

Best Practices Checklist for Foster Care

Intro: The goal of this document is to offer best practices for improving disaster preparedness in foster care/ child placement, sector by using suggestions and resources to achieve indicators of community resilience. This checklist was created by cross-walking action items with questionnaire items from the [Community Preparedness Index \(CPI\)](#) developed by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness and Save the Children. These best practices and resources are tools to help address gaps in child-focused emergency planning. Some suggestions may be constrained by local or state regulations or laws, but these guidelines can assist in developing best practices within the Foster Care/Child Placement sector. These best practices can help guide discussions, inform plan development, and delineate responsibilities to improve child protection and emergency response in the foster care sector. One of these organizations that is referred to throughout the best practices is the “lead organization.” A lead organization is responsible for all foster care homes and child placement agencies to be prepared for emergencies and create policy, guidance, and technical assistance to help with the preparations and planning. A designated lead organization implies an organization, such as an agency, that has a mission and the capacity to directly improve the element of preparedness. A de facto lead organization fills the same role as a lead organization but is not specifically accountable for the element of preparedness.

Intended Audience: This set of best practices for the foster care sector is directed to decision-makers, policymakers, and emergency planners in both governmental and non-governmental positions, at the sector level. While these guidelines may be useful for child placement agencies, this document is not intended to serve as an emergency operations checklist, but rather as a planning guide across a local jurisdiction. The best practices serve to provide suggestions about what has worked for other localities and states on how to improve preparedness and child protection/safety in the sector. Local planning coalitions are encouraged to provide this information to stakeholders to explore how preparedness can be improved.

Approach to Action: There are 3 major ways to achieving the best practices detailed below and improving the CPI score for care for children in foster care.

1. State Regulation
2. County or local regulations
3. Best practices through coalition action

As you review the best practices, check off items that are adequately addressed in your jurisdiction’s foster care sector emergency plan requirements. Keep in mind that legal requirements or guidelines handed down by a lead organization carry more weight in terms of preparedness than an unregulated best practice.

Before You Get Started: Before going through the best practices, identify the foster care licensing or regulatory requirements and lead authorities for your community. This function may be

provided by human services agencies such as the Department of Social Services. State licensing authorities should be consulted and both public and private placement agencies should coordinate planning efforts. Whole Community planning is encouraged in order to develop a comprehensive and appropriate plan for the unique needs of each jurisdiction and its children.

Disclaimer: The question identifiers that begin with “Q” (e.g. Q1, Q2, etc.) located next to some of the checklist items correspond to the question number in the Community Preparedness Index (CPI) questionnaire. This reference point is for those who are utilizing this tool alongside the CPI. The item lettering to track individual items within this document only. For more information about the CPI please email rcrc@columbia.edu. This document was last updated on **7/28/2021**. The referenced hyperlinks will not be maintained beyond this date but are listed for your reference.

Elements of Preparedness

- (1) **Created an emergency response plan. (Q. 1)**
 - Licensing requirements provide the ability to standardize the emergency response plans for foster care settings in the community and can improve coordination and accountability for agencies. See references for an example of a policy and established license requirement for foster care guardians.¹ See references for an example of a general standard license template.² See references for licensing requirements by state.³
 - An example of a non-licensing requirement for a foster care emergency response plan can include a state agency regulating local child and welfare agencies to develop and manage emergency response plans. See references for an example of this type of regulation.^{4 5} Child care providers, including foster care, that receive funding from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) are required to have a disaster plan.^{6 7} Requirements for emergency plans may also come from placement organizations for foster care.⁸ Local agency requirements or best practices can supplement and enhance these mandates.
 - There should be active conversation about disaster preparedness between out-of-home placement/foster care agencies and designated caregivers. See references for an example of an emergency and disaster plan template that can be adapted for local use by each jurisdiction for its foster care providers.⁹

- (2) **Shared emergency response plans with assigned social worker. (Q.3)**

An emergency response plan might be a requirement for licensing and, as such, provided to the out-of-home placement agency, but not required to be distributed to the social/case worker. There should be standardization to include both parties in receiving the plans to facilitate direct contact immediately after a disaster. See references for an example.¹⁰

- (3) **Tested emergency response plans by all levels of government once a year. (Q. 4)**
Guidelines and requirements may vary by level of government (state vs. local). Common and suggested guidelines include that emergency response plans for foster care are reviewed every 6 months.¹¹ Emergency response plans requirements for testing may be limited to fire drills but should consider other manmade and natural hazards to ensure all-hazards preparedness.¹²
- (4) **Reviewed and provided substantive feedback by state, local, or local municipal governments on foster care emergency response plans once a year.**
Review will usually occur through the licensing authority of the state, and it may also be part of the annual inspections. See references for an example.¹³ Guidance or standards may come from associations that manage foster care services.¹⁴ Emergency plans should include fire (a standard practice), but should also include natural (earthquake, fire, tornadoes) and technological disasters (explosion, power outages, or hazardous waste spills). Feedback and technical assistance for emergency plan development could be provided in collaboration with the local emergency management agency.
- (5) **Created a system or mechanism with the State and Local Department of Emergency Management to provide technical assistance on emergency plan creation and maintenance.**
If existing relationships do not exist, it is recommended to collaborate directly with the local emergency management agency to build a partnership. The local emergency management agency may be able to provide consultative services or provide training of trainers for social services staff.
- (6) **Established a mechanism to help foster care guardians get proper legal authorization to evacuate children across state and county lines promptly after the evacuation. The mechanism will allow a foster care guardian to evacuate a child across state lines before obtaining a court order. (Q.5)**
This mechanism may include agreements between specific states or policies set by the respective Child and Family Services/Social Service Agencies. See references for an example of a disaster plan that includes sharing of information across county and state lines to ensure that there is continuity of services and coordination after evacuation, regardless of the duration of displacement.¹⁵ Interstate agency-accessible information should include medical and educational records, custody orders, and family and case history.¹⁶
- (7) **Implemented the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (CFSIA) by a lead agency. (Q.6)**
CFSIA requires that states have monthly in-person meetings by caseworkers with children living in foster care and that the caseworker is prepared and focused on the wellbeing of the children among other requirements.¹⁷
Out-of-home placement lead agencies are commonly the agencies that license the foster homes. If CFSIA isn't mentioned, the lead agency may instead mention the

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Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act of 2011 (CFSII). CFSII is an updated version of CFSIA. Links to more information about CFSIA and CFSII can be seen in the references.^{18 19}

Name of lead CFSIA agency: _____

- (8) **An organization in the community has policies and procedures intended to:** (Q.7)
- Identify, locate, and continue the provision of health care, medical, and other services to children in the child welfare/child protective services system living in your community, who are displaced WITHIN your state or county by a disaster.** (Q.7a)
 - Identify, locate, and continue the provision of health care, medical, and other services to children in the child welfare/child protective services system living in your community, who are displaced OUTSIDE of your state or county by a disaster.** (Q.7b)

These two topics will generally fall under the disaster plan required components of the CFSIA Act of 2006. The agencies that are in charge of managing those funds will likely also be the child welfare agencies that license the foster care homes. In addition to state or county-managed out-of-home placement agencies, private placement agencies should also be included in any planning efforts. Discussion of addressing displaced children living in foster care can be found in the Child and Family Services Plans that are required for CCDF funding. See references for an example.^{20 21}

Lead Organization Name: _____

- (9) **Established systems or protocols in place in the county or state to respond to new child welfare cases in your community resulting from a disaster.** (Q.7c)

Responding to new child welfare cases in the community from a disaster is also required under the CFSIA Act of 2006. A good way to consider this issue is to break down the response into different functions to consider how to identify and respond to the cases. See references for an example.²²

Lead Organization Name: _____

- (10) **Created a system in place to communicate with staff of child welfare/child protective services organizations that are displaced by a disaster.** (Q.7d)

One example of ensuring communication is by keeping a communications chain in and between offices to ensure that staff can be reassigned in emergencies.²³ The agency's network should also allow staff to have access to information and the systems outside of their respective jurisdiction.²⁴ There should also be communication systems in place with all relevant stakeholders (volunteer placement agencies, foster parents, detention facilities, etc.) in case of a disaster. Also consider regional plans to provide mutual aid/assistance within government agencies.

Lead Organization Name: _____

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- (11) **Established procedures to preserve essential program records related to children in the welfare/protective services system during a disaster. (Q.7e)**
Databases featuring backups of children’s records should be contained at a secure off-site and cloud-accessible location to ensure that records are preserved in a disaster. This will allow continuity of services after a disaster. ²⁵
 Lead Organization Name: _____
- (12) **Created processes to coordinate services and share information with other states and counties during and in the aftermath of a disaster. (Q.7f)**
In some cases, this will be coordinated through the American Public Human Services Association, but direct agreements between states would help improve preparedness. Sharing information between states can occur through web-based servers such as Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) and can increase the swiftness of the response.²⁶
 Lead Organization Name: _____
- (13) **Ensured guardian has a valid Medicaid card for the child if foster parents/guardians evacuate a child across state lines. (Q.7g)**
Individual foster family readiness and disaster plans should include a packet of critical information for the children to take in the event of a disaster. The documents in this packet should include a birth certificate, social security card, Medicaid -card, the name and phone number of the case worker, and a list of medications and special needs. ²⁷ This best practice to include social security cards and birth certificates may not be feasible in certain municipalities due to confidentiality agreements for the birth parents. ^{28 29}
 Lead Organization Name: _____
- (14) **Established procedures to ensure continuity of revenue to foster care guardians that are displaced from their normal operating locations to another location in your state and county. (Q.7h)**
Ensuring direct deposit or electronic transfers are setup in advance of a disaster will prevent a loss of revenue and access to funds for foster families during a displacement.
 Lead Organization Name: _____
- (15) **Established procedures to ensure continuity of revenue to foster care guardians that are displaced from your state to a different state. (Q.7i)**
Preservation of essential records in a secure off-site location is critical to ensure a continuity of revenue. Encouraging or standardizing foster care payments to occur electronically can allow for stability after a disaster. ³⁰
 Lead Organization Name: _____

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(16) **A lead or other organization(s) has policies or procedures to facilitate the sharing of case information about children in your community with the following: (Q.8)**

- Child welfare/child protective services agencies elsewhere in this state.**

Lead Organization Name: _____

- Child welfare/child protective services agencies in other states.**

Lead Organization Name: _____

- Public school systems in your community.**

Public schools will have their own records on attendance, performance, disciplinary information, and health information. A formal standard of sharing information between caseworkers and the schools should be established. Standards will vary by state but may include health records to understand special needs. See references for examples.^{31 32}

Lead Organization Name: _____

- Shelters in your community**

Establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU)³³ between the organization running the shelters (e.g. American Red Cross) which addresses the procedures to share data. This is an important way to help ensure that information sharing is feasible.³⁴ Since some shelters will not be able to accommodate children with disabilities, access or functional needs, out-of-home placement agencies should work directly with ESF#6 agencies to communicate viable shelter resources for foster families taking care of children with such needs.³⁵

Lead Organization Name: _____

¹ [Nebraska Division of Children and Family Services Disaster Plan \(pg.87\)](http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/Disaster%20Plan.pdf) – Nebraska’s Department of Health & Human Services established a requirement that foster parents had to develop and display a family emergency plan within 6 months and required it be updated every 6 months.
<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/Disaster%20Plan.pdf>

² [National Association for Regulatory Administration \(NARA\)](https://grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Model%20Licensing%20Standards%202018%20update.pdf) (Evacuation and emergencies is on pg. 27) – NARA, the American Bar Association, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Generations United created a series of guidelines of requirements for states to consider in licensing standards for foster care homes to ensure the home is safe.
<https://grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Model%20Licensing%20Standards%202018%20update.pdf>

³ [United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/sgm/) – This search engine includes publications from all states that describe their services and guidance on child welfare-related topics for all types of audiences. These topics include licensing, child protection, out-of-home care like foster care.
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/sgm/>

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⁴ [New York State Office of Children & Family Services](#) – New York State’s Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) created a policy in response to new federal requirements to have a disaster plan. This policy was not directly enforced through licensing and was instead done by setting requirements to local departments of social services in New York. OCFS also provided recommendations on what to include in disaster plans for the local departments of social services.

https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/OCFS_2007/ADMs/07-OCFS-ADM-10%20New%20York%20State%20Disaster%20Plan%20-%20Local%20Department%20of%20Social%20Services%20Requirements.doc

⁵ [California Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Social Services](#) –California’s Department of Social Services sent out a letter that requested updates to child welfare agency’s disaster plans. This an example of a regulation that doesn’t directly go through licensing to require foster care guardians to prepare an emergency response plan.

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/lettersnotices/EntRes/getinfo/acl/2016/16-40.pdf>

⁶ [United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families](#) – A blog post that documents the statewide child care disaster requirements under Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/blog/2015/09/emergency-preparedness-ccdbg-reauthorization>

⁷ [United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care](#) – Frequently asked questions about the reauthorization and updates to CCDF.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/occ/resource/faqs-about-the-ccdf-2015-nprm>

⁸ [KVC Kansas \(pg. 60\)](#) – A non-profit under KVC Health Systems Inc., a private non-profit child welfare organization. Their role as placing children in foster care homes shows they work closely with the licensing agency to make sure the foster parents are licensed properly. A KVC Family Services Coordinator assumes responsibility for completing the initial licensing process with the families.

<http://kansas.kvc.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/02/KVC-Foster-Parent-Policy-and-Procedure-Manual1.pdf>

⁹ [National Center for Disaster Preparedness Resilient Children/Resilient Communities](#) – An Out-of-Home Placement/Foster Care Emergency & Disaster Plan Template to be refined for local use collaboratively between out-of-home placement agencies and designated caregivers.

<https://rcrctoolbox.org/toolbox/foster-care-emergency-disaster-plan-template/>

¹⁰ [Alaska Center for Resource Families](#) – A training for foster parents about emergency planning and the requirements from the state of Alaska. The training includes a mention of the requirement of foster parents having to share their emergency response plan with the social and licensing worker.

<http://acrf.org>

¹¹ [Missouri Department of Social Services \(pg. 1\)](#) – The disaster plan component of the 2015-2019 Child and Family Services Plan for the Missouri Department of Social Services. There is an explicit requirement that the disaster plan for the family must be reviewed every six months.

<https://dss.mo.gov/cd/cfsplan/2015-2019/2016-disaster-plan.pdf>

¹² [Florida Department of Children and Families \(pg.33\)](#) – Administrative code from Florida that includes a requirement for licensed out-of-home caregivers to have an up to date written plan for evacuation for natural or manmade disasters.

<https://www.dcf.state.fl.us/admin/publications/fsp/fsdr/65C-13.pdf>

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¹³ [Nevada Legislature \(NAC 424.615\)](#) – The Nevada Administrative Code contains requirements for foster homes for children to have disaster plans that are updated every year. The licensing authority will do a site visit and provide feedback on the disaster plan every year.

<http://www.leg.state.nv.us/nAC/NAC-424.html#NAC424Sec615>

¹⁴ [Georgia Association of Homes and Services for Children](#) – A guide for disaster plans for foster care homes in Georgia that isn't legally binding, but provides a great deal of suggestions for a disaster plan for foster homes.

<https://www.gahsc.org/ms/fc/2008/fcdisasterprepplan20080612.doc>

¹⁵ [Nevada Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services](#) – Disaster response and recovery plan for Nevada's Division of Child and Family services, which includes establishing communication and liaisons in neighboring counties and states in the event of an emergency.

http://dcfs.nv.gov/uploadedfiles/dcfsvgov/content/policies/cw/fpo_1501a_disasterresponseandrecoveryplan.pdf

¹⁶ [Contra Costa County Children & Family Services in California](#) – The child welfare disaster plan for Contra Costa county that includes sharing important documents and information with other states.

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cfsweb/res/pdf/DisasterPlan/ContraCostaDisasterPlan.pdf>

¹⁷ [Virginia Department of Social Services \(pg. 135 and pgs. 180-181\)](#) – A statewide assessment of the Child and Family Services in Virginia. The assessment cited CFSIA requirements for the caseworkers and the resulting policy from VDSS, implying its role as a lead agency for CFSIA. Specific requirements for a written evacuation plan is also mentioned.

https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/about/reports/children/child_family_services_review/reports/2009/statewideassessment_05-2009.pdf

¹⁸ [Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 \(CFSIA\)](#) – The text for CFSIA as published under an amendment of part B of title IV of the Social Security Act.

<https://www.congress.gov/109/plaws/publ288/PLAW-109publ288.pdf>

¹⁹ [Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act \(CFSII\)](#) – The text for CFSII as published under an amendment of part B of title IV of the Social Security Act.

<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ34/PLAW-112publ34.pdf>

²⁰ [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services \(pgs. 251-256\)](#) – Michigan's welfare disaster plan includes information about the emergency response plan, procedures for displacement of children within the state, and communication during emergencies.

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/CFSP_2015-2019_APSR-2016_515500_7.pdf

²¹ [New York State Office of Children and Family Services \(pgs. 165-170, out of state displacement on pg. 167\)](#) – New York State Office of Children and Family services is part of a Regional Catastrophe Planning Team which sets up an agreement between states in the region to collaborate on continuing Human Services and responding to a disaster.

<http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/FFY%202010%20-%202014%20Final%20Report%20and%202015%20-%202019%20CFSP%206%2025%2014%20Final.pdf>

²² [Mariposa County in California \(pgs. 6-7\)](#) – Child welfare disaster response plan for Mariposa County in California. The plan is based on requirements from CFSIA, and includes a section on responding to new child welfare cases that are affected by a disaster.

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cfsweb/res/pdf/DisasterPlan/MariposaDisasterPlan.pdf>

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- ²³ [Indiana Department of Child Services](https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Disaster_Plan.pdf) – This disaster plan documents operations, communications, main areas to focus on, and chain of command for the Indiana Department of Child Services.
https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Disaster_Plan.pdf
- ²⁴ [South Carolina Department of Social Services \(pgs. 3-4\)](https://dss.sc.gov/resource-library/statistics/APSR/files/CFSP_2015-2019DisasterPlan.pdf) – The Department of Social Services in South Carolina has a disaster plan that includes maintaining communication capabilities of child welfare and child protective services in the event of a disaster.
https://dss.sc.gov/resource-library/statistics/APSR/files/CFSP_2015-2019DisasterPlan.pdf
- ²⁵ [Indiana Department of Child Services \(pgs. 12-13\)](https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Disaster_Plan.pdf) – A section of this disaster plan includes a specific focus on preservation of vital records to ensure that all information is maintained and there isn't a disruption in services.
https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Disaster_Plan.pdf
- ²⁶ [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/state-tribal-info-systems/federal-guidance) – A list of resources from the HHS Administration for Children & Families' Children's Bureau that includes guidance on information sharing between states. **Note:** The Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is now obsolete and has been replaced with the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS).
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/state-tribal-info-systems/federal-guidance>
- ²⁷ [New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department \(pg.10\)](https://cyfd.org/docs/New_Mexico_CYFD_PS_2015_Emergency_Response_Plan.pdf) – New Mexico specifically states that foster care providers need to have a readiness plan that includes items for children to take with them in an evacuation. The items include the child's social security card, Medicaid card, special needs, and birth certificate.
https://cyfd.org/docs/New_Mexico_CYFD_PS_2015_Emergency_Response_Plan.pdf
- ²⁸ [South Carolina Department of Social Services \(pg. 9\)](https://dss.sc.gov/media/2095/fostercare_2019-07-15.pdf) – South Carolina's policy for foster care states that the case worker will obtain and hold onto the child's birth certificate and social security card.
https://dss.sc.gov/media/2095/fostercare_2019-07-15.pdf
- ²⁹ [Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services](http://policy.dcf.lacounty.gov/Content/Obtaining_a_Passport_for.htm) – This policy states that adoptive parents cannot be given the child's birth certificate due to confidentiality of birth parents.
http://policy.dcf.lacounty.gov/Content/Obtaining_a_Passport_for.htm
- ³⁰ [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services \(pg. 130\)](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/CFSP_2015-2019_Final_Revision_473521_7.pdf) – Michigan's foster care program has disaster response procedures that include a focus on preservation of essential records that is backed up and is accessible statewide. The preservation of essential records allows there to be uninterrupted payments to foster caregivers.
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/CFSP_2015-2019_Final_Revision_473521_7.pdf
- ³¹ [Maryland Department of Human Resources \(pg.20-22\)](http://dhr.maryland.gov/documents/Manuals/Foster%20Care/access-to-education-for-children-in-foster-care.pdf) – Maryland's Department of Human Resources has specific protocols for children in state care, such as foster care, and ensuring their access to education. One aspect of these protocols includes information sharing between local school systems and child welfare services.
<http://dhr.maryland.gov/documents/Manuals/Foster%20Care/access-to-education-for-children-in-foster-care.pdf>
- ³² [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction \(pgs. 21-22\)](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/sswedfostercare.pdf) – Wisconsin has a publication that contains the procedures and policies for children in foster care and sharing information between human service agencies and schools.
<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/sswedfostercare.pdf>

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³³ [Resilient Children/Resilient Communities \(RCRC\) Toolbox](#) – A guide to writing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), including the key questions to think about when establishing a collaboration agreement and an MOU template.

<https://rcrctoolbox.org/toolbox/guide-to-writing-an-mou/>

³⁴ [San Francisco City and County California \(pgs. 3-4\)](#) – San Francisco has worked with the American Red Cross (ARC) to pinpoint shelters in the city and has an agreement to share data and identify foster children entering ARC shelters in the event of a disaster.

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cfsweb/res/pdf/DisasterPlan/SanFranciscoDisasterPlan.pdf>

³⁵ [Jackson County, Oregon \(pg. 7-8 and 27-28\)](#) – This workbook on creating a disaster plan for group or foster homes notes that the American Red Cross general population shelters generally do not take people with special needs.

https://jacksoncountyor.org/emergency/Resources/Overview?EntryId=36703&Command=Core_Download&method=attachment