

## Chapter 4 : Partnerships with the Community

### Partnerships with the Community

Learn about how OhioKAN was first implemented in the state of Ohio and the fundamental frameworks for engaging families and honoring their needs through a lens of inclusion, diversity, equity and access.

### Partnerships with the Community Overview

Image



Partnerships with the community are a core component of the OhioKAN model with an intentional pathway included in the theory of change. Examples of such partnerships may include public agencies, community organizations, and community representatives with an emphasis on individuals with lived experience and direct practice experts.

#### **Meaningful partnerships with community representatives with an emphasis on individuals with lived experience and direct practice experts**

- Multiple formal opportunities for individuals with lived experience and direct practice experts to inform and engage in decision-making about program implementation and community capacity building efforts
- Formalized councils with local community representatives to build community capacity and foster awareness of best practices in serving kinship and adoptive families
- Intentional engagement with lived experience members who are diverse and representative of the community, including families of color, LGBTQ+ families, and people with disabilities

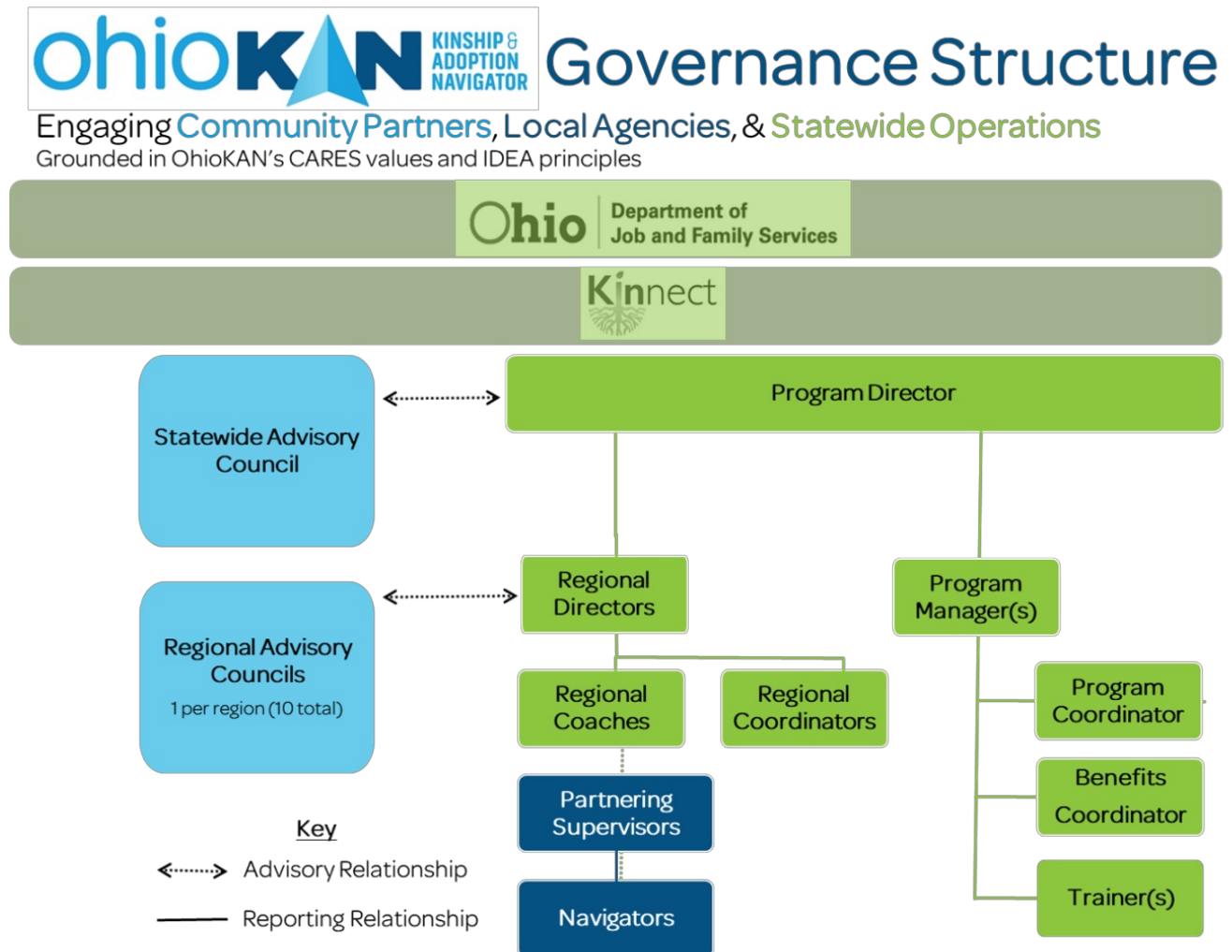
#### **Partnerships with public agencies and community organizations**

