

**Title:** The Adoption Tracking Tool: Creating Structures to Improve Cross-Sector Collaboration

**Authors:** Amanda Brown, Dennis Alford, Kaela Byers, Becci Akin

**Cluster Area:** Child Welfare

**Paper Presentation**

### **Background/Purpose:**

Decreasing time to permanency for children in foster care is a critical goal of child welfare system reform. However, streamlining the adoption process involves improving processes across multiple interacting systems, and these systems often lack formal supports for cross-sector coordination. The Adoption Tracking Tool (ATT) is a case tracking tool for agency workers and court/legal personnel newly designed to document the adoption process and assist with communication and shared understanding of key milestones and activities that are part of the adoption process. The ATT was developed in collaboration with court and child welfare agency leaders to clarify and streamline procedures, improve communication between caseworkers and courts, expand efforts to identify barriers, and increase collaborative accountability. The study's objective was to evaluate the initial impact of the ATT on adoption processes across sectors, focusing on its adoption, acceptability, usability, and fidelity (Proctor et al, 2011).

### **Method:**

Court and child welfare personnel handling adoption cases in six pilot counties of one Midwestern state, including judges, prosecuting attorneys, guardians ad litem, parent attorneys, adoptive family attorneys, court appointed special advocates, and child welfare staff (e.g., directors, supervisors, caseworkers) (N = 77), in pilot counties completed monthly online surveys. . Surveys were followed by focus groups with 20 individuals representing each county and role regarding their experiences of using the ATT in practice. Focus group transcripts were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis to evaluate how agency and court personnel were impacted by the tool.

### **Findings:**

Overall, the tool was rated positively for supporting milestone tracking, communication, and identifying barriers to adoption, although responses varied by role. Most stakeholders agreed that the tool was easy to complete and could be useful in some specific capacity in their work, often as a "quick reference" communication tool. Court and public agency personnel endorsed the ATT as a tool that could help identify barriers to adoption and streamline communication across stakeholder groups because the tool gave them easy access to information that they could discuss in court or with their internal teams. Conversely, private agency personnel reported valuing the ATT for ensuring continuity of services and monitoring progress as cases transition to new staff and were less likely to endorse the ATT as a facilitator for between-stakeholder communication or for identifying barriers to adoption.

### **Conclusions:**

Although individuals in all stakeholder groups responded favorably to the ATT, differences in local court procedures and stakeholder exposure impacted implementation. Additionally, adoption proceedings have been disrupted by COVID-related court delays, thus impacting the potential impact of the ATT on time to adoption. However, consistently positive responses across stakeholder groups demonstrate utility of the tool as intended to support stakeholder communication thus potentially streamlining adoption cases. Further study is needed to

**Title:** The Adoption Tracking Tool: Creating Structures to Improve Cross-Sector Collaboration

**Authors:** Amanda Brown, Dennis Alford, Kaela Byers, Becci Akin

**Cluster Area:** Child Welfare

**Paper Presentation**

determine the relationship between use of the tool and decreased time to adoption. However, these pilot findings demonstrate promise to ensure adoption cases proceed through milestones timely by ensuring all case participants have a shared understanding of the status, process, and barriers to completion.