



Allegheny County Department of Human Services
Request for Proposals

Foster Care Agencies

RFP Posting:

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

Pre-Proposal Conference:

Friday, January 15, 2021 from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time

Deadline for Questions:

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 3, 2021

Submission Deadline:

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Estimated Award Decision/Notification:

March 2021

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street Pittsburgh, PA 15222

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Acronyms and Definitions

Unless the context indicates otherwise, the following capitalized words are defined as follows for purposes of this RFP:

1. Agreement: A contract negotiated between Allegheny County and the Successful Proposer to provide the Contract Services
2. Allegheny County: A home rule county and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
3. Children: For the purposes of this RFP, the term “children” will refer to individuals from birth up to the date of their 21st birthday
4. Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) Home: A placement type for children or youth with significant mental health needs, whereby a clinical treatment team delivers mental health services in partnership with the foster parents who are provided with specific training and support.
5. Contract Services: The specific services that the Successful Proposer agrees to provide to the County in response to this RFP as more particularly described in the Scope of Services in the Agreement
6. DHS: [Allegheny County] Department of Human Services
7. Emergency Placement: A temporary out-of-home placement need that arises from an unforeseen or unplanned issue
8. Emergency Placement Home: A home that is available for temporary placement of a child due to an unforeseen or unplanned issue
9. Foster Care: For the purposes of this RFP, Foster Care refers to a placement in which the caregiver(s) is not related to or does not have a prior relationship with the child (non-kinship care). In this RFP, unless explicitly stated, Foster Care only refers to non-kinship foster care agencies, parents and families.
10. Foster Care Agency: An entity under contract with DHS to provide Foster Care services
11. Kinship Care: A placement type in which the caregivers are extended family or close family friends of the child.
12. LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and/or Asexual; the plus sign (“+”) is to recognize that there are individuals of other sexual orientations (e.g., Pansexual and Demisexual) and/or gender identities (e.g., Androgynous or Two-Spirit) that are not reflected in the LGBTQIA acronym.
13. PADHS/OCYF: The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services [Office of Children, Youth and Families]
14. Proposal: A completed Response Form, with specified attachments, submitted in response to this RFP
15. Proposer: The individual, non-profit organization, or for-profit organization or business submitting a Proposal in response to this RFP
16. Resource Family Registry: A database maintained by the PADHS where all foster, adoptive and formal kinship care applicants in the state are registered
17. Respite Home: A short-term alternative placement for a child in Foster Care. Depending on the usage herein, Respite Home either means a “Traditional Respite Home” for which a stay is planned in advance when the child or foster parent needs a “break,” or the foster

parent is otherwise unavailable, or an “Emergency Respite Home,” which is used when the need for respite care is unforeseen.

18. Response Form: The Word document in which Proposers provide information in response to this RFP
19. RFP: Request for Proposals
20. SOGIE: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression
21. Successful Proposer: The Proposer(s) selected by the County to provide the Contract Services.
22. Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC): A type of Foster Care for children with significant behavioral, emotional and/or physical health needs that requires specific training for Foster Care parents

The RFP at a Glance

Purpose

Allegheny County, on behalf of its Department of Human Services' (DHS) Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) is seeking Proposals from qualified Proposers to provide administration of Foster Care services for children from birth up to the date of their 21st birthday. **For the purposes of this RFP, Foster Care excludes Kinship Care and refers to a placement in which the caregiver(s) is not related to and does not have a prior relationship with the child.** A Foster Care family, sometimes referred to as a resource family by the child welfare system, provides temporary care for a child who needs an out-of-home placement.

The goal of issuing this RFP for Foster Care Agencies is to improve the placement stability, well-being and safety of children and families in Allegheny County by building on the success of existing services, creating a shared framework with agency partners and collaboratively implementing new strategies. Successful Proposers must demonstrate their capacity to provide a continuum of services and supports related to Foster Care, ranging from recruitment activities to placement stability, for children and foster families, including providing Therapeutic Foster Care as needed.

Award Details

DHS intends to enter into Agreements with multiple Successful Proposers to provide the Scope of Services requested in this RFP on a fee-for-service basis linked to the number of days that children are in Foster Care placement – per diem rate. In total, DHS seeks to establish capacity to provide Foster Care to as many as 480 children per day.

DHS desires to enter into Agreements for the provision of Foster Care on or before July 1, 2021, with a roll-out period that extends beyond July 2021 for Successful Proposers to implement all the necessary components of Foster Care requested by this RFP. As part of this RFP process, DHS will establish new per diem rates with Successful Proposers. As further described in Section 2.3C, the established per diem rates shall include both an administrative portion for the Successful Proposers and a maintenance portion that is passed through to the foster family. While the maintenance portion will be established by DHS, Successful Proposers will be expected to work closely with DHS to establish the administrative portion of the per diem rate. Additionally, DHS will offer incentive payments for key recruitment and retention related goals.

Who can submit a proposal

Anyone is eligible to submit a Proposal in response to this RFP. This includes non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, small businesses and individuals. Proposers do not need to have an existing contract with Allegheny County to apply, but they must meet and abide by all of Allegheny County's contractual requirements (see Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers) and have the programmatic, financial and staffing capabilities to provide the Contracted Services.

Current Foster Care Agencies must submit a Proposal in response to this RFP if they are interested in continuing to provide Foster Care services through DHS. Collaborative Proposals are encouraged but not required. Entities may participate in more than one collaborative Proposal if the entity is able to provide all Contract Services should more than one collaborative Proposal in which they are part be selected for a contract award.

What's important to us

DHS wants Proposers who share in DHS's [mission and vision](#) to create an accessible, culturally competent, integrated and comprehensive system that ensures individually tailored, seamless and holistic services and want to forge a partnership with DHS to improve our Foster Care system. We encourage Proposers to be creative and visionary in their responses to this RFP, while being practical about their capacity to carry out the necessary changes. DHS seeks to bring meaningful change to the Foster Care system and is depending on Proposers to partner with us to be most effective. Successful Proposers will work collaboratively with DHS to implement Foster Care services and to establish per diem rates.

Timeline

Proposers must submit questions about this RFP by 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 3, 2021. Proposals must be submitted by 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 10, 2021. DHS expects to notify Proposers of the County's decision to award an Agreement in March 2021.

There will be a Pre-Proposal Conference from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, January 15, 2021 via Microsoft Teams. Attendance is not required in order to submit a Proposal. Preliminary answers will be provided orally for questions asked during the conference. Final, definitive answers to questions asked during the conference will be posted in writing on the DHS Solicitations webpage. Please join the pre-proposal conference by:

- Calling: 267-368-7515 and using Conference ID 685 849 766#
- Or following this link: [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
- Or copying and pasting this link: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MWYyZWRjNTItYTMzZi00Njk4LTliY2QtZjY5ODJiZGRmN2Q2%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22e0273d12-e4cb-4eb1-9f70-8bba16fb968d%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%224c7924c5-3d5a-494b-ba54-242fc5f6db86%22%7d

In addition to fulfilling other requirements stated in this RFP, Successful Proposers must submit a complete Budget Packet to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' Office of Children Youth and Families (PADHS/OCYF) by April 15, 2021 to qualify as a provider of Foster Care for the County.

Who we are

On behalf of Allegheny County, DHS is the issuing office for this RFP.

DHS is the largest department of Allegheny County government and provides publicly funded services to more than 200,000 people annually, in areas including family-strengthening, childcare, child and family welfare, behavioral health, aging, intellectual disability, homelessness and community services.

More information about DHS is available at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>

Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFP

1.1 Foster Care in Allegheny County

Studies show that children who are raised in a loving, nurturing family are more likely to have improved physical, cognitive and emotional outcomes.¹ When families become involved in child welfare due to child maltreatment or neglect, most are able to remain together with support, including family-strengthening services.²

The majority of children in Allegheny County who must be removed from their home for safety or other reasons are placed with family members or family friends in Kinship Care. When Kinship Care is not possible, DHS relies on kind and nurturing individuals and families in the community to provide a home for these children. This situation is sometimes referred to as “non-kinship foster care.” As stated previously, non-Kinship Care is what is referred to in this RFP as Foster Care. **This RFP exclusively seeks Foster Care services; Kinship Care is not included.**

Foster Care serves a substantial population of children in need of out-of-home care and requires a large financial investment by DHS.³ In 2019, 827 unique children spent at least one day in Foster Care, supported by 21 Foster Care Agencies. On a single day that year, there were an average of 430 children with a Foster Care family, in an average of 286 homes and with an average length of stay of 202 days. DHS spent approximately \$11.5 million in 2019 to support Foster Care families and Agencies.