- Relationships with local child protective service agencies that are designed to support system involved families reduce entry or re-entry into the formal child-welfare system
- Partnerships with local service providers, community-based organizations, and community stakeholders to facilitate access to services, build community capacity, and prevent duplication of services
- Formalized councils with representatives from diverse multidisciplinary child and family serving organizations serving diverse communities
- Intentional feedback loops with partnering sites, public agencies and programs, and local child and family serving organizations to ensure program implementation is responsive to the unique needs of kinship and adoptive families in the local context

## Governance Structure

The following is a description of OhioKAN's governance structure and approach to community partnerships tailored to the Ohio context. The OhioKAN Governance Structure was developed by the nonprofit community organization, Kinnect, in partnership with Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The Governance Structure includes the engagement of community partners, local agencies, and statewide operations all grounded in OhioKAN's CARES values and IDEA principles. The light green boxes indicate the governing agency, ODJFS, and the implementing agency, Kinnect. Below in light blue are the entities established for community partnerships, specifically Regional Advisory Councils with one council per region and a Statewide Advisory Council. Membership of all councils includes intentional engagement of community members with lived experience as kinship caregivers and/or adoptive parents. The darker green boxes indicate the Kinnect program staff that partner with the staff employed by local agencies indicated by the dark blue boxes. Kinnect program staff such as the Program Director, Regional Directors, Coaches and Regional Coordinators all work either directly or indirectly with partnered site staff such as the Partnering Supervisors and Navigators. Coaches work directly with Navigators to support service delivery and continuous quality improvement.

Image



**Figure 4.** The above visual includes the OhioKAN Governance Structure, a visual that demonstrates the relationships between both internal and external stakeholders involved in the implementation and delivery of the OhioKAN program.

## Statewide Operations

The non-profit organization, Kinnect, and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) partnered together to convene a formal management structure to attend to the day-to-day operations of the program's implementation, fidelity to the model, and sustainability. Kinnect is the statewide implementing provider organization of the OhioKAN program model. The management structure includes ODJFS funding and agency staff embedded in the initial and ongoing implementation support efforts such as project and implementation teams. ODJFS staff support the Kinnect staff by providing expertise and guidance in areas such as program development, implementation, and management of the statewide data system (SACWIS).

The OhioKAN program is delivered statewide and administered regionally via ten OhioKAN regions. These geographic regions were developed as part of the initial program design, based on statewide stakeholder recommendations, Ohio census data, and county-reported population data. Each region is supported by a Regional Director with the guidance of a Regional Advisory Council, consisting of local providers and leaders within that region. Kinnect includes a set of program staff to support the OhioKAN model. Such staff include a Program Director, Program Manager(s), Program Coordinator, Program Trainer(s), Regional Directors, Regional Coaches and Regional Coordinators. You can find staff practice profiles in the 'Staffing Resources' section and staff position descriptions in the Appendix.

## Local Site Agencies

Kinnect chose to contract with local agencies to work with established organizations that have a good reputation and credibility in the community to deliver the OhioKAN program model. Selected community organizations and county agencies hire, supervise, and support Kinship and Adoption Navigators. Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Kinnect procures services from community organizations to provide navigation services to kinship and adoptive families. These navigators receive regular coaching on the OhioKAN practice model and report to a partnering supervisor within their agency who works closely with OhioKAN regional staff to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity and is offering exemplary customer service.

## Advisory Councils

The OhioKAN program model is supported by community partners in both a Statewide Advisory Council and a set of Regional Advisory Councils. The advisory councils support the implementation of the OhioKAN program model and the execution of the community pathway of the theory of change. In partnership with OhioKAN staff, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and the OhioKAN Regional Advisory Councils, the OhioKAN State Advisory Council works to ensure that a robust, tailored, and continuously improving service array and system-level supports are available across Ohio.

