

Family Assessment Response (FAR) Application

Name of Applicant County: NASSAU

Name and contact information for the person in your agency to contact regarding this application:

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Please complete all items in this application, unless marked "if applicable," in which case the information should be provided if appropriate. It may be helpful to refer to the *Family Assessment Response Readiness Checklist* for ideas about the information to be provided in each section.

I. Rationale for Implementation of FAR

- A. Describe your rationale for applying to implement Family Assessment Response (FAR) and for undertaking the practice shift to FAR.

The Nassau County Department of Social Services (DSS) is eager to implement FAR in Nassau County for a number reasons. First, NYS has been moving towards implementation of differential response or FAR to provide a more flexible and effective response to families reported to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR). The differential response has proven successful both within NYS and within other counties and states. DSS is looking forward to bringing the many benefits of the family assessment and services model to the Nassau County community. By providing FAR services to families residing within Nassau, DSS and its stakeholders will be better able to ensure family stabilization, child safety, and increased family participation in assessment, planning and provision of services.

- B. What benefits are you seeking for your district through implementation of FAR? For the families reported to your district? For your community?

For the district: To help support staff in their continued development in acquiring, strengthening and enhancing their skills while providing the flexibility inherent in dual track response to SCR reports; engage families more effectively to use services that address their specific needs; opportunity for earlier intervention and possible prevention of child abuse or neglect; reduction in recidivism; enhanced worker satisfaction.

For families: Enhanced positive outcomes for children and families; increased access to services; increased involvement in needs assessment and service provision; augmented family empowerment, strength and stabilization. Reduced stress due to the elimination of a finding for non serious reports of child abuse and neglect.

For the community: More responsive and effective child protective services; increased community stakeholder involvement in assessment and service provision; improved outcomes for children and their families; sustained child safety; decreased Family Court involvement in FAR cases; and long-term cost savings.

- C. Provide a brief assessment of your district's current child welfare/CPS case practice, including an assessment of your district's current strengths regarding family engagement, assessing safety and risk, family-led strengths and needs assessment, and solution-focused practice.

Current child welfare/CPS case practice:

Nassau CPS program currently has twelve (12) Investigation Units (assess safety of children and investigate allegations of neglect or abuse, conduct a safety assessment within 7 days, and investigate allegations within 60 days); six (6) Indicated Units (provide extended ongoing services and referrals to families who have orders of supervision through Family Court); a Registry Unit (registers allegations of child abuse, maltreatment or neglect from the State Central Registry and assigns reports to the units); Monitoring Unit (monitors the health and safety of children who have been placed into Foster Care through CPS removals); Night Emergency Services Unit (conducts investigations and assess safety of child abuse maltreatment and neglect after regular business hours); and Court Ordered Investigation unit (conducts investigations of child abuse, maltreatment or neglect ordered by Family Court and submits a written report to the court).

Nassau's Child Protective Service model was originally developed to address cases involving allegations of child abuse and cases of child neglect. While CPS is expected to provide services to remediate child maltreatment problems, the emphasis has been upon evidentiary fact-finding, the determination of whether

abuse and neglect occurred, as well as the severity of harm, the identification of who inflicted the harm, and the risk of future harm. CPS operated in a law enforcement and judicial environment rather than utilizing a strength-based and family engagement model. Ongoing Family Court oversight relied upon compliance and consequences to encourage changes in parental behavior.

Regardless of the seriousness of the allegations, degree of danger to the children, or level of risk, the same investigative and determination process is used to respond to all reports. In general, the allegations in about two-thirds of CPS reports are not substantiated and most CPS investigations, even those with indicated determinations, are closed without any services being provided to the family. The role of the CPS worker is to identify a perpetrator, seek evidence concerning specific incidents or allegations, record culpability, and help a family, which sometimes places a barrier between the family and the caseworker.

