greater value in collaboration. In particular, CPS caseworkers have experienced that closer collaboration with the CASA volunteers on their caseload can help to ease their workload burden related to family engagement.

Figure 15 describes how CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers perceived that CFE impacts collaboration. The Post Survey asked CASA and CPS respondents to compare their CFE case with

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“I see it as blending the two systems together. CPS and CASA, where it’s not us and them. It’s ‘we are a team’ and we convey that when we are now going to court and testifying. That is very apparent for the family and to the attorneys.”

-CASA volunteer
the non-CFE cases that they have worked on in the past (CASA volunteers) or are currently on
their caseload (CPS caseworkers). The majority of CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers reported
that, relative to other non-CFE cases, CASA volunteers play a larger role in finding connections on
CFE cases, engaging with connections on CFE cases, and that communication between agencies is
better on CFE cases. About 20 percent fewer CPS caseworkers than CASA volunteers indicated
that CASA plays a larger role in finding and engaging connections, however, which may indicate
that not all CASA volunteers are embracing this new role in the same way. Texas CASA should
continue to encourage CASA volunteers to get more involved in family engagement activities.

**Figure 15: Collaboration on CFE Cases**

At sites with strong working relationships, there are distinct challenges to collaboration.
Implementers commonly refer to communication challenges and struggles to coordinate meeting
schedules. Overall, though, at sites with strong interagency relationships, CASA and CPS
demonstrate respect for their partner, a desire to increase collaboration, and a clear
understanding of the partner organization’s value of children and families. CASA and CPS at
strong-relationship sites feel that they have common goals for a child protection case and that
they can trust their counterparts.

CFE start-up and implementation has occurred much slower and less effectively at sites with
weaker interagency relationships. At CFE sites where the CASA-CPS relationship is particularly
strained (as indicated by focus group participants), CFE implementation began much later, and to date these sites have conducted many fewer CFE meetings. At the sites where the interagency relationship is a barrier to CFE implementation, CASA and CPS described several key issues that hinder both their relationship and interagency collaboration. First, communication itself is often a barrier. CASA and CPS frequently reported that the CASA volunteers or CPS caseworkers that they work with do not return their phone calls or emails. This is a barrier to collaboration at a practical level, but can also lead to both agencies feeling disrespected or not valued by the other. Communication issues were reported across CFE sites, but sites with a weaker interagency relationship reported these issues as a systemic problem rather than an anecdotal problem on individual cases.

The next two issues reported at CFE sites pertain to CPS’ perceptions of CASA organizations and volunteers in their local area. CPS caseworkers, as well as agency leadership at some sites, perceive that many CASA volunteers that they work with lack an appropriate understanding of the different cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic circumstances of the families served by CPS. CPS staff perceive that this lack of understanding influences their judgments of a child’s best interest in ways that are both unrelated to child safety as well as contrary to the goals of CFE. For example, a CPS caseworker described a case in her county in which the CASA volunteer was a white woman who was looking into a kin placement with a child’s Hispanic family. The volunteer was concerned that the placement was too ‘busy’ and ‘loud’ for the child because several generations of family members all lived in one house. The volunteer’s concern was disturbing to the caseworker, who felt that a large, inter-generational household was a very positive place for the child, because “Well, that’s family...That’s part of the cultural piece that they don’t understand.” CPS caseworkers identify similar issues in regard to socioeconomic status, and provided examples in which a CASA volunteer weighed a family’s ability to provide a large house and summer vacations into their assessment of whether the biological family or an adoptive home would be best for the child.

CPS staff attribute the perceived cultural and socioeconomic disconnects largely to the lack of diversity of CASA volunteers and staff in their counties. CPS reports that CASA volunteers and staff tend to be white and upper middle class, whereas CPS often serves children and families of color who are often poor.

CPS presented concerns with some CASA volunteers’ lack of awareness of the cultural and socioeconomic realities of the children and families that they mutually serve. Although these concerns may or may not be entirely objective, the tensions raise important issues related to working with CPS-involved families that should not be ignored by Texas CASA, especially because judges often use the CASA volunteer’s opinion to make decisions on a case. The level of knowledge, understanding, and experience working with diverse families likely varies widely among
implementers. CFE training presents one opportunity to move the mark towards greater understanding and empathy. Texas CASA should create or find training modules on cultural competency or on understanding poverty to incorporate as optional online training modules. Texas CASA or local CASA programs could offer in-person trainings at particular sites to provide supplementary information on the importance of family, working with diverse families, and the intersections of poverty and child protection.

**Texas CASA should consider the existing CASA-CPS relationship as a key site-selection factor for future CFE sites.**

An important takeaway from comparing CFE start-up and early implementation across the Year Two sites is that CFE facilitates increased collaboration between CASA and CPS when the agencies already have a moderate or strong relationship, but the CFE approach is not the right tool to mend broken interagency relationships. Texas CASA should consider existing agency partnerships as a primary site-selection criterion for CFE.

