

RESOURCE FAMILIES

- AUTHORITY:** California Department of Social Services (CDSSS) Resource Family Approval (RFA) Written Directives Version 8 Effective Date 11/01/2022
 California Senate Bill (SB) 1013 (CHAPTER 35, STATUTES OF 2012; SB 1460 (CHAPTER 772, STATUTES OF 2014) SB 407 (CHAPTER 226, STATUTES OF 2023)
 California Assembly Bill (AB) 403 (CHAPTER 773, STATUTES OF 2015; AB 1997) (CHAPTER 612, STATUTES OF 2016)
 Title 22, CALIFORNIA CODE OF REGULATIONS, DIVISION 2 SUBCHAPTER 5, ARTICLE 11
 Sections 16519.5 Welfare and Institutions Code
 Section 1517 and 1522.1 of Health and Safety Code
 All County Letter (ACL) 16-10, 17-39, 17-50, 24-14, 24-77
- RESCINDS:** Procedure Manual Item 2-6-211, dated 04/08/2022
- PURPOSE:** Provide guidance in procedural requirements for Resource Family Approval (RFA) process.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The Resource Family Approval (RFA) Program was implemented in 2017 to establish a unified, family-friendly, and child-centered resource family approval process to replace previous multiple processes for licensing foster family homes and approving relatives and nonrelative extended family members as foster care providers, and approving families for legal guardianship or adoption. It was developed to meet California's goal of ensuring that all children live in committed, nurturing and permanent families and to reduce the use of congregate care. This process includes a comprehensive in-depth evaluation of family structures, values, discipline practices, coping strategies and their strengths and where more support may be needed for safer and more effective and quality parenting. Other components of this process include a home evaluation assessment, submission of documentation, references and background checks.

II. BACKGROUND

The RFA Program was enacted by legislation sponsored by the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) in 2007 and expanded through SB 1013 (Chapter 35, Statutes of 2012). It required California Department of Social Services (CDSS), in consultation with county child welfare agencies and probation departments and other stakeholders to implement a unified, family-friendly and child-centered RFA process. The process was tested with five early implementing counties and expanded with a second cohort of nine counties before state-wide implementation that occurred in January 2017. Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16519.5 (f)(1)(A) gives CDSS authority to administer the RFA Program via Written Directives. We are currently operating on Version **8 effective 11/01/2022**. The date the application is received by a family will determine the specific approval guidelines that apply to them. Check the CDSS website for the most current version:

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/resource-family-approval-program>

California's RFA process has been incorporated into California's Title IV-E State Plan, which was submitted to and approved by the Federal Administration for Children and Families. All homes approved as resource families are eligible for Title IV-E federal financial participation.

RFA creates a framework for all families, including relative and non-relative extended family member (NREFM) caregivers, to receive the same information, training and opportunities for support. A resource family completes one approval process, and once approved, may choose to provide care on a short- or long term basis. Once a resource family is approved, they will not be required to undergo any additional approval or licensure if they decide to adopt or seek guardianship. All resource families will undergo an annual update or earlier if there are changes in the household or personal life events. At these times, families will meet the requirements of the current version of the Written Directives.

The Written Directives (WDs) are the written processes, standards, and requirements issued by CDSS to implement the RFA Program. The WDs have the same force and effect as regulations and ensure counties use the same standards for RF approval. Given the revisions in the WDs and changes that may happen to funding prior to approval, the following procedure is our process and there may be modifications due to legislative or mandated changes.

The application approval process is to be completed in under 90 days. This is not a linear process and several steps can be worked on concurrently.

III. APPROVAL PROCEDURE

A. Applicant recruitment and referral

1. Prospective RFA applicants may come to the attention of probation through:
 - a. Court order
 - b. Relative notification
 - c. Family referral
 - d. Self-initiated referral
 - e. Self-identified relative requesting placement consideration
 - f. Recruitment strategies and events

B. Response following court hearing:

1. A Suitable Placement order is made, and the court has ordered that the youth be released to the care of a relative or NREFM.
2. The court officer/Contested cases will send an email to placement supervisors to notify them of the court's order.

