



## **Child and Family Services Reviews: Guiding Principles, Framework, and Tools for the Program Improvement Plan Development Process**

The Children's Bureau (CB), part of the Department of Health and Human Services, administers the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). The reviews were established by the 1994 Amendments to the Social Security Act. In 2000, the Children's Bureau published a final rule in the Federal Register to establish a process for monitoring state child welfare programs. The review process is designed to meet statutory and regulatory requirements to provide oversight of states' compliance with the requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. Under the rule, states are assessed for substantial conformity with federal requirements for child welfare services.

The CFSR process enables the CB to (1) ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is happening to children and families receiving child welfare services; and (3) assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being. The CFSRs are a partnership between the federal government and state. The reviews are structured to help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs, and to ultimately improve services and strengthen the functioning of their systems.

The CFSR is a multi-phase process that captures a state system's strengths and areas needing improvement. A program improvement process is included after the onsite review for states to address any areas of nonconformity and build on identified strengths. The Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is a state-specific plan that addresses the practice and systemic concerns found during CFSR that affect the system's ability to meet the needs of children and families. The PIP process provides an opportunity for the state child welfare agency, state legal and judicial systems, Tribes, other system partners, and those with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system to use information from the statewide assessment and the onsite review to develop, implement, and monitor the PIP. The PIP and its development process are designed to create lasting and statewide systemic improvements in key areas identified in the CFSR.

This document provides guiding principles, a suggested framework, and resources and tools states can use when developing a quality PIP.

### **Guiding Principles for Program Improvement Plan Development**

The CB firmly believes it is necessary for each state to have strong state agency and external partner leadership to create the change and innovation envisioned by the PIP process.<sup>1</sup> The buy-in, commitment, and support from leadership assists with successful implementation of efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Haight, J. & Mitchell, L. (2021, September). Lessons learned from the Child and Family Services Review rounds 1 through 3. *Children's Bureau Express*, 22(8).

<https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/article/2021/september/lessons-learned-from-the-child-and-family-services-review-rounds-1-through-3/1e3844031b92c150517620efe54bcba4>

National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care. (2010). *Leadership in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care initiative*. Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/leadershipbrief.pdf>

improve outcomes in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

When developing a PIP to improve practice and outcomes for children, youth, and families, consider the following guiding principles:

- Program improvement efforts should be consistent with the state’s vision for its child welfare system as described in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and Court Improvement Program (CIP) strategic plan. A well-designed child welfare system aligns the system’s structures, programs, processes, and improvement efforts with the state’s vision and continually assesses the achievement of goals, the quality of the actions and improvement efforts taken, and the resulting outcomes.
- A well-coordinated and integrated approach to executing federal requirements across programs, including improvement strategies and interventions, will help states achieve and demonstrate marked and sustained programmatic and systemic improvement.
- Improvement requires continually assessing performance on practices, programs, and processes that are reflected and/or assessed in the seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors. The CB continues to emphasize the importance of states developing a robust approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI).<sup>3</sup> A high-functioning CQI system will help states meet existing federal requirements for quality assurance (QA), periodic evaluation, and delivery of quality services. See the CQI framework as outlined in [ACYF-CB-IM-12-07](#).

State CQI processes help produce evidence that drives clinical and administrative decisions about how to improve outcomes for children and families. The CQI problem-solving process follows the standard Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle. This provides states with a structure to support the activities and behaviors required for the systematic process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems, and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions.

- Proper use of evidence is necessary to make accurate observations about performance on the CFSP outcomes and systemic factor functioning, uncover causes and contributing factors, and arrive at defensible solutions and strategies/interventions.<sup>4</sup> Reliance on quality

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<sup>2</sup> IBM Center for the Business of Government. (n.d.) *Chapter 2: Performance* [Issue brief]. <https://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/ch2Performance.pdf>

Casey Family Programs. (2019, September). *How can child protection agencies deepen partnerships with birth parents to advance systems change?* [Interview with David Sanders, Casey Family Programs’ executive vice president of Systems Improvement]. [https://www.casey.org/media/HO\\_Engaging-birth-parents-QA.pdf](https://www.casey.org/media/HO_Engaging-birth-parents-QA.pdf)  
Children’s Bureau. (2014). *A guide for implementing improvement through the CFSP and CFSR*. CFSR Information Portal. <https://www.cfsportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-3-resources/cfsr-round-3-program-improvement-planning-tools>

