



Family &
Community
Services

User Guidelines for Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers



Document approval

User Guidelines for FACS Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers (“the Panel”) has been endorsed and approved by:

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1 Introduction

The NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) seek to better protect the most vulnerable members of our community. Our vision is to empower all people to live fulfilling lives and achieve their potential in inclusive communities.

The Safe Home for Life reforms, announced in October 2014, strengthened the child protection system through legislative change, new policy and practice, and a redesign of how technology is used in child protection.

The legislative changes to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Adoption Act 2000 aim to achieve greater permanency for children and young people who cannot be restored to the care of their parents. Permanency placement principles and Guardianship Orders were introduced for the first time, alongside a renewed focus on open adoption.

The legislative reforms incorporate the principles of permanency to guide all actions and decisions. The principles establish a set of preferences for permanent placement for children in the following order:

1. Family preservation and restoration
2. Long term guardianship to relative or kin (or suitable others)
3. Open adoption
4. Parental responsibility to the Minister and placement in long term care

This direction was reinforced by Premier Berejiklian and Minister Goward in their 29th March 2017 announcement of major changes to the child protection system. One key point being a progressive change to how FACS funds service partners, including with performance-based contracts, to find children in care a pathway to a permanent home within two years.

With the commencement of FACS's Permanency Support Program from October 2017, more Independent Assessors will be required to assist with permanency assessments and report writing activities that inform the determination of the most appropriate permanency option for a child/young person in care. As a result, FACS anticipates increasing demand for Independent Assessors working alongside FACS and NGO caseworkers.

The supply of Independent Assessment services and establishment of the FACS Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers will support the implementation of Permanency Support Program across FACS districts.

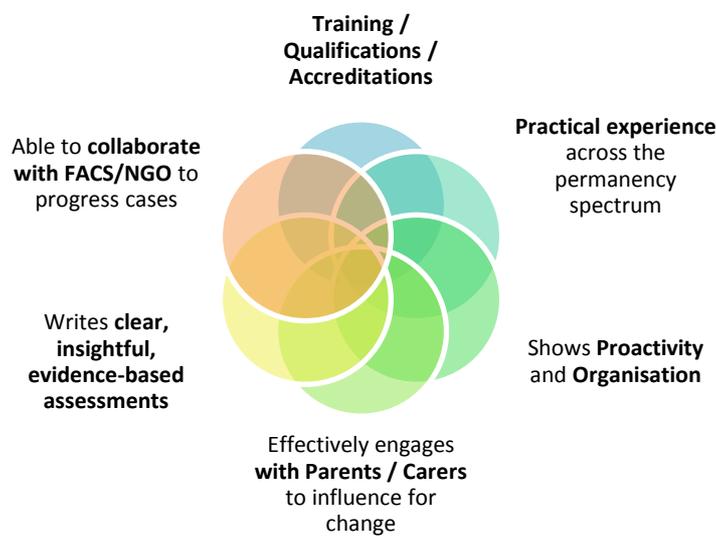
1.1 When should these guidelines be used?

These guidelines are to assist FACS staff when selecting Service Providers from the FACS Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers database.

1.2 What is the FACS Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers?

The FACS Independent Assessment Services – Panel of Service Providers (“the Panel”) is a panel whose membership is made of successful applicants from an E-tender process. Each member of the Panel has been selected based upon specific selection criteria outlining individual skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge in assessment and report writing and casework skills.

Attributes of an excellent independent assessor



A Service Provider who provides independent assessment services for FACS is impartial and plays a significant role in liaising with family members and key stakeholders to inform the determination of the most appropriate permanency option for a child/young person in care.

1.3 Monitoring Performance and Managing Grievances

Monitoring the performance of Service Providers occurs at the District level.

For quality assurance purposes and professional development, Service Providers who provide Independent Assessment services for FACS should be provided feedback in a timely manner about the quality of service that was provided. FACS districts will regularly monitor the performance of Service Providers. Monitoring involves stakeholders (e.g. RACS, Permanency Support Coordinators, Caseworkers, Managers Case Work etc) who have referred a matter to an Independent Assessor providing regular feedback.

Feedback via a feedback client satisfaction survey will be collected by the Panel Secretariat for review and providing consolidated feedback to Service Providers to enable continuous improvement.

If issues arise at any stage during the referral, FACS districts should address this with the individual Service Provider in the first instance.

Refer to Performance Measurement and Monitoring in the Service Level Agreement (Appendix 3.3) for further details.

If the matter is unable to be resolved please refer to the FACS Grievance Management Policy and advise the Panel Secretariat as soon as possible.

http://intranet.facs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/file/0016/320713/Grievance_Management_Policy.pdf

1.4 Risk

The Service Providers listed on the Panel database are individuals who have been selected based on successful application to an E-tendering process. If further risks are identified they will be addressed by the Panel Steering Committee.

2 Making a referral

2.1 Selecting a provider

The Panel will be listed on NSW Community Services Intranet which FACS districts will have access to.

FACS district officers, or central office officers, as part of their roles and responsibilities will refer matters requiring Independent Assessment to Service Providers from the Panel.

Providers will be selected by the relevant Officer, in accordance with district referral process and will be based upon:

- The complexity of the referral
- The Service Provider's professional experience and qualifications
- The cultural and linguistic considerations of the referral
- The geographical location of the referral and capacity of the Service Provider to travel as required
- The availability of the Service Provider to accept the referral and perform the required activities during the prescribed timeframe
- The Service Providers completion of any relevant FACS orientation or training
- The Service Providers agreement to FACS Fee Schedule.

2.2 What if there are no suitable Panel Service Providers available?

There may be some instances where the Panel may not identify any suitable or available service providers within a specific district. The Officer should survey the entire Panel list to determine if a Service Provider not nominated in their local area is suitable and available to provide the service.

If there are ongoing instances of no suitable Service Providers being available from the Panel then this should be escalated to the Panel Secretariat for consideration and recommendation to the Facilitator Panel Steering Committee to reopen the Panel for new entrants.

3 Appendices

3.1 List of Panel members

3.2 Templates for estimation of services hours and costs

3.3 Service Level Agreement

Updated versions of these documents and other information relevant to the Panel can be found on the FACS intranet