

Child and Family Services Reviews: Guiding Principles, Framework, and Tools for the Statewide Assessment Process

The Children's Bureau (CB), part of the Department of Health and Human Services, administers 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 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 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 the system.

The CFSRs are a partnership between federal and state staff. The CFSR is a multi-phase process that begins with the statewide assessment. Information provided in the statewide assessment informs the Children's Bureau's determinations of substantial conformity and subsequent phases of the CFSR. The statewide assessment provides an opportunity for states to gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data and evidence to evaluate their child welfare programs and practices.

The statewide assessment is initiated when the Children's Bureau transmits the CFSR data profile to the state. The data profile provides states with performance information on child outcomes related to safety and permanency. The Children's Bureau creates the data profile using the state's administrative data (from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS] and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System [NCANDS]). In addition to the CFSR data profile, states use their own qualitative and administrative data along with relevant data from agency partners and stakeholders to examine and report on performance in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being and the routine statewide functioning of systemic factors.

This document provides guiding principles, a suggested framework, and resources and tools states can use when completing a quality statewide assessment.

Guiding Principles for the Statewide Assessment

The Children's Bureau (CB) firmly believes it is necessary for each state to have a shared vision across its child welfare system to achieve desired outcomes. A state's vision for its child welfare system provides the basis for system structures and functions to produce desired outcomes in

the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being.¹

When assessing how well your state child welfare system is operating, consider the following guiding principles:

- A well-designed child welfare system aligns the system's structures, programs, and processes with the state's vision and continually assesses the achievement of goals, the quality of the actions 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 each of the seven child and family outcomes and the seven systemic factors. The CB continues to emphasize the importance of states developing a robust approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI).² 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 CFSSR outcomes and systemic factor functioning, uncover causes and contributing factors, and arrive at defensible solutions and strategies/interventions.³ Reliance on quality and relevant evidence that is produced in accordance with best practices in measurement is a cornerstone of the statewide assessment and applies to

¹ National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care. (2010). *Leadership in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/leadershipbrief.pdf>

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

² "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).

³ Wulczyn, F., Alpert, L., Orlebeke, B., & Haight, J. (2014). *Principles, Language, and Shared Meaning: Toward a Common Understanding of CQI in Child Welfare*. The Center for State Child Welfare Data at Chapin Hall. https://fcda.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014-07-Principles-Language-and-Shared-Meaning_Toward-a-Common-Understanding-of-CQI-in-Child-Welfare.pdf

the collection and use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

- Quality assessments 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.⁴
- Broad and meaningful engagement of system partners,⁵ including those who work in and 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. 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 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.⁶
- Quality statewide assessments 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 CF SR Final Report, Program Improvement Plan (PIP), Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and Court Improvement Program (CIP) Annual Report and Strategic Plan. 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.
- Results of the statewide assessment help inform planning for CF SR onsite case reviews, provide an early framework for development of the PIP, and provide direction for ongoing CQI change and implementation activities.

⁴ 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/>

⁵ System partners include but are not limited to Tribes, legal and judicial communities, agency caseworkers and supervisors, resource families, private agencies, service providers, federal partners, and communities.

⁶ 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.

The statewide assessment process is part of the ongoing federal monitoring and state CQI change and implementation cycle and is 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, child welfare system partners, Tribes, 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

When preparing for the statewide assessment, begin by reviewing the state's vision for the child welfare system, which provides the basis for the organization of system structures and functions to produce desired outcomes.

At the system level, states will need to determine, in collaboration with a broad range of system partners, how well the vision is realized in the core structures and processes of the state's child welfare system. Among the organizational structures and processes are systemic factors. When routinely functioning within a state, systemic factors support positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. States will need to assess systemic processes as well as the quality of the results being produced by those processes, and the potential need for system-level solutions and adjustments. This process involves:

- Engaging families and youth with lived experience 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 broad range of other system partners and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system
- Using equity and inclusion principles throughout the statewide assessment process and CQI change and implementation activities
- Collecting and using data and evidence to understand system dynamics, outcome performance and potential differences across sub-populations, and the routine statewide functioning of systemic factors (this may require identifying any lack of data and developing/implementing one or more data collection plans)
- Identifying and understanding areas of strength and drivers of strong practice; this provides opportunities to build on what is working well (e.g., scaling up, testing adaptations to other programs and practices)