It is within this context that Nassau County has begun to look for better ways to respond to the needs of children, families, and communities for child safety, permanency, and well-being. Nassau is looking to strengthen, empower and stabilize families that partner in FAR process. By utilizing the differential response, Nassau hopes to break the cycle of generational CPS involvement, reduce the recidivism rate for CPS cases and help families realize that we are there to help them achieve their goals and not penalize them.

As Nassau continues to receive encouragement and guidance from OCFS, we have been working to slowly transform the casework culture of CPS and Children's Services to embrace a more strength based and outcome-focused approach to child welfare practice in which Nassau has begun to see a change.

Current strengths regarding family engagement, assessing safety and risk, family-led strengths and needs assessment, and solution-focused practice:

Training has been and continues to be provided to CPS and Children's Services staff on such topics as the Family Meetings service model; strategies for locating and engaging fathers and relatives; and concurrent planning. CPS has been working with OCFS to further strengthen and define our Family Meetings. This model utilizes an approach to assessment, case planning and on-going casework management that forms a partnership with the family. CPS workers have been able to build upon and strengthen their skills in family engagement, and as a result CPS has been experiencing an increase in Family Meetings.

- D. Identify areas of practice where you anticipate that development and support will be needed in the successful implementation of FAR.

Nassau County DSS will require training on the principals of FAR and how FAR is different from a CPS investigation. CPS investigators will require support and development to assist them in shifting the culture from investigating allegations to determine when the use of FAR is appropriate. Encouraging family Engagement,

having families direct their own needs assessment and helping families to develop a goal/service plan will challenge and change long held thinking in the Child Protective Unit.

II. Intake - Criteria for Assigning Reports to Family Assessment Response

While New York State Law excludes assignment of Child Protective Services (CPS) reports containing certain categories of allegations to FAR, a majority of all CPS reports remain eligible for FAR assignment. OCFS has found that when districts severely limit the types of allegations assigned to FAR, it impedes the successful implementation of FAR. Therefore, OCFS policy requires districts to commit to screening in a broad range of allegations for FAR assignment.

As per New York State law, reports with allegations said to have occurred outside of family settings (day care, foster care) cannot be assigned to FAR. Also in accordance with State law, reports containing the following allegations cannot be assigned to FAR:

- sex abuse (i.e., commission of a sex offense against a child)
- child prostitution
- incest
- a child engaged in, or use of a child for purposes of, child pornography
- assault against a child
- attempted or committed murder or manslaughter in the first or second degree
- child abandonment
- severe or repeated abuse
- neglect resulting in failure to thrive

A. List additional criteria you will use to screen out reports from FAR (if applicable):

Domestic Violence

Reports with same day response or immediate safety concerns

Serious/excessive bruises or injuries

Primary caretaker currently incapacitated due to alcohol/drugs, mental illness, and violence

Child Fatalities

Court Ordered Investigations

Open Preventive Cases

Ongoing police investigation/arrest

Unknown Demographics and Unknowns

Cross county involvement (to be reviewed if the other county has FAR)

B. List the types of reports to be screened into FAR:

SCR reports to be screened into FAR include:

- All reports involving allegations of
 - Educational neglect that do not fit the above disqualifiers.
- Inadequate guardianship reports originating in zip codes 11550, 11520, 11575, 11553, 11590, and 11003
- All reports submitted by report source: Educational personnel that do not fit above disqualifiers

C. Describe the procedures you will use to screen reports into FAR:

All SCR intakes are received into the Registry Unit. The units will review the case, and if it meets the type of report being screened into FAR (see above), it will be sent to the Assistant Director or Supervisor of the FAR Unit. The Supervisor or the Assistant Director will review the report utilizing the FAR screening tool. If the case meets the criteria for FAR, the supervisor will accept the case into the FAR unit and assign it to a worker.

III. Projected Caseloads and Workforce Allocation

Developing a successful FAR program requires assigning a sufficient number of cases to FAR to foster a vibrant FAR program. Agencies should commit to assigning to the FAR track a meaningful percentage (minimum of 30-40%) of the CPS reports that fall within the categories of cases that meet their criteria for FAR. Alternatively, medium to large sized districts may wish to serve one or more communities that have a disproportionately large number of CPS reports and/or a disproportionately high minority representation in their CPS reports, with a commitment to assigning a minimum of 15-20% of all such allowable CPS reports to FAR.

A. **Caseload projections** - After considering the criteria you plan to use to assign FAR cases and reviewing past CPS data, estimate your **projections** for assignment of cases to FAR in the first 12 months of operation:

% of all CPS reports received:

30%

% of CPS reports meeting criteria for inclusion in FAR:

85 % will be assigned to the two FAR Units.

Total number of reports to be assigned to FAR:

Approximately 1,785 reports annually

Additional comments (optional):

FAR implementation is countywide

Note that FAR implementation in Nassau County will be on an incremental basis. Initially ten caseworkers will be assigned to the FAR Units (2). Assuming an average case load of 15 and an average case length of two months, the ten caseworkers initially assigned to the program are estimated to serve 900 cases annually. As Nassau becomes more familiar with the FAR service model, additional staff resources will be dedicated to the program, incrementally building capacity to serve the targeted annual caseload of 1785.

B. Decision-making about staff allocations

Describe how you plan to staff FAR. (Please note: because FAR is a CPS service, the basic training requirements for staff assigned to FAR are the same as those for other CPS staff.) Include a description of your process for the identification of staff who will implement FAR. Are you assigning based on specific criteria, asking for volunteers, etc.?

DSS will discuss the FAR program with CPS and Children Services staff, encouraging those wishing to be part of the unit to apply. All applicants will be interviewed by the Assistant Director and Director of CPS. Selection will be based upon experience, history of good service delivery, knowledge of community resources, and experience in the utilization of the Family Meetings service model.

C. Staff allocations projected for the first year

Field experience has demonstrated that FAR is implemented most easily and most effectively when staff assigned to FAR are responsible for FAR cases only and do not have mixed caseloads. Therefore, OCFS will not approve any applications with a plan to implement FAR in which individual caseworkers carry case loads of both FAR and Investigation cases.. Supervisory oversight of mixed units should be considered only in small districts with two or fewer CPS units.

1. Number of units to be assigned to FAR

Designate the number of units that will be responsible for FAR cases only and the number of any units that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable) and include the number of caseworkers / senior workers or supervisors assigned to each unit:

Two (2) CPS units will be assigned solely to FAR and will not have mixed caseloads.

2. Number of Supervisors to be assigned to FAR / experience and qualifications

Describe the experience and qualifications of supervisory staff:

Two (2) unit supervisors will be assigned to FAR. The FAR supervisor will possess the following experience and qualifications:

- Meet the Nassau County Department of Civil Service-specified education, work experience and other requirements of their specific job

title and have a proven history of meeting expectations in all job factors on formal employee evaluations.

- Have successful supervisory experience
- Hold successful experience and/or knowledge of both CPS investigations and preventive services
- Possess relevant experience or training in engaging and working with difficult service populations
- Possess relevant experience or training in Family Meetings service model
- To the extent possible, match the target populations' language, racial and/or cultural characteristics.

Designate the number of supervisors responsible for FAR cases only, and those that will have mixed caseloads (if applicable):

Two (2) unit supervisors will be assigned to FAR and will be responsible for FAR cases only.

3. Number of caseworkers assigned to FAR / experience and qualifications

Describe the experience and qualifications of caseworker staff:

Ten (10) caseworkers will be initially assigned to FAR. Casework staff will possess the following experience and qualifications:

- Meet the Nassau County Department of Civil Service-specified education, work experience and other requirements of their specific job title and have a proven history of meeting expectations in all job factors on formal employee evaluations.
- Hold successful experience and knowledge of CPS investigations
- Possess relevant experience or training in engaging and working with difficult service populations
- One caseworker will be bi-lingual
- Utilization of the language line

Designate the number of caseworkers who will have FAR caseloads:

Ten (10) caseworkers will have FAR caseloads. Assuming an average case load of 15 and an average case length of two months, the ten caseworkers initially assigned to the program are estimated to serve 900 cases annually.

