

Family Outreach Series

Strategies for Outreach to Families Living in Rural or Remote Areas



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Parent, Family and Community Engagement

Acknowledgments

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Family Outreach Series **Strategies for Outreach to Families Living in Rural or Remote Areas**

Effective outreach promotes families' awareness of, access to, and use of early childhood care and education and comprehensive services. States, Territories, Tribes, and their partners can use this resource to enhance their outreach efforts.

In this resource, you will find:

- A definition of outreach (page 3)
- Specific examples of outreach to families living in rural or remote areas (page 3)
- Research-informed strategies (pages 4–12)

As you review the strategies in this resource, consider your agency's approach to meeting Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) requirements. Some of the strategies described in this resource can be applied by State, Territory, or Tribal administrators. Others can be used or adapted for use by leadership and staff working in agencies and programs that have direct contact with families.

Family Outreach Series

Use this resource along with others in the Family Outreach Series. The series is available on the Child Care Technical Assistance website (CCTA): <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov>.

Titles include:

- **Strategies for Outreach to All Families: Overview**
- **Strategies for Outreach to Families Experiencing Homelessness**
- **Strategies for Outreach to Families with Limited English Proficiency**

How This Resource Is Organized

This resource is organized into two sections:

- **Building a Shared Understanding of Outreach**
Offers a definition of outreach. Provides examples of outreach at the family, program, community, and State/Territory/Tribal levels.
- **Creating an Effective Approach to Outreach**
Highlights research-informed strategies that can enhance your approach to outreach to families living in rural or remote areas.



You will also find related resources, including

- **Foundational Strategies for Outreach to All Families**
- **CCDF Requirements Related to Outreach to Improve Access for Children and Families Living in Rural or Remote Areas**

Resource Terms

Rural and Remote

In this resource, we use the phrase “rural or remote” broadly—to describe geographic areas that are less populated than larger cities, towns, or villages in a State, Territory, or Tribe. We do not distinguish “rural” from “remote.” Levels and defining characteristics of ruralness can be subtle and complex (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). We acknowledge that States, Territories, and Tribes use definitions that best fit their needs.

There are many definitions for the words “rural” and “remote.” Census Bureau definitions are based on population size and density. In the 2010 census, “rural” referred to open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2019).

Meanwhile, the U. S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) uses a rubric that classifies geographic counties by their degree of urbanization and nearness to a metropolitan area or areas—from those most densely populated (metropolitan) to those least densely populated (nonmetropolitan) (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). ERS researchers further categorize some rural areas as “Frontier and Remote” (FAR) at the zip code level. FAR areas are determined by their distance from urban areas and access to goods and services.

Professionals and Programs

In this resource, “professional” refers to all early childhood and school-age care and education professionals working at the systems or program level.

“Program” refers to all early childhood and school-age care and education programs.

Building a Shared Understanding of Outreach

What Do We Mean by Outreach?

In early childhood and school-age care and education systems, outreach tends to focus on increasing the awareness among families of available services and promoting their use. Early childhood and school-age professionals do this by intentionally seeking out families and ensuring that all families are included in outreach efforts.

Effective outreach is data-informed and culturally and linguistically responsive.

The purpose of outreach is to identify families who are not being reached and to share relevant information internally and with community partners. To do this, effective outreach involves collecting, analyzing, and using and sharing data.

Outreach also involves promoting culturally and linguistically responsive activities that raise families’ awareness of:

- High-quality early childhood and school-age care and education services
- Comprehensive supports for family well-being
- Research-based practices to support child development and learning

Examples of outreach related to families living in rural or remote areas:

Family level	A couple expecting their first child experiences outreach at their county fair. Representatives from their local child care resource and referral agency provide a tip sheet about how their chosen child care provider (who is a family friend) can become a licensed CCDF-eligible provider. The couple supports outreach when they share the information with other family members, friends, and co-workers.
Program level	A provider conducts outreach by sharing with families copies of handouts she received from the monitoring specialist from the Tribal Lead Agency during a monitoring visit. The handouts include information about stages of child development and applications for services available through the Tribal government.
Community level	A child care resource and referral agency promotes outreach by partnering with a local faith-based organization that has relationships with families living in a low-income, rural community. Together they create a plan to increase awareness of financial assistance for child care and the importance of high-quality early childhood care and education.
State, Territory, or Tribal level	A Tribal Lead Agency conducts outreach by producing a public service announcement (PSA) to air on the local Tribal radio station. The PSA tells families where to go for information about Tribal child care services.