<sup>3</sup> “A CQI system is a coherent set of structures, functions, policies, and procedures that facilitate the CQI process. It is the interactive collection of agency departments, oversight procedures, data collection and analytic tools, reporting protocols, feedback mechanisms, and overarching agency culture that enable staff in various roles to conduct CQI activities. In other words, a CQI system is the supportive context inside which the CQI process runs.” (Wulczyn, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Wulczyn, F., Alpert, L., Orlebeke, B., & Haight, J. (2014). *Principles, language, and shared meaning: Toward a common understanding of CQI in child welfare*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://www.chapinhall.org/research/toward-a-common-understanding-of-cqi-in-child-welfare/>

and relevant evidence that is produced in accordance with best practices in measurement is a cornerstone of the PIP development process.

- Quality PIPs consider evidence of potential disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes for people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system. Advancing equity requires a systematic approach to identifying and understanding variation in the experiences and outcomes of different populations.<sup>5</sup>
- Quality PIPs build on existing processes, findings, plans, and lessons learned from other federal monitoring and reporting, including but not limited to the state’s most recent CFSR Final Report and PIP, CFSP, APSR, and CIP annual self-assessment and strategic plan, and other non-federally related activities, evaluations, and/or assessments of state processes, programs, and practices. These sources contain a wealth of information on state context; processes for engaging partners in the CQI process; assessments of performance; priority areas of focus; plans to improve child welfare structures, programs, and practices; results of monitoring activities and the evaluation of implemented strategies and interventions; needed adjustments; and plans for scaling implementation activities.
- Broad and meaningful engagement of system partners,<sup>6</sup> including those who work in and/or have lived experience with the child welfare system, is essential for gathering the best information, making accurate observations, and identifying, implementing, and monitoring effective strategies and/or interventions. This principle is grounded in the knowledge that a child welfare system is most effective in achieving its goals and improving outcomes for children, youth, and families when all partners who have a role in it contribute to its design and operation.
  - These individuals include persons who work in and/or have lived experience with the system, and who reflect the race, ethnicity, and other characteristics of those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system.<sup>7</sup>
  - Collaboration between legal and judicial communities and child welfare agencies is critical to strengthening the safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes for children and families as legal and judicial communities have an integral role in achieving positive outcomes for children and families. State legal and judicial partners should fully participate in PIP development and monitoring.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Executive Order No. 13985, 3 C.F.R. 7009 (2021). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

<sup>6</sup> System partners include but are not limited to Tribes, legal and judicial communities, agency caseworkers and supervisors, resource (foster) families, private agencies, service providers, federal partners, and communities.

<sup>7</sup> Underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected populations may include Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see: Children’s Bureau. (August 2020). *CFSR Technical Bulletin #12*. U.S.

The Children’s Bureau envisions the PIP development, implementation, and monitoring process as collaborative among state child welfare staff and leadership, Tribes, legal and judicial partners, other system partners, and individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system. Effective collaboration takes planning, time, and a commitment to work together to create change. Facilitators and structured facilitation methods can assist with being deliberate in the creation, coordination, management, and continuous assessment of PIP improvement efforts. Facilitation assists in creating productive, inclusive, and meaningful participation by all internal and external partners. This also provides an opportunity to have system partners, including legal and judicial representatives, Tribes, and persons with lived experience lead or co-lead meetings, discussions, and/or focus groups that occur as part of the process.