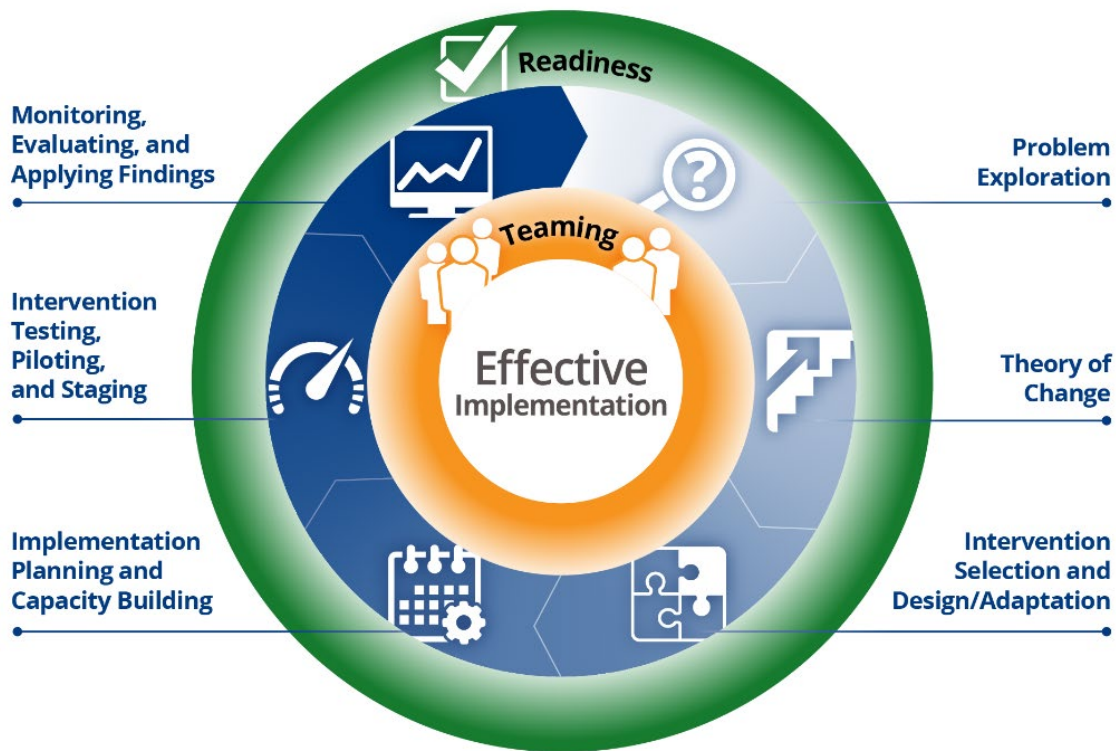
- Identifying and understanding areas in need of improvement
- Completing deeper data exploration to determine contributing factors and root causes
- Reviewing theories of change and implemented strategies and interventions
- Evaluating results of CQI change and implementation processes
- Determining the need for potential adjustments, adaptations, and readiness to scale up

As with the CQI change and implementation process, statewide assessments 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. Reliance on evidence that is produced in accordance with best practices in measurement⁷ is one of the cornerstones of the statewide assessment. Collecting and using relevant evidence for the statewide assessment is required for states to understand and demonstrate the degree to which (a) system structures, programs, processes, and practices are aligned with the state’s vision, goals, objectives, and strategies, and (b) desired results and equitable outcomes for children and families served are achieved.

States are encouraged to prioritize areas of focus and build on prior data exploration, lessons learned, and results from development, implementation, and monitoring of the state’s most recent CFSR/PIP, CFSP/APSR, CIP Report and Strategic Plan, and other state CQI change and implementation activities. 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.

⁷ Wulczn et al., *Principles, Language, and Shared Meaning*.

Figure 1: CQI Change and Implementation Framework⁸



Recommended Activities and Questions to Consider in the Statewide Assessment Process

Outlined below in Table 1 are recommended activities and questions to consider in the statewide assessment 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 their areas of focus and current or prior related CQI change and implementation work. Movement between the steps is expected as data exploration progresses and analysis leads to more questions and a need for additional data to support observations grounded in evidence. Results of this process will provide evidence to support the state’s observations related to child welfare system strengths and improvement needs, including contributing factors and root causes.

⁸ Source: Capacity Building Center for States. (2018). *Change and implementation in practice: Overview* [Issue brief]. [https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/119888.pdf?r=1&rpp=10&upp=0&w=+NATIVE\(%27recno=119888%27\)&m=1](https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/119888.pdf?r=1&rpp=10&upp=0&w=+NATIVE(%27recno=119888%27)&m=1)

Table 1: Activities and Questions to Consider for Statewide Assessment⁹

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
<p>A. Review the state’s vision for its child welfare system.</p>	<p>Reviewing the vision for the state’s child welfare system will help ground the statewide assessment in the direction the state is headed and the potential transformation being made.</p> <p>This helps the assessment serve as an extension of the CQI change and implementation process that is used to achieve the state’s vision and desired outcomes.</p> <p>Engage individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system in the review and discussion as they will provide different and important perspectives to consider throughout the process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = very unclear, 10 = very clear), how clearly does the state describe or articulate the vision for its child welfare system? • How well is the vision for the state’s child welfare system understood and supported across system partners, individuals with lived experience, and the community? • Are the individuals participating in the statewide assessment process reflective of the race, ethnicity, and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system? If not, who is missing?
<p>B. Identify the key structures and functions of the system that are designed to support the state’s effort to achieve its vision and desired outcomes.</p>	<p>Discussing how the state’s child welfare system is organized and designed to achieve the vision will help identify the structures and functions that need to be assessed to determine whether they support and contribute/lead to desired results or require adjustments.</p> <p>Examples of these structures and functions include the state’s practice model; process to plan and integrate systemic improvement efforts across agencies, courts, and other partners based on data-informed decision-making (e.g., QA/CQI); child protection hotlines, intake process; workforce recruitment and retention; Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) development; contracts and performance management; community collaborations; framework and plan to advance equity and inclusion; and the seven systems comprising the CFSR systemic factors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are there strong partnerships within the child welfare system between and among youth, families, Tribes, communities, and others with a vested interest (e.g., legal and judicial communities, service providers)? Do these partners include individuals who reflect the race, ethnicity, and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system? • What systematic approaches are employed to implement an equity and inclusion framework, assess disparities, and promote equity throughout the system and in outcomes achieved? • To what extent do the system’s structures have quality data available for assessment, to ground observations, and to provide strong evidence of systemic functioning?

⁹ Adapted from Capacity Building Center for States. (2018). *Change and implementation in practice: Problem exploration* [Issue brief]. <https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/capacity/Blob/119580.pdf?r=1&rpp=10&upp=0&w=recno=119580&m=1>; and, for questions to consider, from Child Trends. (2019). *How to embed a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research: Practical guidance for the research process*. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RacialEthnicEquityPerspective_ChildTrends_October2019.pdf; and Capacity Building Center for States (2021). *Focusing on race equity throughout change and implementation*. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/change-implementation-focusing-on-race-equity>