4. Describe other staff resources to be dedicated to FAR (if applicable):

Clerical, Registry Unit and Behavioral Health staff will be available to the FAR Unit. Administrative staff is available as well as a liaison to child care. It is planned that staff resources from the eligibility base services will be available as needed.

- 5. Include additional information** about units and/or workers to be assigned, including **location** information if implementation will not be countywide (if applicable):

Nassau will continuously evaluate and review the data and the types of cases received into FAR. This process will afford us the opportunity to expand, refine and tweak the program as needed. Nassau is anticipating that at least one other unit will be in place after one year.

D. Phase-in or Rollout Plans for Workforce

Describe your plans for phasing in your FAR workforce (if applicable):

In anticipation of the approval of our application, a workgroup comprised of Director, caseworkers, supervisors and an assistant director, has been meeting since September 2011 on a biweekly basis to discuss the FAR process and implementation issues. Child welfare staff has been informed of plans to initiate a differential response model in CPS. DSS will partner with OCFS and the Butler Institute to provide training, coaching and technical assistance in implementing FAR.

As the program start date approaches, all child welfare staff will attend informal informational sessions and trainings regarding FAR. Staff will be recruited, screened and selected to staff the FAR unit. Program policy, procedures and trainings will be developed, formalized and implemented. We are anticipating training to begin with the Butler Institute in September 2012.

E. Future Plans (After the First Year)

Describe any additional plans you may have regarding the future size of the FAR program and staffing patterns to accommodate the program after the first year (if applicable):

Nassau County plans to begin training in September of 2012 and begin implementation. After the first year, and depending upon the success of the project (decrease in the number of reports and the recidivism rate, the empowerment of families) and the linkages with community services, the County may look towards expansion by adding additional staff and units.

IV. Plan for Service Provision

Describe

- the types of services and supports you plan to provide to families in FAR
- the procedures you will use in offering these services, including:
 - your strategies to apply the principle of actively engaging and empowering families in an ongoing process of assessing their strengths and needs, assessing child safety, and decision-making; and
 - how you plan to link families with needed services and goods through relationships with preventive services staff, TANF staff, and community service providers, including any plans to contract for such services.

Upon an intake being accepted into the FAR Unit, the FAR worker will immediately begin to engage the family through the initial phone call, and home visits will be scheduled as quickly as possible. Caseworkers will gather information from the children and the family to help determine the children's safety. The workers will work with the family regarding problem solving, issues, concerns and their goals. The caseworkers will utilize the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) to complete the assessment of the family.

The FAR worker will employ strategies to help the family identify strengths and supports, while also looking to their needs and concerns. The worker will utilize existing safety assessment tools in evaluating the children's safety, while also completing the 7-day Safety Assessment. Together they will make the necessary referrals and linkages as identified by the families both within the community and the department as needed. The families will be able to access services on their own should the need exist in the future based upon the skills they have learned.

V. Community and Other Resources

The success of every FAR Program is dependent upon the creation of vibrant and cooperative partnership with services and programs in the community.

A. Identification of stakeholders – List the stakeholders for FAR that you have identified in your district and in your community:

School Districts, Police Departments, Nassau County Family Court, Probation, Early Intervention Program, medical community, DSS Advisory Council, preventive service agencies, voluntary agencies, community-based organizations including the Hispanic Counseling Center, EOC and Head Start and Mental Health.

B. Community outreach – Describe how your district has reached out to and coordinated with community stakeholders (or plans to do so) in the planning of FAR:

DSS plans to reach out to the stakeholders listed above and invite them to a formal presentation describing the FAR program using Butler Institute power point and the role the agencies can play in serving FAR families.

Members of the FAR workgroup will begin presentations in the late summer/early fall.