If states would like to have multi-day onsite meetings to help develop the state’s PIP, states are encouraged to take advantage of technical assistance provided by the Children’s Bureau’s Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative.<sup>9</sup>

The CFSR and PIP processes are part of the ongoing federal monitoring and state CQI change and implementation cycle and are intended to build on work states are already doing to identify system strengths and areas needing improvement, prioritize areas of focus, and make improvements through development, implementation, and monitoring of federal and state program improvement plans and the evaluation and reporting of progress. The cornerstones of all these monitoring and reporting processes are:

- Reliance on quality and relevant data and use of evidence to evaluate and demonstrate outcome performance and systemic factor functioning, including equity in programs administered, families served, practices, and child and family outcomes.
- Broad and meaningful involvement of persons with lived experience, legal and judicial communities, Tribes, child welfare system partners, and others with a vested interest in the child welfare system, including persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system.

## Framework

The results of the statewide assessment and onsite case reviews provide an early framework for development of the PIP, including review and analysis of relevant data and evidence of the system’s performance on each of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors.

In collaboration with persons with lived experience, legal and judicial communities, Tribes, and other child welfare system partners, the PIP development process should include:

- Engaging families and youth with lived experience, including those who represent the racial and ethnic populations and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system, and a

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Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/cfsr-technical-bulletin-12>

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see: Children’s Bureau. (August 2020). *CFSR Technical Bulletin #12*. U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/cfsr-technical-bulletin-12>

broad range of other system partners, including legal and judicial communities, Tribes, and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system.

- Establishing planning and implementation team(s), including members of the legal and judicial communities, persons with lived experience, Tribal representatives, and other system partners, with the authority, skills, and support to lead the development, implementation, and monitoring of the PIP.
- Creating ongoing bi-directional communication plans and feedback loops with internal and external partners for the entire PIP process.
- Using equity and inclusion principles throughout the PIP development process and CQI change and implementation activities.
- Identifying and evaluating results of prior data exploration and progress made from development, implementation, and monitoring of the state's prior PIP, most recent CFSP/APSR, statewide assessment, CIP self-assessment and strategic plan, and other continuous quality improvement activities. This can help support identifying and understanding areas of strength and drivers of strong practice, and provides opportunities to build on what is working well (e.g., scaling up and testing adaptations to other programs and practices).
- Completing deeper data exploration to determine contributing factors and root causes, including any potential differences across sub-populations and evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes.
- Identifying PIP goals that are broad and measurable for each area requiring improvement, including cross-cutting themes that emerge from analysis of data and evidence in the statewide assessment, onsite review, and other sources.
- Developing theories of change to assist with selection of strategies or interventions, and revisiting theories of change for already implemented strategies or interventions to consider for integration in the PIP.
- Selecting effective strategies or interventions that address the true cause(s) of the outcomes not in substantial conformity while considering whether the selected strategy or intervention is a good fit for the target population. Strategies or interventions can also address cross-cutting themes in more than one performance area needing improvement and can include strategies or interventions that legal and judicial communities will implement to address any areas needing improvement.
- Identifying groups of sites or localities to implement the selected strategies or interventions guided by evidence used to develop the PIP, selected PIP strategies or interventions, demonstrated practice improvement needs, readiness to be an implementation site, and the CQI change and implementation process.
- Developing a detailed implementation plan to guide day-to-day implementation work, including any communication and engagement strategies necessary to obtain needed buy-in and support, as well as data collection strategies that support both implementation and future assessment.

As with any CQI change and implementation process, PIPs need to be grounded in evidence—both quantitative and qualitative. The proper evidence needs to be considered to make accurate observations about performance, contributing factors, root causes, and solutions. This will provide a firm foundation for the change and implementation process envisioned by the PIP process.

The CFSR and PIP processes can also inform a state’s own CQI efforts to address areas of need and to strengthen practices, programs, and systems. It’s another data source to assist the state in measuring the quality of services provided and the effectiveness of processes and systems in operation by determining the impact those services have on child and family outcomes. The information gathered during the CFSR and PIP processes can be used to inform strategies or interventions in the state’s CFSP and CIP strategic plan, and other CQI initiatives. The cyclical improvement process, as shown in Figure 1 below, supports meeting states where they are in the continuum of data exploration, implementation, evaluation of results, and decisions made to adjust or restart the process based on the area of focus.