3. The file is routed immediately to the placement unit.
4. If the youth is released on the date suitable placement orders are made, it will be deemed an emergency placement.
 - a. A placement prior to approval is made on an emergency basis pursuant to WIC 309 or WIC 361.45 or for a compelling reason pursuant to WIC 16519.5. RFA WD
 - b. The beginning date of aid for emergency caregiver funding is the date of the placement.
 - c. The family will be contacted immediately for an orientation as to RFA process and an application (RFA-01) will be given to the caregiver.
 - d. The signed RFA-01 must be obtained from the family within five business days.
 - e. RFA-01 is scanned and emailed to the designated social services agency worker.
 - f. Effective July 1, 2019, all counties must provide a payment, equivalent to the basic level rate for a resource family, to the emergency caregiver on behalf of a youth who has been placed prior to RFA approval.
 - g. The signed EA-1 application is submitted to the eligibility technician.
 - h. A criminal records check shall be conducted through CLETS and LiveScan.
 - i. A home environment assessment shall be completed using RFA-03 as specified in Section 6-02 and 6-03A of the WD, which includes:
 - (1) Background check
 - (2) Health and safety assessment of the home and grounds
 - (3) Outdoor activity space
 - (4) Storage areas of the home
 - (5) Capacity determination
 - j. Proceed to the full approval process to be completed within 90 days. Refer to Sections 4-08 and 4-09 if the approval process exceeds the 90-day timeline.

C. Applicant qualifications (Section 5-02)

1. Must be at least 18 years of age
2. Shall be in good physical and mental health
- D. Application Requirements- refer to Sections 5-03 (applicant) and 5-03A (county)
- E. RFA Deputy Probation Officer (DPO) will;
 1. Provide the applicant(s) with a packet of information as outlined in the WDs
 2. Provide an orientation that will include but is not limited to:
 - a. The general process
 - b. What is an RFA Home
 - c. Expectations
 - d. Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)
 - e. What is a home assessment
 - f. Funding
 - g. Juvenile justice system
 - h. Required 12 hours of pre-approval training
 - i. The use of Structured Assessment Family Evaluation (SAFE) tool that is used to complete the family assessment and written directive
 - j. Minimum of two home visits
 - (1) Home assessment with initial orientation
 - (2) SAFE questionnaire pick-up and other documents
 - (3) Live Scan for each adult in the home and other adults regularly present
 3. Complete a written assessment of the applicant and the family including a social history.
 4. Enter required/indicated information into the Binti electronic system.
 5. Evaluate the case for potential barriers and identify workaround solutions as needed that will support the applicants in an encouraging and motivating manner. This is a “whatever it takes” process.
 - a. Example: For homes in need of minor fixes to meet the physical standards, there are some remedies available such as smoke detector and small denomination, home improvement store gift cards.

- b. For applicants who are nearing the allowable timelines for approval, every effort shall be made to complete their application in a timely manner. This may require multiple trips to the home or regular telephone contact.
- c. Any non-regular measures shall be staffed with the SPO for approval prior to execution.

F. The Placement Unit SPO will:

- 1. Stay apprised of the progress of each applicant and troubleshoot with the RFA DPO if barriers to approval present themselves.
- 2. Monitor each application to ensure it complies with mandated timelines.
- 3. Review the written assessment.
- 4. Provide the final approval.
 - a. In cases where the application is not approved or denied within the Written Directive indicated timelines, the SPO will submit a request for Good Cause.

IV. ANNUAL RENEWAL & INVESTIGATIONS

- A. Approved homes require annual recertification per the Written Directives. The designated RFA DPO shall maintain a log to track renewal dates and complete them within the designated timelines.
- B. The same DPO who completes the resource family approval process may not act as the investigator in instances where there is some type of misconduct alleged. The designated investigator is required to have training specific to resource family investigations. The placement monitor is the designated investigator for the department and should receive this training as soon as possible upon entering the position.

REFERENCES:

Procedures: 2-6-205 Placement Unit Investigations: Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) and Resource Family Approval (RFA)

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/resource-family-approval-program>

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APPROVED BY: