

# WORKING WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



# STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

On a local level find someone in your circle of influence (church member, colleague, foster parent, adoptive parent or child welfare worker) who is already connected to your local Child Welfare system. Gather as much information as possible related to church support of foster care and adoption. Ask them to help you identify:

- Local leaders who are open to church involvement in foster care
- History of other partnerships between churches and child welfare, or other government social services, such as, public assistance, Workforce Centers, etc. This information can help you identify possible support for child welfare partnerships.
- Rules or regulations that would define, support or limit the church involvement in foster care
- Families from local churches who have fostered or adopted. Active foster families can help you connect with churches and pastors who may be open to considering foster care ministry. They can also vouch for you with governmental entities, especially if they have a good reputation with the state or local child welfare office.

## CONNECTIONS

CURRENT

DESIRED

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## **START AT THE TOP**

Generally speaking, you will want to find the person with the most authority and speak with them first. However, be sensitive to the politics of your community which may require you to start elsewhere to get buy-in. Be willing to let the governmental authority take the credit for any good that comes from the newly formed partnership. The goal is to connect kids in foster care with Christian families. Like Harry S. Truman said, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”



## **HAVE A GRASP OF THE PROBLEM**

Although you want to hear government leadership’s perspective of the problems, it is still important to do your homework in advance. If you come in with absolutely no understanding of the Child Welfare system, or worse yet, an incorrect understanding, you might not be taken seriously. Gathering data about the gaps in available foster homes in your community shows you are serious and plan to work hard and approach the problem based on facts and logic. The goal is to identify the problems and possible solutions and resources.



## **BE RESPECTFUL**

Approach your government leaders with respect, humility and a desire to understand their perspective. Show a genuine willingness to assist in ways they would consider as most helpful. Don’t approach them with the attitude that you have all the answers. You may or may not have the answer, but leaders will be more likely to accept help if you first listen to their perspective. Show appreciation for the difficult work they do, acknowledging that they don’t get enough credit for the good they do. Ask what they identify as their top issues as it relates to foster care and work within that context to start developing a partnership.



## BE SOLUTIONS ORIENTED

Develop a good working knowledge of the problems, approach your work with a willingness and determination to find and implement solutions.

What problems need to be addressed?

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## BE PATIENT

Some 1.27 Network leaders report feeling discouraged when hearing about smooth start-ups in other areas. It's easy to assume we are doing something wrong. Every environment is different, especially in terms of churches, faith-based organizations and government systems and how they work together. In some communities, churches are hesitant to work with government. In other communities, government is hesitant to work churches. Additionally, this field can take its toll on those who work in it. Be patient as you learn to navigate the Child Welfare system. And pray for those who work in the system.



## START SMALL

Once one person in child welfare sees what you are doing is making a difference, those who might have initially been apprehensive to accept help from a faith-based organization may be more willing to work with you. Sometimes we feel called to start big, and sometimes we feel called to start small. Whatever you decide to do be sure to deliver.

What's one small thing we could accomplish that meets a need?

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## OTHER RESOURCES

The Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) offers a wealth of resources for ministries and faith-based organizations working in the foster care field. Some of those include:

### ***Church and State Partnerships in Foster Care: Six places where it's working***

This e-book is available to members\* of CAFO through their resources page. It shares details of ministry organizations in six states that have had success working with their state and local governments. [Get a copy here: resources.cafo.org](https://resources.cafo.org)

### ***Growing a Foster Care Movement Where You Live***

This free e-booklet is a simple interactive guide that will walk you through the first four critical steps of foster care movement-building. It provides clear, simple worksheets to help you figure out what it will take to provide more than enough for kids and families in the county where you live. [Download it here: tinyurl.com/127-cafomovement](https://tinyurl.com/127-cafomovement)