Creating an Effective Approach to Outreach

Nationally, about 16 percent of children in families with low incomes live in rural or remote areas. From state to state, however, the percentage varies widely. In some states more than 50 percent of children in low-income households live in rural/remote areas: Mississippi (56 percent), Montana (58 percent), North and South Dakota (54 percent), Vermont (70 percent), and Wyoming (68 percent). In other states, (e.g., California, Connecticut, Maryland, and New Jersey) less than 10 percent of children in families with low incomes live outside of metropolitan areas (Henly & Adams, 2018).

Families with young children living in rural or remote communities are diverse and have varied needs. Yet, many share key characteristics and have similar needs that, if addressed, can lead to more positive child and family outcomes.

Families and children in rural or remote areas may be more likely to . . .

- Have incomes above the poverty line (18.9 percent live in poverty compared to 22.3 percent of urban/suburban households) (U. S. Census Bureau, 2014).
- Have lower median incomes than urban/suburban households (\$52,385 compared to \$54,296) (U. S. Census Bureau, 2014).
- Spend more than 7 percent of their income on child care (U. S. Census Bureau, 2014).
- Live in an area where the demand for child care exceeds the supply (Child Care Aware of America, 2016).
- Use relative or nonrelative, nonlicensed child care arrangements (De Marco, Vernon-Feagans, & Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2015).

As you select strategies to try, consider the strengths, needs, interests, and cultures of families in your communities. Consider assets you already have in place. Think about opportunities to build on or strengthen those assets.

Research-informed Strategies

The six strategies described in this resource support and strengthen outreach efforts to families who live in rural or remote areas. Related resources and examples from CCDF State Plans are also included.

1. Compile community data to inform your outreach plan and to guide policy.
2. Learn about the primary outlets that families in rural communities use to receive important information. Tailor your efforts with those outlets in mind.
3. Appeal to and include parents, grandparents, and other family members.
4. Build partnerships with local community leaders.
5. Travel to communities for outreach, and participate in community events.
6. Address family child care and family, friend, and neighbor care with specialized messages.

Strategies for Outreach to Families Living in Remote or Rural Communities

Consider these six research-informed strategies to enhance your approach to outreach. Reflect on how any one of these could build on the successful strategies you already have in place.

1. Compile community data to inform your outreach plan and to guide policy.

Identify reliable data about families with young children living in remote and rural areas of your state or community. What parts of your state, region, or Tribal service area are considered rural or remote? How many families live in these areas? What are the preferred languages of these families? How many receive child care subsidy? How many eligible families are not being served?

Identify reliable data to track the supply of high-quality early childhood care and education in rural and remote areas. Use licensing data to determine whether there have been any changes in the availability of licensed child care providers over time, particularly family child care home providers. Family home providers of child care are often the main or only type of program available to families in rural and remote areas.

Use the data collected about families and providers to inform:

- Resource allocation (e.g., what professional development resources to provide, what kind of technical assistance to offer, how much grant money to make available for a specific effort)
 - Evaluations of your effort in order to show which strategies are more or less effective
 - Provider recruitment efforts in areas with a low supply of quality child care
 - Professional development efforts and technical assistance
- (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Use U.S. Census data in coordination with other administrative data that you may already collect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Look to community partners to help you identify and collect data. Explore data-sharing agreements that include sharing participant data, mutual referrals, and coordinated (nonduplicative) enrollment paperwork among programs.

Strategies for Outreach to All Families: Overview describes 10 foundational strategies for effective outreach. Use the foundational strategies along with the strategies in this resource to enhance your outreach to families living in rural or remote areas. Find a list of the foundational strategies on page 13. Find the full resource on CCTA:
<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strategies-outreach-all-families-overview>

Plan to collect data to track the progress of your outreach efforts over time. Use data to identify which strategies are more or less effective. Also use data to inform how you:

- Allocate resources for outreach staff, marketing, professional development, and other related considerations.
- Design recruitment strategies for identifying providers in communities where families live.
- Guide professional development efforts and technical assistance

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016).



Explore data-sharing agreements with agencies and programs that serve families living in rural or remote areas. Consider sharing such information as participant data, mutual referrals, and coordinated (nonduplicative) enrollment forms. Partner with parents involved with these agencies and programs to get their input, and co-plan outreach to other families and stakeholders. Provide stipends to parents to compensate them for their efforts. Follow agency protocol for data sharing.

When applicable, consider ways to coordinate data analysis and outreach planning with CCDF Lead Agencies, Tribal Lead Agencies, and Head Start and Early Head Start. Tribal Lead Agencies may also work with other agencies within their Tribal Government to access data about Tribal families. Consider these possible partners:

- Tribal enrollment office
- Tribal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) office
- Tribal education department
- Tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs

CCDF State Plan and Tribal CCDF Plan Examples

In 2017 the state of Utah contracted with the University of Utah to complete a survey of parents in the state, including those in rural areas, to determine the need for child care services. A total of 1,354 responses were received. Data from this report have been used to inform investments for building, shape policies about subsidy, and evaluate methods that parents use to select child care providers.

Some Tribal CCDF and Tribal Head Start programs partner to complete their community needs assessments. Together they collect and analyze data that represent children and families served by both programs.

Related Resources

- **Insights on Access to Quality Child Care for Families Living in Rural Areas** (brief)
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/insights-access-quality-child-care-families-living-rural-areas>
- **Mapping the Gap 2018: Mapping the Child Care Supply and Demand Across the Country** (interactive maps)
<https://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/mappingthegap/>
- **My Tribal Area** (data sets)
<https://www.census.gov/tribal/>
- **Understanding American Indian and Alaska Native Early Childhood Needs: The Potential of Existing Data** (report)
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/understanding-american-indian-and-alaska-native-early-childhood-needs-the-potential-of-existing-data>
- **A Portrait of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families** (report)
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/a-portrait-of-american-indian-and-alaska-native-children-and-families>

2. Learn about the primary outlets that families in rural communities use to receive important information. Tailor your efforts with those outlets in mind.

Are there places where community members come together—for example, places of worship, annual community celebrations, or fairs? Once you know where community members gather and how they prefer to receive information, you can build more effective methods to connect with families.

Ask families about their preferences. Ask families with young children how and where they prefer to receive information about services. For example, do they prefer print resources, face-to-face conversations, email correspondence, information via community resources (e.g., pin boards in local grocery stores, gas stations, or diners), or a combination of these approaches? Maybe they prefer to receive and share information by text, social media, or online discussion boards.

3. Appeal to and include parents, grandparents, and other family members.

Be inclusive of families' cultural structures, decision-making processes, and ways of being (Torres, Guerra, Caal, & Li, 2016). Matriarchs and patriarchs (respected family leaders) often serve as gatekeepers and guardians for the entire family.

Partner with family leaders. Family leaders can give voice to the unique needs of a particular community and share important details about how cultural backgrounds can affect parents' experiences and decisions. Identify family leaders by connecting with parent leadership groups or reaching out to community partner organizations that have relationships with families.

Tips for Partnering with Family Leaders

- Engage families through culturally and community-responsive approaches. See the culture and history of each family as assets (Nava, 2016).
- Provide opportunities for open communication, and validate parental concerns (Stanley, 2015).
- Value parents for their input individually rather than as a group (BUILD Initiative, n.d.).
- Provide the logistical supports that family leaders need to participate in meetings and events, including stipends, transportation, child care, food, the use of computers, and reimbursement for time and travel as policies allow.

Find more information in **Families as Advocates and Leaders:**

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rtp-advocates-leaders.pdf>

Invite the whole family. There are many benefits to focusing your outreach efforts on the whole family and using a two-generational or multigenerational approach (Lombardi, Mosle, Patel, Schumacher, & Stedron, 2014). This approach increases the awareness of all family members of the services available and how to access them.

This kind of outreach—and its resulting consumer education and engagement—also can enhance the ways that parents and other family members, such as grandparents, aunts/uncles, or older siblings, care for their young family members.

For example, outreach that is inclusive of the whole family can build a family’s capacity around health and safety practices (e.g., safe sleep) and improve the quality of time spent together (e.g., enriched conversations and limited screen time). It can contribute to nurturing and safe environments for children in their own home and in the homes and care of family members.

Consider a community-based participatory approach. Parents and families know their family members and communities the best. They are the local experts in their own homes and neighborhoods. Consider using a community-based participatory (CBP) approach to build partnerships with families. A CBP approach partners professionals (often researchers) with community members to work toward an identified purpose.



Often the purpose of a CBP is to conduct and analyze research. In this case, the purpose would be to define an issue related to early childhood or comprehensive services (e.g., to increase awareness and use of child care subsidy) and then to work together with families to develop and evaluate community-based outreach strategies.

Using a Community-based Participatory Approach

One way to begin community-based participation is to acknowledge families and staff as equals. Rely on families early, often, and throughout outreach efforts. Emphasize mutual engagement, the strengths and skills of families and staff, sharing resources, decision-making, and access to data.

When using this approach, it is important to clearly identify roles and expectations. Consider writing a simple memorandum of agreement or memorandum of understanding that specifically defines the partnership and outlines mutual expectations.

Community-based participatory approaches are particularly effective because they're centered on input and real-life experiences from community members (families). The prime goal is to build effective partnership processes to improve systems, policies, community capacities, and equitable outcomes (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008).

Related Resources

Explore the **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series** to learn more about the knowledge, skills, and individual practices that early childhood professionals need to engage families effectively in positive, goal-oriented relationships.

<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement-series>

The Community Toolbox, a service of the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, has resources and information on building skills to promote healthy communities. These skills are generalizable to early childhood communities. The toolbox includes chapters on “Community-based Participatory Research” and “Communications to Promote Interest and Participation.” <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>

4. Build partnerships with local community leaders.

Partnerships with local leaders can open doors to and foster trusting relationships, especially with families in close-knit, private communities. Consider working with leaders who are trusted and deeply connected to the community (Florida Department of Education, 2015). Do these partners have avenues for outreach already in place that you might ask permission to join?

Consider partnerships with faith-based organizations. Faith-based organizations tend to provide social gathering places for rural community members. According to a 2002 Gallup poll, rural community members have much higher levels of religious involvement than people who live in more suburban or urban settings. Families in rural and remote communities also are more likely than urban/suburban families to attend religious services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2011).

Community faith leaders can serve as trusted liaisons, similar to community health workers (Pullmann, VanHooser, Hoffman, & Heflinger, 2010). Forging partnerships with faith-based organizations may be an effective strategy to explore.

Partner with child care providers. Child care providers are often trusted advisors and respected by families. Identify child care providers in rural communities, and consider engaging them to partner on outreach to families in their child care program (Gupta, Shuman, Taveras, Kulldorff, & Finkelstein, 2005; Taveras, LaPelle, Gupta, & Finkelstein, 2006). Partnerships with currently operating providers may also be useful in outreach efforts to recruit new providers.

Assess your agency's image in the community. Consider how connected you or your outreach team members are to each community you intend to reach. Are you considered part of the community already? Is there a chance that community members may see you as an outsider, which may make outreach efforts less effective?

Be authentic, follow through with commitments, and show the utmost respect. Rural and remote communities often are tight knit, and word travels quickly. If your image with community members during outreach becomes questioned, your ability to be effective in future outreach efforts may be hindered. Rebuilding trust can be difficult (Christopher, Watts, McCormick, & Young, 2008).

5. Travel to communities for outreach and to participate in community events.

Plan to be onsite. As much as possible, be physically and reliably present in the community. Outreach within rural and remote communities involves extensive travel to reach sites and can be time consuming (Fahrenwald, Wey, Martin, & Specker, 2013). Adjust your outreach budget and timeline accordingly.

Consider ways to make it easier for families to participate Be mindful of the distances community members may have to travel. Provide or fund transportation. Offer high-quality child care when feasible or a stipend that participants may use to pay a caregiver. Vary the times of the day and days of the week you host gatherings to maximize participation (Werner, 2016).

Consider telecommunication strategies. Telecommunications strategies (e.g., video calls, virtual meetings, or broadcasts) may help when it is not feasible for you or your outreach team members to travel for community gatherings. For example, if telemedicine is available, consider how you might partner with health care professionals to borrow or rent access to the telemedicine technology.

Also check with community colleges and adult education programs that might use telecommunications. Doing so may be a way you can extend your outreach efforts, particularly for large geographic areas where you would like to provide outreach.

Using Telemedicine Technology to Enhance Outreach

The health care community is increasingly embracing telemedicine technology to provide rural residents with access to medical specialists who are located elsewhere (Fair Health, 2019). In 2016, an estimated 61 percent of U.S. healthcare institutions and 40 to 50 percent of U.S. hospitals used telemedicine (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Telemedicine, also referred to as telehealth, uses computers, display monitors, and software to deliver virtual health services. During a telemedicine encounter, a patient is in one location and has an e-visit with the health care professional in another location. The patient and professional are connected via a video link and converse similarly to how they would in a face-to-face encounter. Telemedicine encounters may be one-on-one private interactions or group interactions in which remote participants gather in a conference room equipped with a camera, video screen, and sound. Group encounters using telemedicine technology may be used to conduct important conversations with families who live in remote areas. The technology can also be used to provide information to outreach staff who work in these areas.

6. Address family child care and family, friend, and neighbor care with specialized messages.

Rural communities often do not have the infrastructure to sustain large child care center settings. Families in rural areas face significant challenges in finding licensed child care. In fact, 60 percent of rural communities lack an adequate child care supply (Malik, Hamm, Schochet, Novoa, Workman, Jessen-Howard, 2018).

Child care in rural or remote communities is most likely to be in the form of a family child care home (Smith, 2006). Family child care represents 20 percent of licensed capacity in rural communities (compared to 9 percent in suburban areas and 14 in urban areas). Family child care homes are well suited for rural communities. They are smaller programs that may be closer to where families live, making them more accessible (Schochet, 2019).