C. Community resources that may be used to assist families in FAR. Specify:

- Government agencies or resources:

DSS caseworkers will assist all eligible FAR families in obtaining needed services from public human service programs including: Medicaid, Temporary Assistance, Food Stamps, HEAP, child care subsidy, Earned Income tax Credit (EITC), mental health and chemical dependency services, education services, early intervention services, domestic violence services, etc.

- Non-government agencies or resources:

DSS caseworkers will assist all eligible FAR families in obtaining needed services from non-public agencies or resources including: child care, education services, early intervention services, domestic violence service, head start, etc.

- D.** Describe how you will use community resources to **reduce government involvement** (including that of child welfare services) in the lives of families while maintaining child safety and preserving families:

One of the implementation goals of FAR in Nassau is to not only reduce the number of cases coming into the Child Protective System, but to also reduce the recidivism rate of the repeat cases. We would be looking to reduce the number of intergenerational cases being called into the system as well as reducing the number of children requiring out of home placement. As this occurs, there will be less involvement of government and more reliance on community based agencies. Nassau's linkage of families to the various agencies will help decrease the families' need for Preventive Services while increasing the monitoring of the safety of their children. We are hopeful that this approach will instill upon the families the needed confidence for them to reach out for services within the communities on their own, should the need arise, and to identify their own natural resources.

E. Additional Funding

A key component of FAR is the provision over the short term of needed goods and services, including wrap-around services, to families and children. While OCFS has had FAR flex funds (with no local share) available to districts that previously applied to participate in FAR, there is no current plan for the provision of State-only FAR flex funds going forward. Affirm that you plan to fund these services for FAR families with a local share of the costs, and describe your policy for the use of those funds. (Note: local share is to be claimed through the use of protective funding).

Nassau will utilize protective funding as necessary on an as needed basis. Nassau will have a fund of approximately \$10,000.00. The funds will be utilized to meet critical needs of families, such as: emergency repairs, transportation, school trips or a specific family activity, furniture, home cleaning, etc.

VI. Maintaining Safety/Assessing and Responding to Risk

A. Intake– The initiation of a safety assessment within 24 hrs is a FAR requirement. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to initiate the assessment of the safety of children including how you will or will not screen and assess SCR reports for FAR inclusion during on-call hours:

During our first year of operation, on call cases will not be screened into FAR. Those calls will continue to be handled with as an investigative response. If a subsequent report is received in an open FAR case and it does not meet the FAR requirements, the FAR case will then be closed and, if appropriate, a new report will be made, to be addressed in the investigative track.

Once a report has been received in the FAR unit and the history is reviewed, the worker will contact the source of the report and begin to assess the safety of the children. A home visit with the family will be scheduled as quickly as possible to further assess the safety of the children. A 7 day safety assessment will be completed.

B. Assessment - The completion of a safety assessment within seven days is a FAR requirement. FAR staff must also complete an assessment of risk and an assessment of family strengths and needs. OCFS requires that districts use the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG) for these comprehensive assessments and that a completed FLAG be maintained in the case record. Describe the procedures and processes you will follow to protect the safety of children and engage families in a full assessment of safety, risk, strengths and needs.

The primary focus is child safety, which will be assessed, together with risk factors, from the time a report is received and throughout the FAR process as DSS staff work to engage and serve families. A family support approach will be utilized; as part of the process, caseworkers will immediately begin to work with the family to assess their strengths and needs by utilizing the FLAG, as well as risk level. The FAR process will be explained to the parents to help them become engaged in the FAR process. Included in this process will be child and family interviews with all family members, their identified supports, and other stakeholders. Family meetings, motivational interviewing, and a solution focused and strength-based approach will be used in order to have open and honest

discussions with the family so as to empower them to identify and meet their own needs. Family led objectives and outcomes will be developed.

After the case has been tracked to FAR, if there is a safety issue or the family ceases to cooperate with FAR caseworkers and there is evidence of maltreatment of a child, the CPS worker will call in a new report to the SCR.

Nassau County FAR workers will immediately begin assessing strengths, needs, and concerns, in partnership with the family from the initial phone contact. The caseworkers will be utilizing the Family Led Assessment Guide (FLAG). Child safety and risk will be assessed from receipt of the report throughout the length of the case, in partnership with the family, using a strength-based family support approach.