### ***State Advisory Council***

The State Advisory Council plays a critical role in developing awareness of kinship and adoptive families and building system-level capacity to support them in a consistent and equitable manner state-wide. The role of this advisory council is to advise OhioKAN on communication about critical state-wide service gaps and system barriers impacting kinship and adoptive families, as well as strategize the dissemination of this information to key stakeholders. The Council facilitates connections and problem-solving regarding identified service gaps, system barriers, and resource needs to promote family well-being, prevent entry into foster care, and other areas that are identified to support the sustainability of the OhioKAN program. The focus on an equitable distribution of service and system supports across the state is rooted in the six key principles of Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Access, which include the continued analysis of historical factors; the distribution of resources and access to opportunity for families in ways that promote equity and support transformational change; ensure conditions for health, safety and economic security; and actively disrupt the perpetuation of institutional discrimination and oppression. The OhioKAN State Advisory Council is a space for state-level change-agents, subject-matter experts, senior leaders, and innovative thinkers to gather, explore new ideas, and tackle systemic issues on behalf of Ohio's kinship and adoptive families.

### ***Regional Advisory Council***

Each Regional Advisory Council identifies existing programs and services that support kinship and adoptive families, determine how existing programs and services should be enhanced to best support the OhioKAN model, and identify service gaps and how those gaps should be addressed. Participants may include community organizations and stakeholders such as individuals with lived experience, caregivers, faith community leaders, area offices on aging, housing organizations, local nonprofits, managed care organizations and schools. The Regional Advisory Council plays a critical role in developing awareness of kinship and adoptive families and building community capacity to support them. In partnership with the OhioKAN Regional Director, the Council will help identify existing programs and services that support kinship and adoptive families. They determine how existing programs, services, and practices should be enhanced to best support the OhioKAN model. They identify service and practice gaps for kinship and adoptive families and how those gaps should be addressed. The identification of service gaps is rooted in the six key principles of Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Access, which include the continued analysis of historical factors; the distribution of resources and access to opportunity for families in ways that promote equity and support transformational change; ensure conditions for health; safety and economic security; and actively disrupt the perpetuation of institutional discrimination and oppression. The council provides recommendations on behalf of the region for needed services and resources to prevent entry into foster care and any other areas that are identified to support the sustainability for the regional OhioKAN program.

## Family Engagement Framework

The OhioKAN Family Engagement Framework is a guiding approach and includes a set of core principles that describe how the OhioKAN program and staff partner with kinship and adoptive families. Since the beginning of the process to design OhioKAN, kinship and adoptive families have played an important role in envisioning and identifying the services and supports they want and need. OhioKAN actively and intentionally partners with families through direct services and capacity building engagements. Both efforts build family's confidence, connections, and equip community systems to better support the unique needs of kinship and adoptive families. In partnership with families, the OhioKAN program advocates for services and systems that are inclusive, equitable, responsive, and accountable to kinship and adoptive families and communities.

### **Guiding Approach**

OhioKAN's Family Engagement Framework is based on the Parent Leadership model developed by the FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention 51. Families and staff work together as partners to make decisions about the OhioKAN program, policies, and practices that affect families, all while sharing responsibility, expertise, and leadership. The Parent Leadership model is a strengths-based approach built on the belief that parents and caregivers are the most knowledgeable about their families and communities.

Collaborative leadership, an aspect of the Parent Leadership model, is a decision-making process that is open to all, built on general agreement and uplifts the points of view

of all people involved. Staff seek out, listen, and respect family voice, and recognize that parents, caregivers, and youth are experts on their family's strengths, experiences and needs. Through collaborative leadership, OhioKAN staff and Families develop a true partnership to make the best decisions for both families served by the OhioKAN program and the broader kinship and adoptive community. The OhioKAN program and staff also value and celebrate the diversity of families and operate with cultural humility, as staff engage with the intention of honoring families' beliefs, traditions, customs, and values.

### Core Principles

The OhioKAN Family Engagement Framework includes a set of core principles which are considered best practices to effectively engage, inspire, and uplift the voices of kinship and adoptive families in both service delivery and broader capacity building efforts.