**Sites in regions with a Year One CFE site were able to plan for and begin implementing CFE more efficiently than sites in regions new to CFE.**

In Year Two, two of the six new CFE sites were located in DFPS regions where other programs implemented CFE in Year One (Liberty/Chambers in Region 6B and Hidalgo in Region 11). These two counties began CFE implementation sooner and more efficiently than the other six new sites, each located in Region 3B. The startup process was easier for leadership in Liberty/Chambers and Hidalgo Counties because CPS leadership at these sites worked closely with sites already implementing CFE. Further, some CPS program directors and program administrators covered both Year One and Year Two CFE counties, meaning that they already had a year of experience and lessons learned to pull from when starting CFE at a new site. Texas CASA should consider either rolling out CFE more widely in one geographic area at a time to make it easier for leadership staff, or plan for extra support and guidance to leadership in new regions.

**Integrating additional communication and decision-making guidance for new sites will improve CFE planning and early implementation at new sites.**

CFRP identified places within the design of the CFE approach where additional structure and guidance could better support the planning and early implementation process for new sites, especially in DFPS regions that are new to CFE. Leadership from new CFE sites in Year Two reported confusion and a lack of clarity on how to develop their local process for implementing CFE. Members of the leadership teams were confused about who was responsible for making decisions and sometimes did not know exactly what they needed to decide or what processes should be created. These ‘site-level’ decisions include establishing how cases will be assigned, who will decide which cases will be CFE cases, and when implementation will begin. Though a CFE
Coach and the CFE Manager are available to provide continual support to each site, it appears as though some sites hesitated to bring these questions directly to the coach.

In the future, it would be helpful to create a list of decisions that each site must consider when planning for local CFE implementation, along with a guided-notetaking tool to outline key decisions, assignment of responsibility for tasks, and any deadlines or important dates for the planning process. Site leadership could use this tool at CFE planning meetings with the local CFE Coach, in much the same way as the CFE Team creates an action plan at a Team Meeting for a specific case; the CFE leadership at a new site would create a team action plan for beginning CFE implementation. CFE implementers from CASA and CPS value that CFE Team Meetings provide clear guidelines for dividing and assigning tasks among the team and establishing interim deadlines for casework tasks. Creating tools and guidance for a more systematic planning process can ensure that each site begins implementation in a timely manner with the necessary plans in place, while still leaving the implementation decisions in the hands of local leadership, who know best what is needed at their sites.

*CFE Teams need additional structure from the model to guide the timing and content of communication in between CFE Meetings, to maintain progress and momentum.*

CFE adds value to the case process by providing specific tools and structure for engaging with family and collaborating across agencies, however some sites reported gaps in the CFE process that led to lost momentum and stalled progress on some of their cases. The major point at which this can occur on cases is between two CFE meetings, especially when the next meeting is scheduled long after the preceding meeting because the team needs time to find and engage family. The team can become discouraged and lose faith in the CFE approach at this time without finding a way to sustain the momentum and continue progress in the case. CFE teams would benefit from additional guidelines and processes for checking in with their collaborators on a regular basis, such as once every two weeks, for example, to discuss progress, next steps, and identify interim deadlines. It would be best to assign the CASA volunteers this responsibility so that he or she can feel ownership over communication and can be held accountable to their role by other members of the team.
Key Recommendations

- Provide clear guidance and recommendations in the CFE approach for communication and decision-making for leadership at new sites as well as for CFE Teams in the middle and later stages of a case.
- Select sites for CFE with moderate or strong working relationships between CASA and CPS.
- Plan to provide extra support to sites beginning to use the CFE approach if they are the first site within their CPS region to use the CFE approach.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list synthesizes the recommendations that CFRP provided throughout the report based on data collection through focus groups, surveys, training observations, and stakeholder meetings. Recommendations provided to Texas CASA include suggestions for training, tool use, family meetings, site selection, and the structure and content of the guidelines provided to CFE sites. These recommendations are meant to inform Year Three implementation.

TRAININGS, TOOLS, & RESOURCES

- Focus in-person CFE training on details of the CFE approach and provide time to learn the practical, day-to-day implementation skills and processes. Create additional time for CASA to practice using the tools through in-services or workdays.
- Incorporate additional online training modules for participants to view independently, to supplement CFE Overview and Tools Training content. Key additional modules include trauma-informed care, working with diverse populations, working with impoverished families, and how to conduct CFE meetings in Spanish, or with a translator.
- Continue to encourage and support CASA volunteers and CPS caseworkers to apply the CFE tools and framework to a wide selection of their cases. Continue to support CASA program sites to incorporate the CFE tools into their standard practices locally.
- Consider funding additional Seneca Searches to save time up front during the family finding and engagement process. The time saved could be spent instead engaging with the children or relatives identified in the search.
- Refer to the Blended Perspectives Meeting, Decision Making Meeting, and Lifetime Network Meeting simply as “Family Meetings” and “Family Meeting One” or “the second family meeting” to ease confusion surrounding the meeting names.

GUIDELINES FOR THE CFE APPROACH

- Continue to frame Collaborative Family Engagement as an “approach,” or a “strategy” for CASA and CPS to use to conduct their work, rather than a “model” that must be applied with strict fidelity.
- Consider how different case characteristics influence the use of CFE and the goals of a CFE case. In particular, Texas CASA should consider how to set intermediate outcome goals for PMC cases, such as contact with relatives outside of CFE meetings, as markers of case progress.
Clearly distinguish between the core, critical activities that define the CFE approach and optional activities that implementers should use as needed. Texas CASA should focus on balancing the flexibility that CFE offers with the need to ensure fidelity to the core elements of the approach.

Create additional guidelines to support implementation planning at new CFE sites. Texas CASA should create a list of local planning decisions, along with a guided-notetaking tool to outline key decisions, assignment of responsibility for tasks, and any planning deadlines for site leadership to use in the same way that an action plan guides the Team Meeting on a CFE case.

Create additional guidelines for the timing and content of communication for the CFE Team in between CFE Meetings to maintain progress and momentum on the case. For example, the CASA volunteer could be responsible for arranging a conference call for the CFE Team several days after a family meeting to discuss next steps.

SITE SELECTION

Consider existing agency partnerships as a primary site-selection criterion for CFE sites. CFE facilitates increased collaboration between CASA and CPS when the agencies already have a moderate or strong relationship, but the CFE approach is not the right tool to mend broken interagency relationships.

Plan to provide extra support to new CFE sites in DFPS regions where no CFE sites currently exist to facilitate efficient planning and start-up.

CFE COACHES

Train each CFE Coach to focus on mitigating resource and personnel limitations at their CFE sites to ensure the CFE approach can be used widely at each site. A vital role for the CFE Manager and CFE Coach is to help sites think creatively about how to address their limitations to best serve children and families.

Ensure the CFE Coaches (or any local CFE Meeting Facilitators) who work in areas of Texas with a large proportion of Spanish speakers are bilingual.
CONCLUSION

Through the Year One and Year Two implementation evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement initiative, CASA and CPS implementers emphasized the value of the CFE approach for family engagement and collaboration. CFE enhances the way that CASA and CPS engage with children and families, on both TMC and PMC cases, by providing tools to locate and connect with family and fictive kin, as well as by providing a family meeting structure that eases tensions and builds trust and rapport among participants, who are then able to take part in decision making. CFE enhances collaboration between CASA and CPS by providing needed structure for the relationship, including a time to meet and tasks to divide between the agencies, which enhances teamwork and increases information sharing.

Key challenges to implementing CFE include caseworker workload, difficulty learning the model and beginning a new approach, tensions between CASA and CPS at sites with weaker pre-existing relationships, and difficulty engaging with family members who may be angry or resistant to participation. As sites continue to use the CFE approach on their cases, they learn new ways to mitigate these challenges and refine the way they implement CFE to better meet the needs of the children and families that they serve.

In Year Three, as use of the CFE approach increases, the evaluators will begin to track outcomes on CFE cases around the state. At the end of Year Two, 19 CFE cases had closed. Nine of those cases resulted in PMC to a guardian, four families were reunified, two cases resulted in Joint Managing Conservatorship between a parent and a relative or fictive kin connection, two cases resulted in adoptions, one case ended with PMC granted to the state, and one child aged out of care. In Year Three, CFRP will assess whether the case outcomes of CFE cases look different than outcomes on non-CFE cases. The evaluators will also track the development of the lifetime network beyond attendance and participation in family meetings, to learn about the support networks developed through CFE. CFRP will collect data from clients to better understand their experience with CFE and will assess key measures of child wellbeing to determine if and how the CFE approach influences case outcomes.


3 Department of Family Protective Services, “CPS Removals – by County FY08-FY16.”


The Child and Family Research Partnership is an independent, nonpartisan research center under the direction of Dr. Cynthia Osborne at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. CFRP specializes in rigorous research on policy issues related to young children, teens, and their parents. CFRP seeks to understand how current demographic trends affect parents and their children, what factors contribute to both positive and negative child outcomes, and what policy and programmatic changes can be implemented to improve child and family wellbeing.

Research Areas

**Family Supports**
Community Impact • Economic Security

**Fatherhood**
Supports for Fathers • Paternity Establishment • Child Support

**Early Childhood Investments**
Home Visiting • Pre-Kindergarten • Child Care

**Child Welfare**
Child Welfare Workforce • Child and Family Outcomes

**Adolescent Health and Wellbeing**
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