After completion of the initial assessment, and throughout the life of the case, the FAR worker will continue to assess the safety needs of the children. The FAR workers will engage the parent(s) and children in the FAR process and work with them in identifying strengths and resources within the family, in a more solution focused strength based approach. Parent(s) will be able to share how other community supports will be useful to them as part of the planning process to support the family's needs as they see them. In the planning, DSS will assist the family to meet needs that have been identified throughout the assessment (FLAG).

Within Seven (7) days of the initial report, the formal safety assessment will be completed and approved through the Connections System. The SCR will be notified that the case will be tracked to FAR.

A strengths and needs assessment will be conducted in partnership with the family, identifying family strengths and needs, with the highest priority being the child's safety and well being.

C. Service provision – Describe how the FAR Program will enhance your ability to protect children, maintain their safety, reduce risk, and preserve families:

The FAR program will enhance the ability of families to protect their children, maintain their safety, reduce risk, and preserve families by altering the community perception that the primary aim of CPS is investigation and enforcement. Instead, families will begin to experience CPS as a genuine source of support without a punitive component, which may lead to increased openness and honesty in

sharing concerns with CPS staff as well as constructing solutions in partnership with Nassau County.

Child safety will be continually assessed and evaluated throughout the process by engaging the family in an open discussion of their needs and empowering the family to make changes as appropriate.

- D. Domestic violence cases** – Describe the protocol that you have developed to maintain the safety of child(ren) and the non-offending caretaker in FAR cases with suspected or confirmed domestic violence:

Cases involving domestic violence will be screened out of FAR.

VII. Training

District staff and any non-district staff who are contracted to provide FAR assessment and services must participate in the FAR training and coaching programs, as designed by OCFS.

- A.** Describe training already provided or planned for FAR district staff:

In anticipation of the approval of our application, a workgroup comprised of Director, caseworkers, supervisors and assistant directors, has been meeting since September 2011 on a biweekly basis to discuss the FAR process and implementation issues.

- B.** Describe any cross training, orientation, or preparation that has already been provided or is planned for FAR staff, CPS investigative staff, any other child welfare staff, and/or other district staff:

Child welfare staffs have been informed of plans to initiate a differential response model in CPS. DSS will partner with OCFS and the Butler Institute to provide training, coaching and technical assistance in implementing FAR. Nassau is looking for training to begin in September 2012.

As the program start date approaches, all child welfare staff will attend informal informational sessions and trainings regarding FAR. Staff will be recruited, screened and selected to staff the FAR unit. Program policy, procedures and trainings will be developed, formalized and implemented.

- C.** Describe FAR training/orientation that has already been provided or is planned for non-district organizations or entities:

Basic FAR informational trainings and presentations will be planned and scheduled for organizations outside of DSS. Nassau County will adapt and present the orientation PowerPoint prepared for all FAR counties by Butler Institute and approved by OCFS for use with community stakeholders.

VIII. Monitoring and Assessment

Each district must agree to participate in any monitoring or quality assurance activities with OCFS and its agents as may be designated by OCFS. Each district must commit to engage in internal quality assurance activities that will enable them to continuously assess their fidelity to the FAR practice model and the efficacy of their FAR program, and adjust procedures and practices as necessary.

- A. Describe the quality assurance procedures that your district plans to follow in order to monitor and assess the success of your provision of services in FAR cases:

The unit will implement team meetings on a bi-weekly basis to not only monitor the work flow, but to discuss and collaborate on cases and resources. The Supervisor will meet individually with the workers to closely monitor the cases.

The FAR team, along with our planning and research department, will utilize the data supplied by data warehouse.

- B. Describe the procedures your district will use to monitor and assess the provision of services to families in the FAR Program by agencies with which you contract to provide services:

Nassau currently reviews its contracts through various performance measures and meetings. This practice would continue should we execute any new contracts for FAR services.