- **Foster mutual respect and trusting relationships with strong reciprocal communication.** We develop positive relationships with families through authentic interactions over time that are meaningful to everyone involved. We seek out, listen, and respect family voice, and recognize that parents, caregivers, and youth are experts on their own family's strengths, experiences, and needs. We apply our knowledge of the OhioKAN core practice skills to have open, on-going, and two-way communication with families, emphasizing families' strengths, interests, and perspectives. We value that families and communities know their children, culture, and community. We honor the diverse set of skills, expertise, and backgrounds that equip families with unique strengths and perspective. We are continuously in the process of building strong relationships with families 52 .
- **Partner with Families through shared decision-making, responsibility, and leadership.** Grounded in a decision-making process, we embrace collaborative leadership that is open to all, built on consensus, and uplifts the points of view of kinship and adoptive families. We intentionally create space for families to bring their unique expertise and knowledge to decision-making about the services they receive and the priorities they address in their communities. Their deep knowledge and skills are complementary to those of staff and other stakeholders, an essential perspective to meeting the needs of kinship and adoptive families in Ohio.
- **Respect, value, and honor cultural and linguistic assets.** The OhioKAN program values and celebrates the diversity of families and practices cultural humility. Staff engage with the intention of learning about and honoring families' beliefs, traditions, customs, and values. We reflect on, name, and address inequities as well as preconceived ideas, judgements and/or beliefs in interactions with individuals, communities, and systems. We recognize the need to build and rebuild trust with families who are marginalized by systems and experience inequities and discrimination. We recognize the strengths of families; acknowledging, respecting, and learning from differences; and intentionally consider how to adapt our approach to service delivery, policy and program development so that it is culturally responsive and aligned with the values of the community.
- **Engage families where they are.** The OhioKAN program effectively engages with families in ways that are equitable, accessible, safe, and convenient for families. We ask families for their communication preferences, and use a variety of options such as phone, email, text, virtual meetings, or in-person meetings to ensure families are connecting with us in the ways that work best for them. We honor the time that families dedicate to engaging with the OhioKAN program by providing stipends to kinship and adoptive families who work with us as advisors 53 .

### Culture of Engagement

OhioKAN is dedicated to a culture of meaningful engagement with families at their request and pace. At every level of the program, staff authentically engage and partner with young people and families as experts on their own experience, culture, and community. The partnership with families is embedded at every level of the organization with a sustained, targeted, and on-going focus. Families add fundamental value to the program by sharing their experiences and insights as a kinship and/or adoptive caregiver, family member, or youth. The OhioKAN program invests in leadership skills of families through service and support planning, active participation of families in program development and opportunities for families' voices in system-wide capacity building efforts. Families and staff partner together to focus on these key areas to share responsibility, expertise, and accountability.

- **Service episode level.** Services are focused on a family-centered, trauma responsive, and strengths-based approach. Staff partner with families to make decisions, set goals and achieve desired outcomes throughout service delivery. Caregivers are the drivers of decision-making, determining the direction, type and level of services received from OhioKAN Navigators. In every aspect of the service episode, families feel heard, honored, and respected 54 . A family-centered and strengths-based approach of family engagement leads to an improved and shared understanding of family needs and thus leads to positive outcomes for children, families, and caregivers 55 .
- **Program level.** At the program or organization level, family members share their knowledge to improve program outcomes and enhance agency operations. Family members share their unique experiences to improve the effectiveness of the OhioKAN program. Ways to engage families at this level may include methods such as focus groups, surveys, interviews, and membership on Regional Advisory Councils 56 .
- **System level.** Families who engage with OhioKAN at the systems level have experience across and within a range of systems and have a desire to use that experience and the power of their voices to improve outcomes for children and families within the community. The voices of those with lived experience as a kinship and adoptive caregiver can highlight system and practice strengths and improvements necessary. Areas of improvement can include inconsistent processes, community gaps, and unmet service needs. In addition, families provide innovative solutions that reflect their experience and community perspective to policy and program development. To inform system level enhancements, families participate in activities such as: Regional or State Advisory Councils; training staff; contribute expertise in public forums; and membership on planning committees or implementation workgroups 57 .

### Conclusion

The OhioKAN Family Engagement Framework embodies the dedication of the OhioKAN program to effectively engage, inspire, respond to, and amplify the voices of kinship and adoptive families. OhioKAN values the importance of creating and sustaining a culture of engagement in partnership with families that is inclusive and meaningful. OhioKAN staff partner with kinship and adoptive families through direct services, program development and system-wide capacity building efforts.

We continuously review family engagement through our continuous quality improvement processes, family satisfaction surveys and transparent accessible methods for families to provide feedback. Kinship and adoptive families served by the OhioKAN program can provide feedback about OhioKAN's Services or Engagement efforts to the site supervisor and OhioKAN regional coach.

---

51 FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (2019). Retrieved from: <https://friendsnrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Parent->

Leadership-Gui...

52 Massachusetts Department of Education (2020). Strengthening Partnerships: A framework for prenatal through young adulthood family engagement in Massachusetts. Retrieved from: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf>

53 Center for Health Care Strategies (2021). Engaging families in program and policy development to ensure equitable health outcomes for children. Retrieved from: <https://www.chcs.org/engaging-families-in-program-and-policy-developmen...>

54 Capacity Building Center for States (2016). Family Empowerment Implementation Manual. Retrieved from: <https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/126...>

55 Berrick, J.D., Cohen, E., and Anthony, E. (2011). Partnering with parents: Promising approaches to improve reunification outcomes for children in foster care. *Journal of Family Strengths*, 11(1), 1–13.

56 Capacity Building Center for States (2016). Family Empowerment Implementation Manual. Retrieved from: <https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/126...>

57 Capacity Building Center for States (2016). Family Empowerment Implementation Manual. Retrieved from: <https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/126...>

## Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Framework

OhioKAN believes that equity is not only a value and desired outcome, but a process of intentional action to eliminate systemic barriers that have produced historical and contemporary inequities based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, geography, religion, and other aspects of a person's identity.

OhioKAN stands in support of practices for the elimination of racism, classism, heterosexism, nativism, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia, ableism, discrimination against indigenous populations, and religious discrimination. Through the utilization of best practices specific to implementation science, human centered design, and trauma-informed care<sup>58</sup>, OhioKAN commits to sustained prioritization of the six IDEA principles in all practices. The IDEA principles target the distribution of resources and access to opportunities for children, youth, families, and communities in ways that promote equity and support transformational change, ensure safety, and actively disrupt the perpetuation of institutional discrimination and oppression. The six IDEA principles are:

- **Systems Analysis:** To address the web of interconnected issues that inhibit communities of color and other populations marginalized by systems who are discriminated against and may face barriers to reaching their fullest potential, OhioKAN continually analyzes historical factors and inequities. This includes the distribution of resources, policy development, and practices to address disparities and mitigate trauma.
- **Social Justice:** OhioKAN recognizes that inequities are rooted in policies and systems that unjustly disadvantage people of color and other populations marginalized by systems. For that reason, OhioKAN prioritizes solutions that are grounded in balancing power and advancing social justice for families.
- **Inclusion and Community Voice:** OhioKAN embraces an equity-oriented approach, takes meaningful steps to decenter white dominant culture and actively seeks full inclusion of people of color and other populations marginalized by systems when identifying challenges and shaping solutions that will affect their lives and communities.
- **Naming and Confronting Discrimination and Exclusion:** OhioKAN recognizes that discrimination, oppression, and exclusion have produced disparate outcomes for people marginalized by systems. OhioKAN actively confronts manifestations of discrimination and exclusion through the intentional development and ongoing analysis of programs and practices that are inclusive and equitable.
- **Intersectionality:** OhioKAN recognizes the importance of understanding how race, class, gender and other aspects of one's identity intersect, overlap, and interact with one another. Intersectionality provides some insight into how members of a family may simultaneously experience oppression and privilege in their daily lives interpersonally and systemically. OhioKAN utilizes this understanding of intersectionality in the creation of the program and practices and ensures that program analysis considers individuals' and family's intersectionality.
- **Sustained Commitment:** OhioKAN maintains a commitment to long-term, sustained investment in time, resources, and people to advance equitable realities both internally and externally for the children, families, and communities that we serve. To demonstrate the sustained commitment, OhioKAN staff and agency affiliated representatives actively:
  - Stand against violence and hate of any kind brought on to communities of color and other populations marginalized by systems
  - Supports people and communities impacted by collective or historical trauma
  - Create spaces to continuously improve self-reflective capacity to examine our backgrounds and biases
  - Work against systemic causes of inequities in communities of color and other populations marginalized by systems
  - Remain empathetic to historical, community and cultural factors that may impact experiences with OhioKAN and access to services and supports in the community
  - Engage communities and families as partners and allies
  - Guard against the implied or explicit assumption that western, white, able-bodied, and/or gender conforming/heterosexuality is the normative, standard or default position

---

58 SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. (2014) Retrieved from: [https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA\\_Trauma.pdf](https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf)