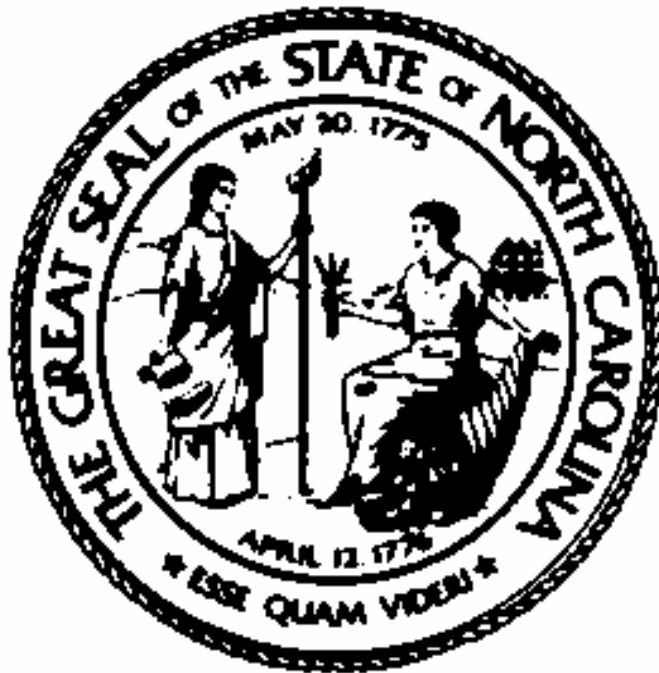


REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

2006-2007 GRANT APPLICATION
Time-Limited Family Reunification Services



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Social Services

Closing Date: April 17, 2006

Time-Limited Family Reunification Services

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services is pleased to announce the availability of \$2,103,896.00 for grants to provide Time-Limited Family Reunification Services programs for SFY 2006-2007. This Request for Applications solicits response from eligible applicants for grants to be awarded on a limited, competitive basis.

The Adoption and Safe families Act (ASFA) of 1997 reauthorized the Family Preservation and Support Program of 1993 and renamed it the Safe and Stable Families Program. ASFA was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on November 19, 1997. The law defines and mandates our national goals for children in the child welfare system to be *safety, permanency, and well-being*. The law addresses the realization that all human service systems that impact families need to work in partnership with one another to better meet the needs of both children and their families. The law also promotes eliminating the barriers that exist between children lingering in out-of-home placements and permanency.

Several key principles for implementation promoted by ASFA are:

1. the safety of children is the paramount concern that must guide all child welfare services;
2. foster care is a temporary setting and not a place for children to grow up;
3. permanency planning efforts for children should begin as soon as a child enters foster care and should be expedited by the provision of services to families; and
4. innovative approaches are needed to achieve the goals of safety , permanency, and well-being.

This legislation expands the scope of services to time-limited family reunification services.

The term "family reunification" is defined as the planned process of reconnecting children in out-of-home care with their families by means of a variety of services and supports to the children, their families, and their foster parents or other service providers. It aims to help each child and family achieve and maintain, at any given time, their optimal level of reconnection – from full reentry of the child into the family system to other forms of contact, such as visiting, that affirm their child's membership in the family.

North Carolina has not developed a prescribed model for this program and the reunification services program closely resembles the state's intensive family preservation services model. The federal Child and Family Services Review requires that the philosophy underlying prevention services be incorporated across program lines to reduce instances of maltreatment and help children return safely to their own homes. Programs funded by the Division of Social Services are to build the capacity to provide in-home services to families in contact with the child welfare system. Programs are required to

submit an estimated cost per family of the service provision for cost-benefit data determination. Child abuse and neglect prevention efforts are to be emphasized.

The reunification services program will provide services to families who have one or more children returning from an out-of-home placement. The population of children shall include those alleged or found to be abused, neglected or dependent, emotionally or behaviorally disturbed, undisciplined or delinquent, and/or have medical needs that, with assistance, could be managed in the home.

The Principles of Family Reunification

The definition of family reunification leads to the following principles which form an important foundation for the development of sound policies, programs, and practices:

1. With its emphasis on ensuring continuity of relationships and care for children, family reunification is an integral part of the philosophy of permanency planning.
2. Children are best reared in families, preferably their own; most families can care for their own children, if properly assisted.
3. Family reunification practice must be guided by an ecologically oriented, competence-centered perspective, that emphasizes:
 - Promoting family empowerment
 - Engaging in advocacy and social action
 - Reaching for – and building on – family strengths
 - Involving and all whom the child considers family as partners
 - Providing needed services and supports
4. Teamwork among the many parties involved with the family and in family reunification is critical.
5. All forms of human diversity – ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, life-style – as well as physical and mental challenges must be respected.
6. A commitment to early and consistent child-family visiting is an essential ingredient in preparing for – and maintaining – reunification.
7. Foster parents and child care workers must be involved as members of the service delivery team. The agency should share information with them about the child and family that is shared with other service providers, involve them in decisions, and provide them with adequate training.
8. Many families will have continuing service needs in multiple areas. Services to meet these needs must be provided for as long as children and families require them to maintain the reunification.

9. Agencies must empower their staff by providing adequate training and supervision and by using a team approach in making case decisions.

Key Elements of Design:

- Services are time-limited – provided for a maximum of twelve months within the fifteen months from the date of DSS custody or placement authority.
- Services are home-based – at least one-half of a caseworker’s time spent providing reunification services to a family is spent in face-to-face contact in the family’s home and community.
- Services focus on promoting family competence and stability – building on strengths and the family’s own resources.
- Services are provided in a culturally responsive manner with an understanding of and a respect for cultural and ethnic diversity.
- The services are both therapeutic and concrete.
- All families receiving reunification services will have access to crisis/emergency services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Caseloads will range from four to ten families at a time, based on the intensity and duration of services and the severity of the problems, as recommended by the caseworker and approved by the supervisor.
- Reunification caseworkers will have specialized training and support to provide these services.

The applicant must demonstrate its financial stability which will enable it to receive funding on a reimbursement after expenditure basis.

Eligibility:

We anticipate funding only up to two grants in each of the identified ten (10) regions. While we are not limiting the number of applications per multi-county cluster or region, we anticipate that the requirement for strong inter-disciplinary collaboration during the planning process will limit the number of applications submitted. It is estimated that eighteen (18) multi-county cluster/regional awards will be made. (See Attachment – Listing of Eligible Counties)

To qualify for funding consideration, each identified multi-county cluster or region must assemble a collaborative planning team. Each planning team must demonstrate strong collaboration among public and private human services agencies and organizations, non-profit and community-based organizations, and consumers/parents who will use and

benefit from the services. The planning team must conduct an initial needs assessment to assess the needs of the target population and to structure the Reunification program that best meets those needs. The planning team should reflect the socio-demographic composition of the region and, at a minimum, include diverse representation from the agencies and organizations listed below:

- County Department of Social Services (mandatory)
- All Community-Based programs funded through the NC Division of Social Services: Family Preservation, Family Resource Center, Family Support, Family Reunification, Respite, and Adoption, Promotion, and Support programs
- Other Community-Based programs
- Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Public Schools
- Local Health Department
- Local Management Entity for Mental Health
- Local Partnerships and relevant stakeholders
- Families and potential consumers

The planning team must select an applicant agency to manage the Reunification program. Due to the nature of the services to be provided, this agency must be a public human service agency or a private, non-profit organization with designation under Section 501 © 3 of the federal tax code. This agency must have the **capacity to plan, provide, and effectively manage an Reunification program in a multi-county and/or regional area.**

Criteria for Funding:

Each planning team must fulfill the following requirements:

- Comply with the Policies and Standards established for the state Family Reunification Program.
- State a commitment to employ staff able to demonstrate the skills and competencies required to provide or supervise Reunification services. All staff are required to attend the state sponsored Family-Centered/Family Preservation Services Training.
- Demonstrate that it has appropriate linkages with community agencies and organizations to enable it to help clients obtain and use services and resources and to make effective referrals, when needed, at the end of the service provision period.
- Demonstrate through the submission of an annual operating budget that the agency has adequate fiscal and other resources to provide a viable Reunification program. The applicant agency must also demonstrate a financial stability that will enable them to receive Reunification funding on a reimbursement after expenditure basis.
- Show the need for the services in the identified region. Relevant data should include, by ethnic and cultural background:
 - Trends in the number of child protective services reports received by county Departments of Social Services and the number of substantiated

cases and cases found to be ‘in need of services’ at the conclusion of the Family Assessment track of Multiple Response;

- Trends in the number of children placed in DSS custody or Placement Authority;
 - Trends in reasons for out-of-home placement of abused and neglected children, placement patterns, and lengths of stay in foster care or other non-relative placements;
 - Number of children admitted to training schools and detention facilities;
 - Number of children placed in residential treatment in mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse facilities; and
 - Other data that indicate trends or increase in out-of-home placements that could be impacted by Reunification services.
 - A description of current local service delivery systems for abused and neglected children in terms of capacities and deficiencies.
- Provide a statement of commitment to providing services in a culturally responsive manner.

Program Documentation:

Programs must maintain individual case records for each client/family. Case records should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Date and time of request for services, assessment visit, and acceptance for services,
- Severity of risk which lead to the out-of-home placement, including the number and types of previous placements,
- Family assessment that includes the family’s immediate problems, barriers, needs, strengths, and goals,
- Detailed services plan signed by the Reunification worker and family members that specifies both individual and family goals,
- Documentation of all counseling sessions, including dates, service provider, service recipient, and type of service (e.g., individual, family, group),
- Progress notes regarding the family’s goal attainment toward completion of the service plan,
- Termination summary, noting the current family situation, goals met, any additional services needs, and referrals made.

The amount of funding shall be based on the individual performance of each program, when applicable.

The state document *Family Reunification Services Policies and Standards* can be obtained at

<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss>

All organizations applying for these funds must propose programs that meet these requirements and must use the model outlined in this document.