Nationally, approximately 1 in 4 families with infants and toddlers choose licensed FCC homes for care. Investing in training and supporting networks for family child care and family, friend, and neighbor providers can help them improve quality and become more widely regulated (Child Care Aware of America, 2017).

Prioritize family child care. For families, provide information about quality in family child care. Offer tools to help families recognize and assess quality in a family child care program. Also consider providing information that families can share with a family, friend, or neighborhood care provider about the benefits of becoming licensed (or regulated). There may be benefits for both families and providers.

For providers, develop recruitment messages that highlight family child care as an attractive career option. Emphasize the resources that are available to new and existing providers and that can help them enhance their program’s quality and business model.



Partner with state and local child care resource and referral agencies. State and local child care resource and referral agencies are well suited to facilitate the process of outreaching to and equipping family child care and kith and kin care providers.

CCDF State Plan Examples

Oregon draws on its child care resource and referral system to recruit family child care providers in rural and underserved areas for families accessing CCDF.

New Mexico child care and child welfare agency staff team up to conduct joint recruitment across rural areas of the state. Members of the child care agency participate in existing child welfare recruitment events and efforts to recruit community members who are interested in becoming child care providers to assist children in their community.

This increased collaboration supports the efforts of the state’s child welfare agency to protect children. Agency staff engage extended family members to become child care providers for the children who are related to them. “Many child welfare offices across New Mexico are now instituting this strategy to help solve the challenge of too few child care providers.”

Appendix A

Foundational Strategies for Outreach to All Families

1. Prioritize outreach, and work to build a shared understanding of outreach and its importance among staff and partners.
2. Allocate resources and funding for outreach.
3. Create a data-informed outreach plan, and embed it into your agency’s overall communication plan.
4. Find out what service features are important to families you are trying to reach, and promote matching strengths in your services.
5. Develop or enhance “no wrong door” and “one-stop shop” policies, procedures, and processes.
6. Dedicate staff or hire (or otherwise engage) family liaisons or parent ambassadors. Ensure that they are skilled in listening and building relationships and that, ideally, they speak the languages spoken by the families in your program.
7. Explore families’ cultural perspectives that may influence when, where, and how outreach occurs. Shape your outreach efforts in light of these perspectives. Encourage staff to reflect on how their own cultural values and beliefs may influence outreach. Consider how your current approach to outreach aligns with the approach that families need.
8. Create outreach messages that are positive and strengths-based.
9. Use consistent, plain language in outreach messages.
10. Use a variety of communication channels and media based on family preferences.

Note: Use these foundational strategies along with the strategies in this resource to enhance your outreach to families experiencing homelessness. Find the full resource, *Strategies for Outreach to All Families: Overview*, on CCTA: <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strategies-outreach-all-families-overview>

Appendix B

CCDF Requirements Related to Outreach to Families Living in Rural or Remote Areas

The CCDF Final Rule does not include specific requirements for outreach to families living in remote or rural areas. However, § 98.33 does require Lead Agencies to make consumer education information available to “parents of eligible children and the general public, and where applicable providers.” This requirement, of course, includes families living in remote or rural areas.

Outreach is essential to ensuring that families living in remote and rural areas have access to information they can use to:

- Make informed decisions about services
- Be resourceful users of services
- Be a source of information for family and friends
- Advocate for high-quality, accessible programs

The Final Rule recognizes that “Child care supply in many low-income and rural communities is often low, particularly for infant and toddler care, school-age children, children with disabilities, and families with non-traditional work schedules.” When supply is short, helping families build their knowledge about child development and available service options may be even more important.

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016)



Appendix C

Related Resources

The Community Toolbox

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en>

Families as Advocates and Leaders (brief)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rtp-advocates-leaders.pdf>

Insights on Access to Quality Child Care for Families Living in Rural Areas (brief)

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/insights-access-quality-child-care-families-living-rural-areas>

Mapping the Gap 2018 (interactive maps)

<https://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/mappingthegap/>

My Tribal Area (data sets)

<https://www.census.gov/tribal/>

A Portrait of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families (report)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/a-portrait-of-american-indian-and-alaska-native-children-and-families>

Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement Series (guides and self-assessments)

<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement-series>

Strategies for Outreach to All Families: Overview (guide)

<https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/strategies-outreach-all-families-overview>

Understanding American Indian and Alaska Native Early Childhood Needs: The Potential of Existing Data (report)

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/understanding-american-indian-and-alaska-native-early-childhood-needs-the-potential-of-existing-data>

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