

# Pathways to Partnerships

## Tips for Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs to Improve Support for Kinship/Grandfamilies



Nationwide, grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends are raising [over 2.5 million children](#) whose parents are unable to do so. While research shows that both [kin caregivers](#) and [children](#) benefit from being in kinship/grandfamilies, studies also indicate that these families are disproportionately impacted by financial instability, disability, and trauma and that the well-being of all family members improves when they receive appropriate services.

Currently, [95 percent](#) of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and [84 percent](#) of Title VI Native American Aging Programs (Title VI programs) offer at least one service for older kin caregivers. Some also partner with community-based organizations (CBOs), like food banks and [transportation providers](#), which offer complementary services or help AAAs and Title VI programs [increase their capacity](#).

This tip sheet provides AAAs and Title VI programs with ideas for initiating community partnerships to support kinship/grandfamilies. It covers a broad range of partnerships, from formal partnerships, such as initiatives to co-develop programs, to informal partnerships, such as referral relationships. It identifies types of providers with whom AAAs and Title VI programs might partner, explains the benefits of these partnerships, furnishes links to provider search tools, and includes quick tips for approaching providers for collaboration.

## Essential Partners

Successfully supporting kinship/grandfamilies takes the engagement of many partners. This section describes key agencies and organizations that AAAs and Title VI programs should consider for partnership, why they are important, and how to find them.

### Child Welfare Agencies

Child welfare agencies seek to ensure the safety and well-being of children at risk for or experiencing abuse, neglect, or exploitation. They do so by investigating suspected cases of abuse and neglect and, as needed, providing services to support children and families. Sometimes they must remove children from their homes, placing them in foster care, either

with traditional non-kin foster parents or with kin. Public child welfare agencies often contract with private organizations to provide services.

### **Why Connect With Them**

About [five percent](#) of children being raised by kin are in the foster care system. For these children and their families, child welfare offers [services](#) often unavailable to those not involved with foster care. While services vary among agencies, they may include case management, legal assistance, [kinship navigation](#), and financial support. Some also contract with CBOs. Learn about partnerships between two AAAs and their local child welfare agencies by watching a recording of the Network's webinar on this topic, [Aging Network and Child Welfare Collaborations to Support Kinship/Grandfamilies](#).

### **Finding Child Welfare Agencies**

- ▶ [State child welfare and foster care contacts](#)
- ▶ [Designated Indian Child Welfare Act agents](#)

### **Community Action Agencies and Family Resource Centers**

Established in 1964 by the Economic Opportunity Act, Community Action Agencies (CAAs), also called Community Action Programs, run a range of anti-poverty programs. Though [services differ among CAAs](#), they can include help with housing, transportation, nutrition, and utilities, as well as employment, income-building, and education services. Some administer HeadStart preschools. Six percent of AAAs are also designated as CAAs. Likewise, [Family Resource Centers \(FRCs\)](#) offer various no-cost services to support families, including kinship/grandfamilies.

### **Why Connect With Them**

Both CAAs and FRCs offer services that can complement those offered by AAAs and Title VI programs. Many CAAs also contract with CBOs.

### **Finding CAAs and FRCs**

- ▶ Many FRCs are organized in [networks](#).
- ▶ [Find your local CAA](#).

### **Information & Referral/Assistance (I&R/A) Programs and Kinship Navigators**

I&R/A programs and kinship navigators help the public identify and navigate community resources. Some also provide hands-on assistance, such as sharing information on public benefits and helping people complete the necessary application forms. I&R/A programs such as 211 offer general assistance to all ages, while specialized I&R/A programs provide

assistance to specific populations. AAAs, Title VI programs, and Aging and Disability Resource Centers offer I&R/A services that focus on aging. Kinship navigators are another specialized form of I&R/A, concentrating on helping kinship/grandfamilies. Many kinship navigator programs are available to all kin caregivers, while some programs restrict access to kin caregivers with open child welfare cases.

### **Why Connect With Them**

I&R/A program staff and kinship navigators are knowledgeable about local, regional, and national services in their area of specialization, and they can be a good referral source for AAAs and Title VI programs seeking to find kinship/grandfamilies who could benefit from their kinship programs. Aging Network programs can also expand their I&R/A services beyond the world of aging and offer kinship navigation. The Kinship Navigator Program at the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio has earned the [Network's Exemplary Program designation](#) for its work, and other AAAs and Title VI programs can learn more about it and take steps to replicate their success.

### **Find I&R/A and Kinship Navigators**

- ▶ [Kinship Navigator Programs Around the United States](#)
- ▶ Find other I&R/A programs specializing in [child care](#), [domestic violence](#), [Medicare](#), [mental health](#), and [veterans services](#)

### **Legal Providers**

Legal providers, including legal aid organizations, can be an important resource for kin caregivers who lack a [legal relationship](#) with the children they are raising. Legal providers can explain the legal options and process to kin caregivers. A legal relationship is often necessary for enrolling children in school and making health care decisions on the children's behalf.

### **Why Connect With Them**

While all AAAs offer access to legal services for older adults, the type of [legal assistance](#) required by [kin caregivers](#) is unique. By collaborating with legal providers with expertise in family law, or more specifically with adoption or children's guardianship, AAAs and Title VI programs can help kin caregivers gain the legal right to make decisions on behalf of the children they are raising. Some legal groups, like the [American Bar Endowment](#) and some state bar foundations, also provide grants to support CBOs' kinship efforts.

### **Find Legal Services Providers**

Given that not all family law practitioners assist with adoption or guardianship cases, finding potential partners can be challenging. Start with online directories from the [U.S. Legal Services Corporation](#) or the [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#). Additionally, the American Bar Association has a directory of [law schools](#) that offer pro bono legal clinics. [Child welfare](#)

[agencies](#), which sometimes partner with legal providers to help kin caregivers formally involved with child welfare, also may be of assistance.

## Schools, Preschools, and Afterschool Programs

### Why Connect With Them

Connecting with schools can be a great way for AAAs and Title VI programs to find kinship/grandfamilies to participate in their programs. Some schools offer supports such as before-school and afterschool programs that may serve as respite for kin caregivers. Most schools participate in federal [school meals](#) and [summer nutrition](#) programs, which provide free or reduced-price meals to children from low-income families. [HeadStart preschools](#) and [Full-Service Community Schools](#) offer social services, often through contracts with CBOs.

### Find Schools and Afterschool Programs

- ▶ [Search for public school districts](#)
- ▶ [Find afterschool networks](#)
- ▶ [Find HeadStart preschools](#)
- ▶ [Find Tribally controlled and U.S. Bureau of Indian Education operated schools](#)

## Universities and Colleges

### Why Connect With Them

Partnering with universities and colleges has many benefits. Some offer supportive services directly to kinship/grandfamilies. Schools with these programs include [American River College](#), [Georgia State University](#), and [Montana State University Extension](#). Many [Cooperative Extension System](#) offices, associated with [land-grant universities](#), offer no- and low-cost nutrition, financial education, and parenting classes that, while not specifically designed for kinship/grandfamilies, may still benefit them. Some university [law schools](#) offer pro-bono legal clinics. Universities also can be good sources of volunteers, including medical and social work interns, who can support kinship/grandfamily programs. Still others can help with program evaluation. Learn about university partnerships developed by three AAAs in [Lessons from the Field: Leveraging Partnerships to Address Staff and Infrastructure Needs and Extend Reach](#) and [Lessons from the Field: Overcoming Transportation Barriers in Supporting Kinship/Grandfamilies](#).

### Find Universities

- ▶ Search the internet for “[state/city/region] universities or colleges” and “kinship families”
- ▶ [Look up land-grant universities](#)
- ▶ [Find Tribal colleges and universities](#)

## Other Key Partners

In addition to the essential partners highlighted above, there are many other organizations that exist at the community level that can support kinship/grandfamily services. This section provides a brief description of some of the other key partners AAAs and Title VI programs might consider reaching out to and engaging.

### Businesses

Many businesses seek ways to give back to their communities, often through donations or grants, [matches of employee donations](#), [sponsorships](#), volunteers, and/or in-kind support.

### Children’s Recreation Providers

Summer camps, Boys & Girls Clubs, Scouting, 4-H—and any other organization offering supervised activities for children—provide respite for kin caregivers.

### Faith Communities

Many faith communities offer supportive services for the public, including food pantries and clothing closets. Some offer programs and/or no- or low-cost meeting spaces; others provide volunteers.

### Food Banks and Farmers Markets

Food banks distribute no-cost food to human services organizations including AAAs and Title VI programs. Many farmers markets participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), [Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#), and [WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#), which help low-income individuals and families, including kinship/grandfamilies, access fresh produce.

### Libraries

Libraries often offer no- or low-cost meeting spaces for CBOs or have community bulletin boards where CBOs can post their literature. Some libraries also have onsite children’s activities, technology classes, food pantries, and social workers.

### Medical and Mental Health Providers

[Charitable clinics and pharmacies](#), [federally funded health centers](#), [Indian Health Services](#), [Urban Indian Organizations](#), and [school-based health centers](#) help low-income kinship/grandfamilies access care at low or no cost. Similarly, [mobile clinics](#) offer accessible care to kinship/grandfamilies in rural areas. Learn about one AAA’s mobile clinic in [Lessons from the Field: Overcoming Transportation Barriers in Supporting Kinship/Grandfamilies](#).

### Parks and Recreation Offices

In most U.S. communities, these offices administer services including supervised activities for children and healthy aging programs that can benefit kinship/grandfamilies. Many offer no-

cost meeting space for CBOs. Still others operate or host [community wellness hubs](#), farmers markets, and food pantries. Learn about one [AAA's partnership with their Parks and Recreation department](#).

## Public and Senior Housing Facilities

These facilities provide supportive services including onsite child care, medical clinics, dining (in senior housing), service coordination, job-training, and more. Some offer no- and low-cost meeting spaces for CBOs. Note, though, that not all senior housing facilities permit children as residents.

## Service Clubs

Service clubs – such as the [Junior League](#), [Kiwanis](#), and the [Lions Clubs](#) – are a great source for volunteers and fundraising support. Many also provide grants to CBOs.

## Other Provider Networks

Other networks that may be of interest include [Coalition for Home Repair](#), [Cribs for Kids](#), [National Diaper Bank Network](#), and [Rebuilding Together](#).

## Pitch Tips

Before you reach out to any potential partner, you will want to think about your best approach strategies. Consider these ideas as you develop your pitch:

- ▶ **Highlight complementary programs:** Describe how your organization and their organization have complementary aims. Many organizations are seeking to deepen referral relations and expand their options for places to refer clients.
- ▶ **Share communication channels:** Offer to disseminate information through your communication channels (such as social media, newsletters, and blog posts) and inquire about their communication channels.
- ▶ **Suggest mutual professional development:** This may include ideas such as offering to train their staff on "aging 101" while they train yours on "child welfare basics." [Grandfamilies 101](#), from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, is a free, 90-minute professional development experience that you can deliver to provide others with a basic introduction to issues frequently facing grandfamilies and kin caregivers.
- ▶ **Frame your pitch to meet partners' needs:** While all the potential partners listed here seek to help others, their priorities may differ from AAAs and Title VI programs. Schools, for example, prioritize the academic and [social-emotional learning](#) of students, whereas medical providers prioritize health outcomes. Ensuring your pitch meets partners' needs will increase their receptivity to collaboration. See the Network's [Partnering with Schools tip sheet](#) for more ideas.

- ▶ **Start small:** When resources are scarce, an organization might fear that partnership means more work. To counter this, you may want to offer to start with something simple, like exchanging literature and referrals or promoting each other's programs in communication channels, before exploring deeper collaboration. See the [story on pages 12-13 of this resource](#) to learn about small steps one Title VI program undertook to partner with a local Boys & Girls Club.

## For More Information

Find more partnering tips from several other resources published by the Network:

- ▶ [Identifying and Engaging Untapped Partners to Support Kinship/Grandfamilies](#)
- ▶ [Identifying Local Champions](#)
- ▶ [Leveraging Partnerships to Better Support Kin Caregivers](#)

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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