DHS has made progress in reducing the need for Foster Care and establishing permanency for children who do enter an out-of-home placement (maintaining children with their families of origin or placing them in a long-term family setting that provides a foundation for a child's healthy development); however, the system continues to confront several pressing challenges. First, there are insufficient Foster Care placement options, including Therapeutic Foster Care and resources for children with complex needs, resulting in the need for emergency placements which can cause more disruption for children.

¹ Essentials for Childhood: Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments for All Children. Centers for Disease Control, Division of Violence Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/essentials-for-childhood-framework508.pdf>.

² In an effort to enhance prevention services, DHS will be publishing a Prevention Concept Paper in early 2021 detailing DHS's plans to redevelop its child welfare prevention services program and subsequent plan to issue RFPs for specific components of that work.

³ All information in this paragraph is only referencing Foster Care (i.e., excludes Kinship Care).

In fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020, the County lost an average of 11 Foster Care homes per month (an attrition rate of 22%). Data from 2019 highlight current challenges:

- Approximately 23% of Foster Care placements began in a temporary setting (an Emergency Placement) because longer-term Foster Care homes were not readily available.
- On average, 40 children were in a temporary home on any given day.
- While intended for short stays of less than 30 days, the average length of stay in a temporary home was 89 days.

Another challenge is an inadequate number of Foster Care families who match the diverse cultures and backgrounds of the children we serve. Research shows that matching children with Foster Care parents of the same cultural background can lead to a smoother transition into an out-of-home placement and improve behavioral and school outcomes for the child. In Allegheny County, there are twice as many white Foster Care parents as Black Foster Care parents; in FY 2019-2020, Black children's race matched one or more of the Foster Care parents' race at a rate 23% lower than that of white children. There is an urgent need for homes that are diverse in race, language spoken, religion and culture.⁴

Another difficulty in the current Foster Care system is a lack of Foster Care homes for teenagers, youth identifying as LGBTQIA+ and for children with complex physical and/or behavioral health needs. In FY 2019-2020, only 31% of Foster Care parents indicated a willingness to foster a young person who identifies as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual and only 24% indicated a willingness to foster a youth who is transgender or non-binary. There is a critical need for Foster Care homes that practice cultural humility⁵ and provide inclusive and loving care. All children and families should feel welcomed, well-served and supported regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), intellectual or physical ability, English language proficiency or life experiences. Targeted recruitment and retention efforts by Successful Proposers will be necessary to achieve this goal.

COVID-19 has not only compounded the stated Foster Care challenges and underscored the importance of adaptability and agility in response to rapidly changing circumstances; it has also highlighted the need for clearer communication and increased collaboration between DHS and its Foster Care Agency partners.

DHS also acknowledges the need for standardized, transparent per diem rates and levels of care for Foster Care and will work with Successful Proposers to establish them, resulting in improved communications and quality of services for children and families.

1.2 Foster Care Redesign Planning in Allegheny County

⁴ Demonstrating the language diversity in Allegheny County, the top seven requested languages for interpretation across all DHS programs are Nepali, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Burmese, Swahili and Hindi.

⁵ Cultural humility refers to the lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique that allows for the examination and recognition of personal and cultural biases as well as the learning of other cultures and awareness and sensitivity to others' cultural issues.

In July 2020, DHS released a [Concept Paper](#) outlining our vision, related goals and objectives for the future of Foster Care in Allegheny County, including the plan to release this RFP. By issuing the Concept Paper, DHS sought to solicit input and feedback from community members, current Foster Care Agencies and those who have been impacted by the child welfare system to better inform our planning and the content of this RFP.

The Concept Paper was published on July 16, 2020, with a four-week feedback period that closed on August 14, 2020. DHS received [22 Community Comments](#) that are publicly posted in the DHS [Solicitations Archive](#). DHS reviewed all comments, which informed the shaping of this RFP. A partial list of themes from the feedback includes:

- Tie accountability measures to incentives.
- Recognize aspects of the system that are out of Foster Care Agency control; DHS and other system actors (e.g., courts) should make relevant changes that support agencies' work in reaching the goals/vision outlined in the Concept Paper.
- Improve access to County data and reduce duplicative data entry for agencies.
- Address DHS's lack of communication and support of Foster Care Agencies and parents.
- Reassess the expectation for foster and birth family communication within a 24-hour timeframe.
- Consider concerns about any "one size fits all" model for family support during Foster Care and suggestions to explore other models and current agency practice.
- Consider concerns about an expedited Foster Care home approval process without appropriate safety guards.

Please note that feedback from the Concept Paper is included throughout the RFP as it pertains to specific content areas.

Through the release of the Concept Paper, consideration of comments received and issuing of this RFP, DHS seeks to build on the successes of its existing Foster Care system, create an enhanced collaborative working relationship with Successful Proposers and implement new strategies that best meet the needs of children and families in Allegheny County.

Section 2: What We Are Looking For

2.1 Overview

DHS's envisions a system in which all children and families thrive. To achieve this vision, our system must:

1. Promote placement stability through readily available Foster Care homes
2. Promote child well-being by ensuring that Foster Care families and Successful Proposers have the support and resources they need to deliver high-quality, trauma-informed services and culturally humble and age-appropriate care to meet the developmental, physical and emotional need of children

3. Offer high-quality, consistent and well-managed Foster Care services and be led collaboratively by DHS and Successful Proposers.

Proposers may propose to provide as many Foster Care placements as their capacity will allow.

2.2 Target Population

The population to be served is children, from birth up to the date of their 21st birthday, who are placed in Foster Care. DHS seeks capacity to meet the needs of and provide a loving home for **480 children on a given day across the age spectrum of birth through age 20, including capacity for at least 144 placements in homes providing Therapeutic Foster Care** and at least 150 placements for teens (TFC and regular), based on data from 2019.

The following tables illustrate select demographics of children in Foster Care throughout 2019.

Table 1: Legal Sex of Children in Foster Care, by age group (entries in 2019)

Age	Female		Male	
	%	Count	%	Count
Under 1 year	46%	49	54%	57
1-2 years	47%	30	53%	34
3-5 years	42%	32	58%	45
6-8 years	41%	29	59%	41
9-11 years	47%	28	53%	32
12-14 years	60%	47	40%	31
15-17 years	61%	38	39%	24
18+ years	40%	4	60%	6
Total	49%	257	51%	270

The racial breakdown of all children who entered Foster Care in 2019 is as follows: 41% Black, 36% White, 17% bi/multicultural, 2% other race and 4% unknown.

Table 2: Race of Children in Foster Care, by age group (entries in 2019)

Age	Black	White	Bi/Multiracial	Other Race	Unknown	Total
Under 1 year	17%	26%	18%	11%	17%	20%
1-2 years	13%	10%	18%	11%	0%	12%
3-5 years	11%	20%	18%	0%	0%	15%
6-8 years	13%	11%	20%	11%	9%	13%
9-11 years	12%	9%	11%	22%	22%	11%
12-14 years	18%	12%	9%	22%	26%	15%
15-17 years	13%	12%	6%	11%	22%	12%
18+ years	2%	2%	0%	11%	4%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2.3 Scope of Services

Successful Proposers will provide a full continuum of services and supports to children and foster families spanning from recruitment and matching activities to supports that promote placement stability and ultimately lead to permanency.

DHS strives to place each child in a Foster Care home based on an appropriate match. However, when placement options are unavailable, DHS utilizes an Emergency Placement home, which is a temporary placement that can provide care for children with a variety of needs on a short-term basis. Accordingly, DHS seeks Proposers that can also recruit Foster Care parents who are willing and able to provide an Emergency Placement home.

In addition to regular Foster Care homes and Emergency Placement homes, Successful Proposers must establish Respite Homes (for both regular Foster Care and TFC), which are short-term alternative placement options used when a child or Foster Care parent needs a “break,” or the Foster Care parent is otherwise unavailable. Successful Proposers must have a respite caregiver plan in place for every home with at least one Traditional Respite Home available and one Emergency Respite Home available at any given time.

DHS envisions that a Proposer may take a variety of approaches to providing the services described in this RFP and is interested in creative Proposals to achieve the stated goals and requirements. For Proposers who are current Foster Care Agencies in Allegheny County, some of these services and supports may already be in place; others will require additional capacity building or changes to current processes. DHS seeks to achieve the following goals through Foster Care services and strategies:

- A. Promote placement stability and ensure that the first placement is the best placement by:
 - a. Carrying out robust Foster Care parent recruitment and retention efforts.
 - b. Effectively and efficiently managing the foster home approval process.
 - c. Offering peer supports for Foster Care parents as well as respite care.
 - d. Instituting feedback mechanisms as an input to continuous quality improvements.
- B. Promote child well-being by providing a robust trauma-informed training program for Foster Care agency staff and parents and ensuring that children receive high-quality, trauma-informed services and culturally humble and age-appropriate care to meet their developmental, physical and emotional needs, including through Therapeutic Foster Care
- C. Build a system that is high-quality, consistent and well-managed, through clearly communicated expectations, oversight and monitoring by DHS and a standardized approach regarding Foster Care rates.

2.3A Promoting Placement Stability

Successful Proposers will recruit, retain and train as many Foster Care homes as their capacity allows. These homes must be proficient in trauma-informed parenting and meet the diverse cultural and behavioral needs of the children served.

Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

Robust and Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment of Foster Care homes is vital to maintaining a consistent number of available, high-quality homes and ensuring faster and fewer placements for children. Foster Care home recruitment will occur in two ways: centrally (through a designated DHS staff member) and through each Successful Proposer, to develop the relationships with the geographic area and communities they know well. Successful Proposers must participate in the DHS-led Recruitment Collaborative to coordinate recruitment efforts and share learning and best practices of recruitment experiences that lead to the recruitment of quality resource families and a greater focus on racial equity outcomes (based on County data). Successful Proposers are expected to develop culturally-informed and culturally humble recruitment plans that:

- Apply creative strategies, including the use of technology and virtual options.
- Target homes that meet the diverse needs and demographics of children in Foster Care, allow sibling groups to remain together, enable children to remain in or near their home communities, and provide Therapeutic Foster Care options for children with complex behavioral and physical health needs.

Proposers must include a detailed recruitment plan in their Proposals. Successful Proposers must update these plans with DHS and collaboratively establish a timeline and corresponding milestones to recruit, train, approve and place children in Foster Care homes.

Additional Expectations of Successful Proposers to Support Retention and Recruitment Efforts

Successful Proposers additionally must participate and interact with DHS through the following systems and activities (see Appendix A for details and definitions):

- Use the Foster Home Status System to communicate about placement availability through daily updates.
- Participate in Option Meetings to match children in needs of placements to available homes.
- Interact with current and prospective Foster Care parents using a “customer service” approach, which includes being available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to support Foster Care parents and facilitate their longevity.
- Initiate and participate in matching events and pre-placement visits between prospective foster parent(s) and child.

Foster Care Home Approval

An effective and efficient Foster Care home approval process ensures that individuals and families who are willing to foster Allegheny County children are available when needed. To have homes available for DHS to match children with and avoid placement changes, Successful Proposers are expected to complete the Foster Care home approval process within three months of receipt of application and will communicate with DHS if the process will take longer. Foster

Care home approvals must be consistent with all state and County requirements. This includes all certifications (background checks), the Resource Family Registry maintained by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (PA DHS) and other Act 160 requirements⁶, pre-service training, medical appraisal and a written home study. Successful Proposers must re-evaluate Foster Care homes annually per state and County requirements and assist Foster Care parents with obtaining required clearances every five years. DHS will support Successful Proposers with a written request to waive a regulation (55 Pa. Code 3700) for a prospective Foster Care home, if needed.

Based on Concept Paper feedback expressing concerns about an “expedited certification process,” DHS has developed the above three-month goal, which builds in flexibilities when necessary and properly communicated.

Peer Supports for Foster Parents

To best support Foster Care parents and ensure they are able to carry out their commitment to provide a stable and nurturing home for a child, while also recognizing the challenges of parenting and unexpected life challenges, DHS strongly believes in the value of Successful Proposers facilitating peer supports for Foster Care parents and families. Successful Proposers will provide opportunities for peer support to Foster Care families and facilitate these connections. The Concept Paper included two options for a support model:

- *The Mockingbird Family Model*⁷ involves forming a ‘constellation,’ consisting of one foster care home that serves as a hub for six - 10 nearby satellite foster care homes. The specially recruited and trained hub offers planned and emergency respite, advice, training and peer supports to the satellite homes to reduce the sense of isolation that Foster Care parents can feel and ensures access to supports when needed.
- *Foster Care Family Support Partners* involves current and former Foster Care parents who can help new Foster Care parents navigate resources and supports. This model offers more one-on-one support to Foster Care parents.

Concept Paper feedback stressed that there are other peer support models and strategies that should be considered and a “one-size-fits-all” solution is not ideal. Taking this feedback into account, DHS is encouraging Proposers to consider models beyond these two. Proposals should outline how Proposers will provide peer support to Foster Care families (using the above options or equivalent models/programs) that create an extended network of support for Foster Care families, support and help retain quality Foster Care parents, and ultimately improve placement stability for children. More specifically, Proposers’ peer support models must include the following aspects:

- Assistance in navigating resources and support
- Reliable respite care
- Advice and social support

⁶ http://www.adoptpakids.org/Documents/Act_160_Bulletin.pdf

⁷ Mockingbird Society. “Mockingbird Family.” Available at: <https://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/family-model>.

- Help with a child’s transportation needs

Proposers should specify in their Proposal if there is a role within the peer support model that requires financial compensation, as well as specifics of the payment.

Incentives Payments

Concept Paper feedback stated that it would be beneficial to incentivize recruitment efforts. Accordingly, DHS is incorporating a financial incentive for Successful Proposers to recruit and retain high-quality homes. The exact measures and incentive amounts will be shared with Successful Proposers.

2.3B Promoting Well-Being

Successful Proposers must provide a variety of services and supports to children and families in care, ensuring that that children receive age-appropriate and trauma-informed care appropriate to their developmental, physical and behavioral health needs.

Foster Parent Training Program

Successful Proposers must implement a robust training program for Foster Care parents that respects, supports and sustains the culture of children and families. Successful Proposers must require all Foster Care parents to attend 24 hours of formal pre-service training (see Appendix B for a list of minimum required topics), which includes training on racial equity and inclusion, SOGIE, trauma-informed parenting and care, cultural humility and co-parenting. Additionally, foster parents are required to attend a minimum of 12 hours of training annually after their first year.

Concept Paper feedback supported the use of activities that promote peer interactions in their training program and have online, virtual training resources. Therefore, Proposers must incorporate virtual trainings and engagement opportunities into Foster Care parent training.

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC)

Historical data show that approximately 30% of children in need of a Foster Care home receive mental health crisis or inpatient services at some point during placement, with a higher percentage of children over 12 years old needing these services. DHS believes TFC is a vital support to meet the mental health needs of these children and needs to be expanded beyond its current capacity. To this end, all Successful Proposers must establish TFC homes by recruiting, training, supervising and supporting foster parents to care for a wide variety of children with significant emotional, behavioral and/or social needs.⁸

DHS is not prescribing a specific TFC model and asks Proposers to consider models that best suit their organization and knowledge of the needs of children in Allegheny County. The chosen model should, at a minimum, include:

⁸ This does not include medical foster care or Community Residential Rehabilitation (CRR) homes.

- Crisis response available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Qualified staff with mental health expertise
- Trauma-informed therapeutic services (if a child is already actively involved with a mental health treatment agency, the preference is to continue that relationship)
- Additional and ongoing trainings to assist Foster Care parents with meeting behavioral health needs and maintaining a structured home environment

In addition to State and County training requirements required of all Foster Care parents, Successful Proposers must provide TFC Foster Care parents with advanced training and support that aligns with the selected TFC model. Additionally, Successful Proposers must have the organizational capacity and infrastructure necessary to successfully implement the selected TFC model.

DHS will support Successful Proposers to prepare at least 30% of homes to provide therapeutic services, with a goal of 50% of homes trained in the model. For more information on expectations and program standards, please refer to information compiled by the [Family Focused Treatment Association](#).

Concept Paper feedback noted that not all current Foster Care Agencies offer TFC training and support, creating an obstacle for Foster Parents who wanted to become TFC Foster Parents. Requiring all Successful Proposers to provide TFC training and support will make it accessible to all interested Foster Care parents while establishing the necessary capacity to best serve the many children with behavioral and/or physical health needs.

Facilitating a Co-Parenting Approach

Successful Proposers will be responsible for cultivating and promoting positive relationships between Foster Care parents and birth parents. Ideally, this will incorporate a co-parenting approach with planned contact between a child’s birth family and Foster Care parent(s). Co-parenting has been linked to several positive outcomes, including more stable placements, better emotional development and faster return home.⁹ Successful Proposers must incorporate [best practices](#) and ensure that the following components are included in their plan to facilitate co-parenting:

- A strengths-based approach¹⁰ in which the Successful Proposers encourage and train the Foster Care parents to recognize and build on parental protective factors that enhance outcomes for families and support reunification, including strategies to reinforce and celebrate successes
- An “icebreaker” meeting between birth parents and Foster Care parents focused on the child and held shortly after a child is placed in out-of-home care. This meeting should provide an opportunity for the Foster Care family and the child’s parents to meet each other and to share information about the needs of the child; it serves as a starting point for

⁹ <https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/champs-playbook-research-highlights.pdf>

¹⁰ A holistic approach that focuses on an individual’s strengths and assets (personal, social or community) and not on their deficits, to promote their well-being.

establishing communication and building a relationship. This icebreaker meeting should occur within 72 hours of placement, when appropriate.¹¹

- Ongoing meetings and communication between the birth family and Foster Care family

Assessment and Planning

Conducting timely and reliable assessments of children's needs is essential to providing them with appropriate services. Successful Proposers must work with Foster Care families and children to administer required assessments and use permanency planning tools, which may include the Child and Adolescent Needs Assessment (CANS), Education Screening Tool, Individual Service Plan/Review, Home Study and Family Profile, Resource Parent Development Plan and Transition Planning. A description of each can be found in Appendix C.

Foster Care Family and Child Contacts

Face-to-face contacts and monthly home inspections are required to ensure homes are safe, secure and meeting the needs of children. Face-to-face contacts are required to be held and documented within 24 hours of placement and no less than every 15 days thereafter for regular Foster Care placements. Successful Proposers must conduct an Emergency Placement contact within 24 hours of placement and no less than every five business days thereafter.

In addition to the home inspection process for the initial home approval, a written Foster Care home inspection report must be completed at least monthly to ensure the home is safe and secure for children. Successful Proposers will be expected to complete contact summaries, encounter forms and monthly statistical reporting. A description of each can be found in Appendix D.

Transportation

Foster Care families have primary responsibility for meeting all daily transportation needs of children in their care. Successful Proposers will set clear expectations with Foster Care families that they are responsible and have the primary role of meeting all transportation needs of children in their care. If necessary, the Successful Proposer must be available to help; DHS will provide transportation support as a last resort.

Successful Proposers will be responsible for providing transportation for family visits and supervising the visits, when required. Successful Proposers must use DHS's Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP) for medical appointments and work with DHS to obtain bus passes, when needed, through the nonprofit organization Traveler's Aid.

Conferencing and Teaming

Conferencing and Teaming is DHS's standard of practice that engages individuals, families, supports and professionals in assessing clients' strengths and needs and developing a plan for

¹¹ Based on Concept Paper feedback about the timeline for contact between birth and foster parents within 24 hours of placement, this timeframe has been modified to take into account situations in which it is not feasible or appropriate due to the specific situation.

keeping children safe and healthy while continually connecting individuals and families with appropriate supportive services. At least one staff member from Successful Proposers will be expected to attend all Conferencing and Teaming meetings for children in their care. The Concept Paper feedback suggested more standardized implementation of Conferencing and Teaming as well as feedback mechanisms for quality assurance. As such, DHS's child welfare office will re-evaluate its training and oversight related to Conferencing and Teaming and provide opportunities for Successful Proposers to provide ongoing feedback on the practice.

Specific Services and Supports Available to Children Through DHS

Successful Proposers are responsible for identifying the needs of children and communicating with DHS (see Appendix E for details) to ensure that children have:

- Appropriate clothing and personal items
- Internet service and media for participation in virtual visits/meetings and virtual education (when appropriate)
- A stable education
- Appropriate educational supports
- Childcare, after-school programs, and summer camp
- Extracurricular activities to develop and pursue interests and talents
- Services for children and families who are not proficient in the English language (English as a Second Language services)
- LGBTQIA+ specific supports and services
- Healthcare insurance
- A Youth Support Partner through DHS for children age 13 and over
- Access to Self-Care and Social Exposure services
- Access to gowns and formal accessories for prom through the Project Prom Gown Giveaway
- Presents during the December holiday season through the DHS Holiday Project

To ensure children are safe, supported and receiving appropriate services, Successful Proposers will implement the following standards, practices, and procedures (see Appendix F for details) in an age-appropriate and trauma-informed way:

- Ensure children are aware of their rights and grievance procedures
- Ensure reasonable and prudent parenting standards are followed
- Provide regular medical care
- Screen children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
- Establish a process to support placement preservation
- Engage in concurrent planning

Additionally, Successful Proposers will advise Foster Care parents about notification and disclosures, cooperate with inquiries from DHS's Director's Action Line, attend a Child Fatality or Near Fatality Review, and maintain and update a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) (see Appendix F for definitions and details of each of these requirements).

Staffing and Staff Training and Qualifications

Successful Proposers are required to maintain sufficient staff capacity to support all children and foster parents and employ staff with the right skill set to carry out the necessary assessments, monitor and assess safety risks, and help foster parents identify and achieve training goals. The staff training program will, at a minimum, instruct all staff about key topics with instruction available through DHS on specific training topics (see Appendix G).

DHS is establishing a Recruitment Collaborative to support and engage Successful Proposers in robust, well-coordinated and collaborative recruitment of Foster Care parents. Successful Proposers must participate in the Recruitment Collaborative by appointing an employee who is most central to the agency's recruitment efforts to serve as a member of this group. At least one employee from all Successful Proposers will participate in full days of training and regular collaborative consultations to share, learn from and strategize based on recruitment experiences and approaches.

2.3C Building a Strong System

Successful Proposers will partner with DHS to build a system that is high quality, consistently implemented and well managed by adhering to stated expectations and ensuring DHS receives data and feedback to appropriately monitor and continuously improve the system.

Rates

DHS will restructure the per diem rates for Successful Proposers and Foster Care families to increase consistency, manageability, and transparency. Foster Care per diem rates are composed of two parts: (1) the administrative portion for the Successful Proposers (the "Administrative Rate"); and (2) the maintenance portion passed through to Foster Care parents to cover room and board (the "Maintenance Rate"). Below, DHS has outlined the methodologies that will be used to calculate both parts of the per diem rates. While DHS has established the maintenance portion of the rate, it has not yet established the administrative portion and will work closely with Successful Proposers to calculate it.

Agency Per Diem (Administrative Rate)

DHS will work with each Successful Proposer to establish two Administrative Rates that cover the needs of all children in care; these rates will cover agency costs for either a regular Foster Care home or a TFC home. The Administrative Rate will be based on the PA DHS budget packet that all Foster Care Agencies in Pennsylvania are required to submit to the state (OCYF) each year. After receiving notification in March 2021 that they have been selected for a contract award, Successful Proposers must promptly submit a complete PA DHS Budget Packet to the state by April 15, 2021.¹² The PA DHS budget packet will enable Allegheny County DHS to

¹² Requirements for the PA DHS budget packet are available in OCYF Bulletin 3170-19-01, Requirements for Reimbursement of Placement Services to Children in Substitute Care. We expect PA DHS to publish an update of this Bulletin in January or February 2021, and that will be the relevant Bulletin for April submission.

establish the per diem Administrative Rates based on operating costs of Successful Proposers, allowability for state and federal funding reimbursement, and a negotiation of reasonableness with each Successful Proposer, before commencing contracts. Finally, DHS will establish an annual, standardized process for reviewing rate change requests that aligns with the calendar for DHS's Needs Based Plan and Budget request.

Foster Care Family Per Diem (Maintenance Rate)

DHS has established the Maintenance Rate for regular Foster Care homes using the Casey Family Program's national survey on rates, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Cost of Raising a Child tool, and other resources. These rates are to serve as a floor (minimum amount of payment to pass through Successful Proposers to foster families) based on two distinct age groups (birth through 12 and 13 through 20). Additionally, DHS will work with Successful Proposers to establish a rate for teens in foster care who have an infant or young child ("parenting teens"). Because Proposers will select a specific TFC model, Proposers must include a recommended rate for TFC homes based on the specifics of that model based on the advanced training and care responsibilities. The family's per diem rate covers housing, food, clothing, miscellaneous expenses and transportation. Foster Care families are expected to provide transportation for visitation with family members, medical appointments, and mental health-related appointments. For extraordinary transportation needs, DHS will provide reimbursement with advance approval.

Feedback Mechanisms

Successful Proposers will regularly collect feedback from Foster Care parents and children through surveys, placement reviews and other means to inform and improve processes and approaches. Concept Paper feedback highlighted the importance of gathering feedback from birth parents and children to inform services and practices. Successful Proposers must clearly articulate how they will improve their services based on feedback from these key stakeholders. Successful Proposers will work with DHS to establish standardized communication channels and opportunities for feedback so that both entities can be as responsive as possible to the needs of children and Foster Care families.

Data Collection and Reporting

Monitoring the quality, capacity and utilization of services is vital to the success of Foster Care. Successful Proposers must utilize the following DHS computer applications and platforms for case management, communication about placement availability and invoicing:

- *ClientView*: database that includes county and state client service history
- *Foster Home Status System*: database for daily updates on children in need of a placement and daily input to inform DHS about available homes
- *Integrated Monitoring Tool (IMT)*: contract monitoring information and documentation system
- *Key Information and Demographics System (KIDS)*: database for all case management and operations data tracking

- Data entry includes, but is not limited to, client health, client education, placement entry and discharge, visitation, clothing inventory, and missing/runaway youth.
- *Master Provider Enterprise Repository (MPER)*: Foster Care Agency profile and claims/payment tracking system
- *Transportation Hub*: transportation requests, scheduling, and management platform within KIDS used when Foster Care parents, natural supports and agencies are unable to provide transportation for the child

Entries and updates should occur regularly (daily, as occurring, and/or as needed). Successful Proposers should meet minimum system requirements and upgrade as needed.

Compliance and Oversight

To ensure a consistent and well-managed system, Successful Proposers shall be subject to the following DHS engagement and monitoring:

- Monthly visits and reviews and as needed
- Monthly interviews with staff, foster parents and children
- Personnel record reviews (electronic and paper)
- Successful Proposers will be able to review the outcome of monitoring visits and upload responses and other documents through the Integrated Monitoring Tool (IMT).
- If a violation of statute, regulation, or specification is identified by DHS’s child welfare provider relations and monitoring team, Successful Proposers will have 10 days from notification to complete a descriptive corrective action plan.

Proposers must have a license to operate Foster Care in Pennsylvania and comply with the following national, state, and local statutes, regulations and directives:

- The Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) and Juvenile Act
- 55 Pa. Code 3680 and 3700
- Applicable PA DHS bulletins
- Specifications Manual and other DHS directives
- DHS’ Child Welfare Provider Relations and Monitoring Office, including site visits, placement visits, statistical reporting, and compliance requirements
- Unusual Incidents (PA DHS) and Critical Incidents (DHS) reporting
 - Successful Proposers must report within 24 hours to the Home and Community Services Information System (HCSIS), a PA DHS application for Unusual Incident Reporting, which is required under 55 Pa. Code 3680.21.

Aftercare Services

While DHS strongly values a continuum of services that includes services that are provided after a child leaves placement, as outlined in the Concept Paper, DHS is still finalizing its “aftercare” approach. Successful Proposers will not be expected to include aftercare in their scope of services.

2.4 Budget

Proposers must submit a detailed program budget and budget narrative that reflects a realistic estimate of the costs associated with implementing and sustaining Foster Care.

2.5 Implementation

DHS anticipates entering into Agreements with Successful Proposers by July 2021. However, because DHS recognizes that establishing some of the services and initiatives included in this RFP will require more time, DHS and Successful Proposers will create an iterative implementation process. DHS will work with Successful Proposers individually as the phase-in implementation specifics will depend on their capacity. Proposers should clearly articulate a realistic timeline for implementing the Contract Services outlined in this RFP and any necessary internal changes or capacity building that needs to occur to ensure success.

At the same time as Successful Proposers begin contracts, a phase-out period will begin for current Foster Care Agencies who will no longer be in contract with DHS. This will involve a transition period for Foster Care homes to transfer from phased out Agencies to Successful Proposers, ensuring a continuity of support for Foster Care families and children during this period.

Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

DHS will evaluate Proposals based upon the evaluation criteria listed below. Proposers must address their qualifications in their Proposal by responding to the requested items or questions in the Response Form. Proposers should download and type their responses directly into the Response Form available on the Active Solicitations webpage at www.allegheycounty.us/dhs/solicitations. The maximum score that a Proposal can receive is **250** points, as outlined in the following sections.

Organizational Experience and Capacity (30 points)

- Demonstrated experience working with and seeking Proposal input from the following populations: children from birth up to their 21st birthday who are at-risk or involved with the child welfare system; prospective and current Foster Care parents; birth parents; other stakeholders in Foster Care, or an equivalent (10 points)
- Demonstrated experience working with communities and populations that are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, culture and SOGIE and reflective of the target population (10 points)
- Clear reasoning why the Proposer feels it is a strong candidate for this opportunity and how Foster Care fits well within the Proposer's mission (5 points)
- The number of homes and available beds the Proposer will be able to maintain, including the demographics and characteristics of children the homes will be best equipped to care for (5 points)

Promoting Placement Stability (60 points)

- Plan for enhanced recruitment of diverse, culturally humble Foster Care families who will provide high-quality and trauma-informed care and safety for children, including specifics asked for in the Response Form (25 points)
- Plan to support and retain Foster Care parents, including specifics of how support will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week (10 points)
- Plan for facilitating peer supports for Foster Care parents, which could be based on a specific model or informal mechanisms (15 points)
- Process and timeline for Foster Care Home approval that is less than three months from receipt of application, or an explanation and anticipated timeline if longer (10 points)

Promoting Well-Being (65 points)

- Pre-service and ongoing training plan for Foster Care parents that emphasizes cultural humility and includes all required and relevant topic areas in Appendix B (25 points)
- Plan to facilitate co-parenting between birth parents and Foster Care parents (10 points)
- Plan for establishing and sustaining Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) homes, including specifics asked for in the Response Form (20 points)
- Plan to ensure timely completion of assessments for children in Foster Care through staff training, supervision and quality assurance (10 points)

Building a High-Quality and Consistent System (15 points)

- Plan to regularly collect and incorporate feedback from Foster Care children, parents and families to inform services and ensure continual quality improvements (10 points)
- Plan for tracking, entering and reporting data in a timely and accurate manner (5 points)

Staffing and Staff Training (40 points)

- Organizational chart that reflects positions and either current or desired qualifications of all staff members involved with all components of operating Foster Care (5 points)
- Plan for recruiting any additional staff needed for Foster Care, or how current staff meets all needs, including the staff who will support TFC homes, and past successes using the plan/strategy (10 points)
- Approach to staff training that emphasizes cultural humility and ensures that staff are trained in relevant topic areas, including the changes to the existing training program to meet requirements (15 points)
- Plan for hiring racially and culturally diverse staff (10 points)

Organizational Capacity and Implementation Timeline (30 points)

- List of the Proposer's services in current contracts with DHS and/or other PA counties (5 points)

- A description of the challenges that Proposers have experience in the past and/or that are anticipated with fulfilling the Foster Care Scope of Services (5 points)
- Plan for implementation that clearly identifies Proposer’s strengths and challenges to implementing the Scope of Services (20 points)
 - List of organizational changes the Proposer will need to make (in terms of staffing, training, structure, Board of Directors, etc.) to successfully operate a Foster Care that delivers the services laid out in the Scope of Services.
 - Provide a timeline for implementation, with benchmarks and anticipated dates (that clearly shows what can be in place by July 2021 and what will require more time).

Financial Management & Budget (10 points)

- A detailed line-item budget that reflects a realistic estimate of the costs associated with implementing and sustaining Foster Care, including the suggested Maintenance Rate for TFC homes for the selected model (5 points)
- A budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies all line items in the proposed budget (5 points)

Section 4: How to Submit a Proposal

4.1 Submission Process

- a. Proposers should take time to review and understand the RFP in its entirety including:
 - The background (see Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFP)
 - The narrative (see Section 2: What We Are Looking For)
 - The requirements (see Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria)
 - The evaluation process (see Section 5: How We Will Evaluate Your Proposal)
- b. Proposers must use the Response Form to develop your Proposal. Type your responses to each requested item directly into the Response Form. It is available at our Active Solicitations website with the RFP announcement at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- c. Proposers must submit a complete Proposal, which includes the following attachments that are available on our Active Solicitations website:
 - Response Form
 - MWDBE documents
 - Allegheny County Vendor Creation Form
 - 3 years of audited financial reports
 - W-9
 - Organizational Chart
 - Implementation Timeline
 - Line-item Budget, if desired
- d. Proposers should not send any attachments other than those listed above and on the Response Form.

- e. If a Proposer does not have audited financial reports for the last three years, then the Proposer may submit other financial documentation that attest to the Proposer's financial health of your organization. Tax returns are the preferred alternative. Please note that providing adequate financial documentation is a requirement of contracting through Allegheny County.
- f. Make sure to complete each section of the Response Form and to stay within any word counts or page limits that may be specified in the Response Form.
- g. Proposals must be submitted electronically to DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us no later than 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 10, 2021 to be considered for review.**
- h. Please make sure to get your Proposal in before the deadline! If your Proposal is late, it will be rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee for review and scoring, as described in Section 5 below.
- i. You will receive an email when your Proposal is received. If you do not receive this notification within 48 hours of submitting your Proposal, please contact: DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us.

4.2 How to Contact DHS about this RFP

- a. All inquiries and questions must be submitted via email to DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us by 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, February 3, 2021.
- b. All information about the RFP, including answers to questions, changes and clarifications will be posted at our Active Solicitations website at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- c. Please be sure to check this website regularly for answers to questions, additional information or changes to the RFP or the RFP process.

4.3 Other Information

- a. The issuance of this RFP does not obligate the County to accept any Proposal or enter into an Agreement with any Proposers. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Proposals and not to enter into an Agreement for the Contracted Services.**
- b. Any Agreement originating from this RFP is subject to all the Terms and Conditions specified in Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers.
- c. Proposers are responsible for all costs related to the preparation and submission of a Proposal.
- d. Proposals become the property of the County and may become part of any subsequent Agreement between the Proposer and the County.
- e. Successful Proposal(s) will be posted online in the DHS Solicitations Archive after an Agreement has been fully executed by the County and the Successful Proposer(s).

4.4 Pennsylvania’s Right-to-Know Law

Proposers should be aware that all documents and materials submitted in response to this RFP may be subject to requests for access to public records made pursuant to Pennsylvania’s Right-To-Know Law (RTKL). Under the RTKL, records in the possession of a public agency like the County are presumed to be public records and the County may have to make documents and materials submitted by the Proposer available to a requestor after an award of an Agreement is made.

If the Proposer includes any information within its Proposal that the Proposer asserts is either a “trade secret” or “confidential proprietary information,” as those terms are defined under the RTKL, the Proposer must include with its Proposal a written statement signed by an authorized representative of the Proposer identifying those portions or parts of its Proposal that the Proposer believes constitute a “trade secret” or “confidential proprietary information” and provide contact information to enable DHS to contact the Proposer in the event that the County receives a Right-To-Know request for the Proposal. The Proposer shall have five (5) business days from date of receipt of any notification from the County to provide a written statement signed by an authorized representative of the Proposer explaining why the Proposal or any portion thereof is exempt from disclosure as a trade secret, confidential proprietary information or other legal reason. The County shall consider this statement in either granting or denying a request for public access to the Proposal or any portion thereof. The County will notify the Proposer of its decision whether to grant or deny the request either in whole or in part.

Section 5: How We Will Evaluate Your Proposal

Proposals will be evaluated by an Evaluation Committee convened by DHS. The Evaluation Committee will assign scores to each Proposal by award points based on the evaluation criteria in Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria using the point scale listed in Section 5.1 b.

5.1 Evaluation of Proposals

The evaluation process will consist of the following steps:

- a. DHS will form an Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee may consist of DHS employees and subject matter representatives from external organizations.
- b. All Evaluation Committee members will individually review and score each Proposal. Each Evaluation Committee member will award points for each response on a Proposer’s Response Form utilizing their personal expertise and best judgment of how the Proposal submitted by that Proposer meets the evaluation criteria in Section 3 using the following scale:
 - 0 – Not addressed in Proposal
 - 1 – Poor
 - 2 – Below expectations
 - 3 – Meets expectations
 - 4 – Exceeds expectations

5 – Outstanding

- c. Each 0-5 score will be multiplied by the appropriate weight for the number of possible points noted after each evaluation criterion in Section 3. For example, for a criterion worth 15 points, the 0-5 score would be multiplied by three. An “Outstanding” response would receive 15 points, while one that “Meets Expectations” would receive nine points.
- d. DHS will tally the average scores of the members of the Evaluation Committee and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the average scores, and arrive at a consensus on which Proposer(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFP. The Committee will have the discretion to proceed as follows: (i) to recommend to the Director of DHS that a reduced number of Proposals be shortlisted for more extensive review through a formal oral presentation to the Committee; or (ii) to recommend to the Director of DHS that DHS request authorization for the County to enter into an Agreement(s) with the Successful Proposer(s).
- e. As described in c above, DHS, on behalf of the County, shall have the exclusive discretion to shortlist a reduced number of Proposals for more extensive review. In this case, DHS may request that shortlisted Proposers make a formal oral presentation to the Evaluation Committee. Each Committee member will individually score the oral presentation of the shortlisted Proposers using the following criteria and the scale outlined in 5.1b. The maximum score that a shortlisted Proposer’s oral presentation can receive is 15 points:
 - Presentation demonstrates Proposer’s ability to implement the Contract Services effectively (5 points)
 - Proposer’s answers to Evaluation Committee’s questions (5 points)
 - Proposer’s presentation is thoughtful and professional (5 points)
- f. DHS will tally the average scores of the Evaluation Committee and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the scores, and arrive at a consensus on which Proposer(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFP.
- g. The Committee will submit its recommendation for award of an Agreement or Agreements to the Director of DHS for approval. The Director will, in turn, submit a request to the County Manager for approval for the County to enter into an Agreement or Agreement with the Successful Proposer(s).
- h. At any time during the evaluation process, DHS may contact a Proposer to discuss any areas of the Proposal needing clarification or further explanation.
- i. As part of determining a Proposer’s eligibility to enter into a contract with Allegheny County, all Proposers’ financial audits or other documentation will be reviewed by DHS fiscal analysts to ensure a Proposer’s financial stability.
- j. The County is under no obligation to award or enter into an Agreement with a Proposer as a result of this RFP. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Proposals.**
- k. All Proposers will be notified of the County’s final decision of which Proposer(s) will be awarded an Agreement.
- l. Proposers not awarded an Agreement who are interested in receiving feedback regarding their submission may request a phone call at DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us.

5.2 Other Requirements

For a Proposal to be eligible for evaluation, it must be:

- a. Received by the due date/time
- b. Properly formatted and include responses to all requested information
- c. Complete with all required forms and attachments

Proposals which do not meet the above requirements will be automatically rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee.

Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers

In order to enter into an Agreement with the County, Proposers must be willing to comply with all contract requirements listed below and all standard terms and conditions contained in a County contract for provision of services to DHS and its offices. Additional details about contracting with Allegheny County are provided in the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](#), available at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.

6.1 Minority, Women or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MWDBE) Requirements

Allegheny County has MWDBE goals of 13% participation for Minority Business Enterprises and 2% participation for Women Business Enterprises and expects that Successful Proposers will make a “good faith effort” in assisting the County in meeting these goals.

- a. All Proposals must include either of the following:
 - If the Proposer is able to meet the MWDBE contract goals, a completed MWDBE Participation Statement and MWDBE Contact Information form is required. You must also attach the MWDBE certifications of the firms you intend to use with the Participation Statement.
 - If the Proposer requests a waiver from participating in the MWDBE contract goals, a completed MWDBE Participation Statement, MWDBE Contact Information form and MWDBE Waiver Request are required.
- b. MWDBE forms and resources can be found at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations:
 - MWDBE Forms
 - [MWDBE Participation Statement](#)
 - [MWDBE Waiver Request](#)
 - [MWDBE Contact Information form](#)
 - MWDBE Resources
 - [MWDBE Contract Specifications Manual](#)
 - [MWDBE Response Checklist](#)
 - [Guide for completing the MWDBE Participation Statement](#)
 - [Sample Diversity Policy](#)
 - [MWDBE Presentation for Proposers](#)

- c. For more information about MWDBEs, visit the [Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion website](#).

6.2 HIPAA Compliance

DHS is a covered entity under the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Therefore, a Successful Proposer must comply with all HIPAA requirements.

6.3 Cyber Security

- a. Successful Proposers must meet the minimum computer specifications which begin on page 14 of the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](#), available at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- b. All electronic devices must have sufficient security software and settings to minimize the risk of an information breach.
- c. Successful Proposers must also have policies in place to ensure that electronic devices are physically secure when not in use (e.g., locked in a vehicle trunk, password protected).

6.4 Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Requirements

By submitting a Proposal, a Proposer agrees to not discriminate against any employee, applicant for employment, independent contractor, client or any other person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, familial status, age (40 or over), or use of a guide or support animal because of blindness, deafness or physical disability.

6.5 New Provider Requirements

If awarded an Agreement, Successful Proposers who do not have current Allegheny County contracts will be required to complete the [DHS New Provider Application](#), available at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/Doing-Business/Prospective-Providers.aspx>. While not required as part of your Proposal, Proposers may wish to review the requirements of this application.

Appendix A: Additional Expectations of Successful Proposers to Support Retention and Recruitment Efforts

Foster Care Home Status System

To understand the daily capacity of the Foster Care system and make placement decisions, DHS will use a centralized, secure online forum called the Foster Care Home Status System for two-way communication between Successful Proposers and DHS about available placements and children in need of a placement. Successful Proposers must provide daily updates to the Foster Care Home Status System. This website also will provide a real-time view of the homes that are available for placements and include home details (e.g., location, Foster Care parent demographics, information about preferences/criteria the Foster Care parents have set). DHS will provide information daily to the site about children in need of a placement.

Additionally, DHS will share with Successful Proposers the demographic trends of children entering placement to inform recruitment efforts. Successful Proposers must adapt and further target recruitment activities, as needed, based on this information.

Successful Proposers must submit a monthly Home Pipeline Report, a document that helps DHS and Successful Proposers track the Foster Care home approval process. Successful Proposers must record the status for each requirement of home certification as potential Foster Care families move through the approval process. They also must use the Home Pipeline Report to monitor and anticipate Foster Care home capacity.

Option Meetings

DHS convenes bi-monthly (or as needed) Option Meetings to match children in need of a placement with available Foster Care homes. Successful Proposers must attend these meetings,¹³ learn about the children in need of placements, and present information on their approved and available Foster Care homes.

Customer Service Approach

Successful Proposers must implement “customer service” concepts into their approach to recruitment and retention of prospective and current Foster Care and adoptive parents. Customer service can be defined as the manner in which agencies provide their services and treat those with whom they work. Empathy, care and respect for others are integral to good customer service and impact how an organization is perceived by current and prospective Foster Care parents, which is critical to improving recruitment and retention efforts. To continually improve the experience for Foster Care parents and families, Successful Proposers must incorporate feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups.

¹³ Virtual attendance is allowable during the COVID-19 pandemic, but otherwise these will occur in-person.

Matching Events and Preplacement Visits

Successful Proposers must initiate and participate in matching events and preplacement visits between prospective Foster Care parents and children to help ensure the first placement is the best placement. Matching events and preplacement visits are used for regular Foster Care placements, as opposed to respite or emergency placements.

Appendix B: Foster Care Parent Training

Successful Proposers must train Foster Care parents on the following topics, at a minimum:

- *Pre-Service (Orientation) Training*: State regulation ([55 Pa. Code 3700.38](#)) requires training in specific topics before a child can be placed with a family. Building on that, DHS requires 24 hours total of formal pre-service training to include the following:
 - The Foster Care Agency's Philosophy and Practices
 - Foster Care Family Role and Responsibilities
 - Includes expectation to carry out specific activities to meet the child's needs (e.g., medical appointments, transportation, normalcy¹⁴)
 - Foster Care Agency Role and Responsibilities
 - Includes expectation of Agency to assist the Foster Care family in serving children
 - Applicable Statutes, Regulations and General Procedures
 - Foster Care Parent Certification Requirements
 - Trauma-Informed Care and Parenting
 - Recognizing that the trauma and mental health needs of children involved in the Foster Care system are unique, Successful Proposers must provide trauma-informed training for all new Foster Care families and will need to phase-in previously licensed homes that have not completed it.
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Responsiveness, which includes:
 - Racial Equity
 - AFFIRM (for all Foster Care parents regardless of the age of child they plan to care for)¹⁵
 - Cultural Humility
 - Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)
 - DHS requires all Foster Care Parents to have this training as part of certification (regardless of the age of child they are willing to foster)
 - Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard¹⁶
 - First Aid and CPR Certification

¹⁴ Opportunities to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities.

¹⁵ AFFIRM is a group support for caregivers to help build an action plan and coping skills to support LGBTQIA+ children.

¹⁶ PA ODHS Bulletin. Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards. September 26, 2018. Available at: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Documents/ODHS/3130-18-04%203700-18-03%203800-18-01.pdf>.

- Note: First Aid and CPR training are not counted toward the required 24 hours of pre-service training.
 - Child and Youth Development
 - Grief and Loss
 - Attachment-Based Parenting Skills
 - Co-Parenting Approach
 - Expectations and training on how to build a relationship with the birth family
 - Legal System Topics
- *Annual Training:* While the state requires a minimum of six hours of agency-approved training ([55 Pa. Code, 3700.65](#)) for each Foster Care parent each year, DHS requires 12 hours annually (six hours shall be in-person with other Foster Care parents¹⁷ and six hours may be online or independent). DHS requires Foster Care parents caring for teens to receive a minimum of 15 total hours of training each year. The required trainings include the following, with additional requirements for Foster Care parents of teenagers:
 - SOGIE and LGBTQIA+
 - Two hours required in the second year and then biennially
 - CSEC
 - One hour biennially
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Responsiveness
 - Mandated Reporting
 - Passive Restraint
 - De-escalation
 - Crisis Response
 - Birth Family / Triad Relationships
 - Additional topics for teen Foster Care parents:
 - Helping Teens Heal: teen brain development and trauma
 - Two hours
 - Creating Teen Connections
 - Two hours

DHS offers trainings covering some of the above topics. Successful Proposers may receive required trainings through DHS, use their own agency’s training or procure the training through a third-party. For some topics, as noted in the Appendix, DHS will need to approve training curriculum used by a Successful Proposer.

Appendix C: Assessment and Planning

Child and Adolescent Needs Assessment (CANS) and Early Childhood CANS (EC-CANS): Assists with assessing the needs and strengths of children in placements (EC-CANS is for children ages birth through age four). Successful Proposers’ staff must be trained and certified by

¹⁷ There is an exception on this requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DHS to administer the assessments. The assessment is due within 30 days of placement and every six months thereafter and needs to be updated for any change in placement.

Education Screening Tool: Assists with gathering information to determine appropriate education recommendations. The assessment is due within 30 days of placement and every six months thereafter.

Individual Service Plan/Review (ISP/R): The ISP is due within 30 days of placement; the ISPR is due every six months thereafter, describing the Successful Proposer's goal(s) and objectives for the child and family.

- *Progress Reports:* These reports are an assessment of the progress, or lack thereof, towards the ISP/R. New goals, objectives, or strategies may be identified.
 - For Emergency Placements, progress reports are due within seven days of the ISP and every seven days thereafter. For regular Foster Care home placements, progress reports are due within 30 days of the ISP and every 30 days thereafter.

Home Study/Family Profile: Successful Proposers must complete a home study and family profile for each new Foster Care family. This will be entered into the Family Profile section of KIDS and include documentation of Act 160 requirements.

Resource Parent Development Plan: Successful Proposers shall create a Resource Parent Development Plan (PDP) and update it annually for each Foster Care parent to address areas in which training and support would be most supportive and beneficial and to identify goals for the year. Successful Proposers shall monitor each Foster Care parent's progress on the established goals and plan to determine if the Foster Care parent meets annual re-evaluation requirements. The PDP must be completed at initial approval and with the annual Foster Care home re-evaluation.

Transition Planning: Successful Proposers must participate in transition planning, which is required within 90 days of when a youth will age out of Foster Care, and include plans for housing, education, employment, physical and emotional health, and provide key documents (e.g., social security card, birth certificate, credit report).

Other Required Reporting: These include, but are not limited to, a Provisional Status Plan or Terminated Status Notice (both related to the result of the Annual Foster Care Home Re-evaluation).

Appendix D: Foster Family and Child Contacts

The following are documentation requirements regarding contact with Foster Care homes:

- *Contact Summaries:* Documentation of face-to-face contact and other pertinent information (e.g., phone calls and attempted phone calls) due in KIDS immediately after but not later than 24 hours after the contact.

- *Encounter Forms*: Documentation of every face-to-face contact completed when the Successful Proposer makes a visit to a Foster Care home; signature confirming the visits shall be signed by a Foster Care parent and children over seven years old.
- *Monthly Statistical Reporting*: Service reporting is due to DHS by the fifth of every month via email. This includes information on children, placement status, discharges and Foster Care homes on provisional status.

Appendix E: Services and Supports Available Through DHS

Initial Clothing: Successful Proposers shall refer to DHS to assess need and determine allocation of funds for clothing purchases. DHS will provide this immediately after placement/request (as needed). Successful Proposers must provide receipts to DHS. Successful Proposers are responsible for ensuring clothing is maintained by the child and remains with the child.

Internet Service and Media: Successful Proposers must support households in having internet connectivity for participation in virtual visits and virtual education (when appropriate). This includes ensuring the Foster Care home has the appropriate devices. Successful Proposers shall work with DHS to provide these necessary services and devices.

Childcare: Successful Proposers shall make daycare referrals to DHS, who will cover costs associated with childcare for non-school-aged children during the school year.

After-School and Summer Camp: Successful Proposers shall make referrals for after-school and/or summer camp to DHS, who will assist with arrangements and cover associated costs for school-aged children.

English as a Second Language (ESL): Successful Proposers must ensure that appropriate interpretation services are in place through DHS referrals to best serve and accommodate all children and Foster Care families. DHS covers the costs for this service.

Education Stability:¹⁸ In accordance with ESSA, Successful Proposers must collaborate with DHS to ensure children are able to remain in the same school and school district, when appropriate, and prevent school disruption due to an out-of-home placement, including placement change. Successful Proposers must submit a referral to the DHS Education Stability Team (EST) who will work with the school and child to determine the appropriate school district and transportation plan. Successful Proposers must participate in EST meetings and communications.

Educational Supports: Successful Proposer must ensure children have access to necessary educational supports and make referrals to DHS for tutoring needs (DHS covers the cost) or an

¹⁸ Refers to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), enacted in December 2015, which includes provisions specifying how children in Foster Care are supported and protected. Resources on ESSA available through the American Bar Association are available [here](#).

Education Liaison. Education Liaisons provide school support in a variety of ways and attend school meetings for a child and Foster Care parent; they are available for children ages 13 or older, unless DHS grants an exception.

LGBTQIA+ Services: Successful Proposers must ensure children and Foster Care parents have appropriate supports specific to LGBTQIA+ individuals. DHS can provide consultative services to Successful Proposers to support work with Foster Care families and children through a third-party organization.

Youth Support Partner (YSP): Successful Proposers may make a referral through DHS for a Youth Support Partner for children age 13 and older, unless DHS grants an exception for a younger child. A YSP is a young adult professional who has personal experience in some area of the human services or juvenile probation system. A YSP supports a young adult in Foster Care by educating and empowering them about their role in the planning process for their future and ensuring youth voice is incorporated in every phase of service development and provision.

Healthcare Enrollment: Successful Proposers shall establish a process by which they communicate directly with the DHS health enrollment unit to facilitate Medicaid enrollment as a primary or secondary payer.

Self-Care and Social Exposure (SCSE): Through the SCSE program, children in Foster Care have access to haircuts and styling, grooming and hygiene, bra fittings and other assistance with self-care. Successful Proposers shall discuss needs with a Foster Care parent and child, will review program availability and contact the SCSE provider directly, in collaboration with DHS.

Extracurricular Activities: Successful Proposers must ensure Foster Care parents enable children to explore, develop and pursue interests and talents.

Project Prom: Project Prom Gown Giveaway provides free new or gently worn gowns and formal accessories to students who may otherwise have to miss the prom because of the cost. Successful Proposals can make a referral to DHS for a child in their care.

DHS Holiday Project: Successful Proposers may make a referral to DHS for a child to receive a holiday present.

Appendix F: Standards, Practices and Procedures

Grievance Procedures and Child Rights: Successful Proposers must ensure that a child's federal and state civil rights are upheld and must abide by Allegheny County and DHS requirements. Successful Proposers must review grievance procedures with all children in a way that is most accessible and age appropriate. Successful Proposers must have children over the age of seven sign an acknowledgement form.

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS): Successful Proposers must work with Foster Care parents to employ the Prudent Parenting standard in determining appropriate

activities for children and providing normalcy, age and developmentally-appropriate activities, experiences and opportunities. As explained by PA DHS, the RPPS is “characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child ... to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.”¹⁹

Medical Care: Successful Proposers must ensure that all children have a comprehensive physical exam within 30 days of placement with the child’s Primary Care Physician and adhere to all Early and Periodic Screen, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) standards and reporting requirements. Gaps in care are a risk factor. Successful Proposers must include the participation of Foster Care parents, and if appropriate and possible the participation of birth parents, in medical and behavioral health care appointments.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC): In situations where a child returns after being missing or on the run, Successful Proposers must complete information input into the CSEC section of KIDS within 24 hours. If the CSEC screening indicates risk factors and follow-up is necessary, Successful Proposals must ensure DHS takes steps to have a full CSEC assessment completed. Successful Proposers must refer to DHS if there are concerns of trafficking or other identified red flags at any point.

Required Notifications and Disclosures by Foster Care Parents: As required by state law, Successful Proposers must advise Foster Care parents of the need to inform the agency of new information related to Act 160, especially related to changes in household composition or arrests.

Placement Preservation: Successful Proposers must establish a process to review interventions, with the intent of keeping the child in the home, and discuss options before disrupting a placement. A Preservation Meeting must occur and include a DHS contract monitor.

Concurrent Planning: Successful Proposers must establish a process for concurrent planning, working with a child towards one legal permanency goal (often reunification) while simultaneously establishing and implementing an alternative permanency goal and plan to move children more quickly to a safe and stable permanent family.

Child Abuse Reporting: Successful Proposers must report suspected child abuse by an employee or other individual.

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP): Successful Proposers must submit, maintain and annually update a COOP, which includes a description of service responsibilities and obligations during an operational emergency.

Director’s Action Line (DAL): Successful Proposers must cooperate with and respond to inquiries through DAL, a hotline that provides access to specialists who answer questions and resolve concerns and complaints regarding services provided through DHS.

¹⁹ <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Documents/ODHS/3130-18-04%203700-18-03%203800-18-01.pdf>

Child Fatality or Near Fatality Review: This mandated review and meeting occurs in response to child fatalities or near fatalities with all stakeholders in attendance, including provider agencies that were involved with the family (per Pennsylvania Act 33). Successful Proposers must participate when required.

Appendix G: Staff Training Topics

Successful Proposers must require their Foster Care agency staff to attend the following training topics, at the minimum:

- Child Protective Service Law (CPSL)
- Mandated Reporting
- CSEC: Four hours are required of direct service staff, including supervisors and administrators, within three months of hire. A one-hour refresher course is required biennially thereafter.
- SOGIE / LGBTQIA+ Support, Services and Standards of Practice: Successful Proposers shall either receive training through DHS or have DHS review and approve their training curriculum. Training must occur within six months of an employee's start date.
- Racial Equity and Inclusion
- Prudent Parenting
- De-escalation Training
- First Aid and CPR
- Pa C.S. Title 23 (Domestic Relations)
- 55 Pa. Code
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) privacy rules
- Recruitment Training and Recruitment Collaborative: Led by DHS, will involve day-long trainings and regular collaborative consultations.

DHS offers trainings covering some of the above topics. Successful Proposers may receive required trainings through DHS, use their own agency's training or procure the training through a third party. For some topics, as noted, DHS will need to approve training curriculum used by a Successful Proposer.