**Figure 1: CQI Change and Implementation Framework**<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Capacity Building Center for States. (2018). *Change and implementation in practice: Overview*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_pdf/ci-briefs-a-cp-00027.pdf](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/ci-briefs-a-cp-00027.pdf)

## Recommended Activities and Questions to Consider in the Program Improvement Plan Development Process

The [CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual](#) is a comprehensive guide to Round 4 CFSR processes and procedures, including developing, implementing, and monitoring the Program Improvement Plan. Chapter 9: Developing the Program Improvement Plan—Overview of Program Improvement Plan Development, Approval, and Implementation, and Appendix E: Collaborating During the Child and Family Services Reviews both provide a strong foundation of the steps and activities necessary for child welfare systems to complete in developing their PIPs as well as required elements to include in the PIP.

Additional resources to consider in the PIP development process:

- [Child and Family Services Reviews: Guiding Principles, Framework, and Tools for the Statewide Assessment Process](#) includes activities and questions to consider when completing a quality statewide assessment. These activities and questions provide a forum for a child welfare system to complete deep problem exploration, so the statewide assessment makes accurate observations grounded in data and evidence about performance and uncovers contributing factors. This provides a framework for PIP development.
- [Children’s Bureau Advancing Equity and Inclusion Through the Child and Family Services Reviews](#)<sup>11</sup> provides a framework for ensuring that child welfare systems are serving all people equitably, and with respect for all individuals, particularly those in underserved and adversely affected communities. This document lists equity and inclusion-centered questions to ask through all phases of the CFSR as well as specifically for development of the PIP.
- [Engaging Young People With Lived Experience in the Child and Family Services Reviews: Key Considerations, Roles, and Recommendations](#) explains key considerations, roles, and recommendations for states when engaging young people in the CFSRs, and specifically describes roles for young people in PIP development and monitoring.
- [Assessing Systemic Factor Functioning Using Data and Evidence](#) is a compilation of briefs that highlights the importance of collecting and using quality data and information to assess statewide functioning of systemic factors. The briefs also include “Getting Curious” questions for each systemic factor. While not required to determine a state’s substantial conformity with each systemic factor, these questions can assist with further data exploration to inform PIP development for any areas needing improvement.

Outlined below in Table 1 are recommended activities and questions to consider in the PIP development process. Although these activities are presented in order, moving through them is not intended to be a linear process because states will likely be at different phases based on current or prior related CQI change and implementation work, and deep problem exploration that occurred during the development of the statewide assessment.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information, see Capacity Building Center for States. (2021). *Focusing on race equity throughout change and implementation*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_pdf/race-equity-change-implementation-cp-20140.pdf](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/race-equity-change-implementation-cp-20140.pdf)

**Table 1: Activities and Questions to Consider for Program Improvement Plan Development<sup>12</sup>**

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
<p>A. Identify PIP development team(s) and associated work groups, including a broad array of system partners, especially individuals with lived expertise in the child welfare system, Tribes, and legal and judicial partners.</p>	<p>Build a team that will guide the PIP development process, facilitate communication, share decision-making authority within the PIP development process, and develop sub-teams or work groups as needed to assist at different stages to carry out specific activities.</p> <p>The team should be broad and representative of internal staff and system partners, which will ensure better understanding of the issue and broad ownership of the solution, and will assist with spreading knowledge through the agency and community. Key system partners include youth, young adults, and parents with lived experience; relative caregivers and resource families; judges and attorneys; Tribes; and other community partners. When feasible, teams should involve individuals representing the diverse characteristics of the communities served by the agency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When forming the team or work group, think broadly about what roles and expertise are required. Who are the system partners that need to be represented on the team(s)? What training and information will be provided to system partners prior to engagement? Is it accessible and diverse? Will meetings be held when all internal and external partners can participate?</li> <li>• Are the teams composed of individuals who reflect the race, ethnicity, and other characteristics of those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system? If not, who is missing? Is a widely published marketing and/or outreach strategy necessary to build teams that are diverse and accessible? Are system partners able to lead efforts to recruit more peer partners?</li> <li>• Does the team or work group have an organized communication plan, a clear</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from the following resources from the Capacity Building Center for States, Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: *Change and implementation in practice: Problem exploration* [Issue brief]. (2018). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/change-and-implementation-in-practice-problem-exploration-brief>; *Change and implementation in practice: Teaming* [Issue brief]. (2018). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/teaming>; *Change and implementation in practice: Theory of change* [Issue brief]. (2018). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/theory-of-change>; *Change and implementation in practice: Intervention selection and design/adaptation* [Issue brief]. (2018). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/intervention-selection-design-adaptation>; *Change and implementation in practice: Readiness* [Issue brief]. (2018). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/readiness>; *Change and implementation in practice: Implementation planning and capacity building* [Issue brief]. (2019). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/implementation-planning-capacity-building>; *CQI training academy handbook* [Online course]. (2022). <https://learn.childwelfare.gov/>; *Strategic planning in child welfare: Strategies for meaningful youth, family, and other partner engagement*. (2022). <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/strategic-planning-meaningful-engagement>.



Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<p>Key partners should also be offered real responsibilities and leadership roles within the PIP development teams, as appropriate. Giving external partners ownership of a specific part of a project creates shared responsibility and works to seek their input at the beginning of the process, not after key decisions have been made.</p> <p>Additionally, these system partners can assist with PIP implementation and monitoring. Involving system partners in the PIP development, implementation, and monitoring processes can also provide an opportunity for the child welfare agency to establish ongoing and sustainable engagement plans and/or strategies with system partners.</p>	<p>decision-making process within the team and agency, and an agreed-upon working approach? Did the team or work group establish a common purpose/vision, and are they following a well-defined set of common objectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the team or work group have a specified approach for generating and/or acquiring data and evidence, processing it, and applying it to the areas that are the focus for improvement?</li> <li>• How will the team or work group gather feedback from those outside the team or work group? Is there flexibility in providing feedback either verbally or written? How will the team or work group communicate with those outside the team about how the information they shared will be used and next steps taken by the team or work group?</li> </ul>
<p>B. Ensure broad and diverse perspectives involved in intensive root cause analysis of areas needing improvement and distilling potential root causes into any cross-cutting themes.</p>	<p>Root cause analysis is about determining the factors that contribute to the identified area needing improvement as well as deciding which factor is most likely to have caused the area needing improvement to emerge. After possible root causes are identified, data or evidence should be generated and/or acquired and used to validate each root cause. Also, teams should identify the target population most affected by the problem and related areas needing improvement as this group will benefit from or be affected by an intervention leading to the desired outcomes.</p> <p>Engaging a broad and diverse group of internal and external partners in root cause analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is the target population most affected by the problem or at risk of experiencing it? What are their characteristics (e.g., age range, geographic location, experiences related to child welfare system) in specific terms?</li> <li>• Are individuals who are reflected in the data participating in the analysis of the data, including persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system?</li> <li>• Is there sufficient time before, during, and in between meetings to allow participants to analyze and discuss available data and evidence as</li> </ul>

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<p>will assist with validating root causes and helping to identify cross-cutting themes. When a broad group is engaged in root cause analysis, these individuals will bring their own diverse perspectives as well as theories about the root causes. These individuals may also be able to bring additional data or evidence to help validate each root cause.</p> <p>It is important to prepare internal and external partners to participate in a root cause analysis of areas needing improvement. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting relevant data or evidence from the case reviews, statewide assessment, CFSR Final Report, previous CFSR Final Reports and PIP monitoring reports, statewide data indicators, and other relevant data or evidence.</li> <li>• Inviting team or work group members and other system partners to attend the CFSR Final Report meeting and record it for those not able to attend.</li> <li>• Creating digestible data/information packets for internal and external partners to review before meetings. Clear data presentations using well-designed data visualizations can help a team understand the data and any trends, patterns, or variations more easily.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>	<p>well as collect additional data and evidence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you engaged with other system partners not on the team or work group to help collect and analyze additional data? Have you discussed data findings and their implications with them to get their perspectives?</li> <li>• Once potential root causes have been identified, is there data or evidence pointing to the root causes?</li> <li>• Is there a mechanism to receive feedback from individuals not on the team or work group about the potential root causes and identify if additional data is needed?</li> <li>• Is there consensus among team or work group members and system partners on the root cause(s)?</li> <li>• Are there external factors that affect the problem and its root cause(s)? Are there internal factors that affect the problem and its root cause(s)? Are there any constraints that may limit the state agency's ability to address certain root causes?</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> For more information on exploring and discussing state performance on the CFSR statewide data indicators as well as how to use visual representations of the data to reveal patterns and differences, see *Guide for using the state data profile and context data—CFSR Round 4 Planning and Implementation Tool*, <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/using-state-data-worksheet>, and *Application example for using the state data profile and context data—CFSR Round 4 Planning and Implementation Tool*,

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding pre-meetings to review data, allow an opportunity for discussion and questions, identify any data gaps, and provide an example of root cause analysis of a CFSR item to demonstrate the process from beginning to end.</li> <li>• Recording any pre-meetings, which will allow those to access them if they are unable to attend.</li> </ul> <p>These activities prepare individuals so they can actively participate in the discussion.</p> <p><b>For more questions to assist with data analysis, including identifying patterns or trends in data, see the <a href="#">Child and Family Services Reviews: Guiding Principles, Framework, and Tools for the Statewide Assessment Process</a> and, in particular, <a href="#">Table 1: Activities and Questions to Consider for Statewide Assessment</a>.</b></p>	
<p>C. Use meaningful input from system partners as well as data to develop theories of change to address any areas needing improvement.</p>	<p>A theory of change describes the root cause of the problem, the desired long-term outcome(s), and how to reach those outcome(s). It outlines what needs to occur before the desired outcome can be achieved. Desired outcomes should be understandable, directly related to the problem, and realistically achievable.</p> <p>A theory of change can assist with achieving buy-in from system partners; selecting the right intervention to achieve short- and long-term outcomes; and helping identify measures to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are individuals who reflect the target population participating in developing the theory of change, including persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system?</li> <li>• Has the team or work group developed a credible theory about how to address the root cause(s) of the problem?</li> <li>• Did the team clearly define expected short- and long-term outcomes?</li> <li>• Is there a clear, logical pathway</li> </ul>

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/using-state-data-application-example> from Capacity Building Center for States. (2022). Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<p>assess intended impact and whether needed adjustments are necessary during implementation.</p> <p>To be useful, a theory of change should meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is widespread agreement that the logic makes sense, and there is data or evidence to support that logic.</li> <li>• Needed resources can be obtained to implement the pathway of change that the theory suggests.</li> <li>• There are credible ways to explore whether predicted results occur.</li> <li>• Team or work group members and other system partners view the outcomes as important, and expected changes are worth the effort.</li> </ul> <p>When working with internal and external partners to develop a theory of change, it is helpful to do pre-work with team or work group members as well as system partners to explain what a theory of change is and how to develop one. This process can be new, so providing examples of theories of change, including theories of change with multiple root causes, and using different approaches (e.g., the “staircase” approach or “so that” chain approach) to develop the theory of change, may be helpful.</p>	<p>from the problem to the expected outcomes? Are there data to support the causal links and any underlying assumptions in the theory of change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the team explored potential challenges (e.g., systemic and organizational capacity issues) to achieving the short- and long-term outcomes?</li> <li>• Did the team seek meaningful input and feedback on the theory of change from system partners to ensure the theory of change is plausible, doable, testable, and meaningful?</li> </ul>
<p>D. Co-develop or co-select strategies and/or interventions to address root causes leading to measurable improvement in the areas needing</p>	<p>The strategy or intervention selection process includes researching possible intervention or strategy options; assessing evidence, fit, and feasibility of possible strategies or</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the intervention address the agency’s identified problem and theory of change? Is there evidence that the intervention will work? Is the intervention well-defined? Is it usable/transferable? Is the</li> </ul>

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
improvement.	<p>interventions;<sup>14</sup> determining whether the interventions are well-defined so they can be replicated; and deciding whether to replicate the strategy or intervention, adapt an existing strategy or intervention, or design a new one.</p> <p>Creating or selecting strategies and/or interventions should be a team effort. The collective talent and experience of a team of internal and external system partners can make an invaluable contribution during this phase. Also, the team approach can assist agencies in increasing successful implementation by the team taking the time to research well-defined strategies or interventions, and understand any evidence of effectiveness and fit with the agency and target population along with feasibility to implement within the 2-year PIP implementation period. The team approach also provides an opportunity to have external partners implement or support implementation of the strategy or intervention as well as create buy-in to support implementation.</p> <p><b>For more detailed information about the process for selecting or designing an intervention or strategy, including determining whether the identified problem is technical or adaptive, see Chapter 9: Developing the Program Improvement Plan—Overview of Program Improvement Plan</b></p>	<p>intervention feasible for the agency to implement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the team or work group solicited input and feedback on potential strategies or interventions from system partners? Do system partners think the strategy or intervention will have the intended impact—achieving the desired outcome for the target population(s)?</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> To consider the impact that proposed policies, programs, practices, strategies, or interventions could have on those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the state’s child welfare system, see “Racial Equity Impact Analysis Tool, What’s race got to do with it?,” Stamey Street Consultant Group. (2021). <https://stameystreet.com/tools/>

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<b>Development, Approval, and Implementation in the <a href="#">CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual</a>, and Capacity Building Center for States, <a href="#">Change and Implementation in Practice—Intervention, Selection, and Design/Adaptation</a></b>	

For more information regarding selecting implementation sites, assessing readiness to implement to increase the likelihood that selected strategies and/or interventions will succeed, and developing an implementation plan to provide a roadmap for the implementation, identify any anticipated challenges, and serve as a communication tool among team members, leadership, and partners, see:

- Chapter 9: Developing the Program Improvement Plan—Overview of Program Improvement Plan Development, Approval, and Implementation, [CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual](#)
- Capacity Building Center for States, [Change and Implementation in Practice—Readiness](#)
- Capacity Building Center for States, [Change and Implementation in Practice—Implementation Planning and Capacity Building](#)

Once the Children’s Bureau approves the state’s PIP, the state engages in continuous evaluation and monitoring of PIP implementation and determines if any adjustments are necessary. This involves monitoring and assessing whether a PIP strategy or intervention is being implemented as planned and having the intended effect. Agency staff, Tribes, legal and judicial partners, other system partners, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system can assist with monitoring and assessing implementation. Feedback loops with internal staff, external partners, and individuals with lived experience can provide data to help assess progress and challenges with implementation and the potential need for adjustment of PIP strategies and interventions.

For more information about implementation of the PIP; ongoing assessment of progress and adjustment, if necessary, of any strategies or interventions in the PIP; and PIP progress reporting requirements, see Chapter 10: Program Improvement Plan Implementation and Monitoring, *CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual*.

## Additional Resources

- Children’s Bureau. (2019). *Information Memorandum 19-03: Engaging, empowering, and utilizing family and youth voice in all aspects of child welfare to drive case planning and system improvement*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/im-19-03>
- Children’s Bureau. (2014). *A Guide for Implementing Improvement Through the CFSP and CFSR*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-3-resources/cfsr-round-3-program-improvement-planning-tools>
- Capacity Building Center for States. (2022). *Strategic planning in child welfare: Strategies for meaningful youth, family, and other partner engagement*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_pdf/Strategic%20Planning%20in%20CW-Integrating%20Efforts\\_508\\_FINAL.pdf](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/Strategic%20Planning%20in%20CW-Integrating%20Efforts_508_FINAL.pdf)
- Capacity Building Center for States. (2019). *Strategies for authentic integration of family and youth voice in child welfare*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_pdf/authentic-integration-families-cp-00029.pdf](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/authentic-integration-families-cp-00029.pdf)
- Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.). *Change and implementation in practice series* [webpage]. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/topics/cqi/change-implementation>
- Capacity Building Center for States. (2022). *CFSR Connections and Integration Tool*. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_pdf/original-CFSR-Connections-and-Integration\\_Tool\\_10.31.22-508jr.pdf](https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/original-CFSR-Connections-and-Integration_Tool_10.31.22-508jr.pdf)
- Permanency Innovations Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project. (2016). *Guide to developing, implementing, and assessing an innovation*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/guide-developing-implementing-and-assessing-innovation>