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the state’s process for planning, integration, and evaluation of strengths and needs across the system and for meeting federal and state reporting requirements?
<p>C. Collect and review data to assess the extent to which the state is accomplishing required and desired functioning and outcomes, and to identify system and practice strengths and areas needing improvement.</p>	<p>Reviewing the CFSR state data profile, supplemental context data, state administrative data, case review results, and other quantitative and qualitative data and information will help identify system and practice strengths and areas needing improvement, including potential disparities in treatment and outcomes. During this step, it may be discovered that data to assess some areas of the system, program, and practice do not exist or are missing or unavailable. For example, not having contractor-related training data to assess routine statewide functioning of the Staff and Provider Training Systemic Factor, or not having data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other characteristics of historically underserved and marginalized populations to assess equity in decisions, services, practices, and outcomes. In these instances, a data collection plan may need to be developed and implemented.</p> <p>Involve a broad range of persons in review of the data, including those with lived experience, child welfare system partners, Tribes, and others with a vested interests in the child welfare 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. Use this information to determine the extent to which the state is making progress toward achieving the vision and whether or not structures and processes are functioning as intended to produce desired results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What performance measures are used to assess progress toward achieving the state’s vision and desired outcomes? • Are data available for all of the practice areas, outcomes, and systemic factors assessed in the CFSR? • Is information available about the experiences and outcomes of the racial and ethnic populations served by the system? Does the state have additional data available for other underserved and marginalized populations (e.g., LGBTQ+, differently abled children, English as a second language, children and families living in poverty), and to explore the intersectionality of multiple identities (e.g., differently abled children of color)? • How well are the state’s systems, structures, and processes producing positive results? • How did the state perform on the statewide data indicators relative to national performance? • What do the data show regarding disproportionality within the system and disparity in outcomes? • Are individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system involved in discussions regarding the collection and review of the data? • What are the trends in performance over time? Is the state trending in the desired direction? • What would you characterize as systemic strengths and areas needing improvement? Which ones have changed over time, and which ones have stayed the same?
<p>D. Analyze the data to better understand the scope of performance.</p>	<p>To better understand system performance, it is necessary to drill down into the data to become as specific as possible about the scope of systemic functioning and practice areas of focus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What systems or areas of practice show strengths and areas needing improvement? • What variations or patterns exist? • Which populations are most at risk of

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
	<p>Examine the characteristics of affected populations and subsets of available data from multiple sources to deepen the state’s understanding of each identified strength or area needing improvement and affected populations.</p> <p>Engage individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system in the analysis of data as they will provide different and important perspectives, including stories and context behind the numbers.</p>	<p>coming to the attention of the child welfare system and entering the foster care system? How might this affect other data points along the continuum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which populations are most at risk of not achieving desired outcomes? Do outcomes differ across populations (e.g., age group, race, ethnicity, geographic location)? For example, is the observation true statewide, or are there variations across counties or racial, ethnic, or other underserved and marginalized populations? • What are the characteristics of the sub-populations? • Are the populations reflected in the data participating in the analysis of the data? • How are qualitative findings and guided discussions with individuals reflected in the data used to understand the stories and context behind the numbers? • Have you considered how implicit biases might affect interpretation of the data and how you can lessen biases? • What are the limitations of the analysis and its findings?
<p>E. Identify priority areas of focus to target deeper data exploration based on key questions the team seeks to answer about the system.</p>	<p>Identifying areas to focus deeper data exploration and to address key questions will help the team better understand the drivers, contributing factors, and root cause(s) affecting systemic functioning and practice.</p> <p>This activity will also help determine additional data collection needs.</p> <p>It is important to engage individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system in the identification of priority areas of focus, as they may have differing perspectives and recommendations.</p> <p>States will likely revisit results of prior assessments and areas of prior practice improvement and systemic CQI change and implementation activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the priority areas of focus for deeper data exploration? • What are the questions the assessment team seeks to address? Why were the areas for additional data exploration identified as priorities and by whom? • Are the values and ideas of youth, families, and communities served represented in the questions asked and the data collected to answer the questions? Was there input and agreement across populations served by the child welfare system regarding priority areas of focus and questions to address? • Which population(s)/sub-population(s) is/are most affected by the identified area of focus? • How do individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system view this area of focus? How do Tribes, system partners, and others with vested interests view it? Why? • How are the priority areas of focus aligned to other current state initiatives, and

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
		<p>interconnected to other systems and practices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do these priority areas relate to previous areas of focus in the state? If there has been related work, what was learned previously and what questions need to be revisited or remain unanswered? • If the area of focus is a strength, what does the state want and need to learn more about to build on the success? • If the area of focus is one needing improvement, what questions were raised from looking at available data?
<p>F. Review, update, or create a data collection and analysis plan for deeper data exploration.</p>	<p>Creating a data collection and exploration plan will help identify and organize the additional data needed to answer questions raised and information needed to better understand the strength or problem, contributing factors, and possible root cause(s).</p> <p>Qualitative data may need to be collected to provide more depth and understanding for quantitative data; context for understanding the numbers.</p> <p>Discuss plans for data collection and analysis with individuals who work in and have lived experience with the child welfare system, including individuals who reflect the race, ethnicity, and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system, as they will provide important and helpful perspectives and suggestions regarding approach, methodologies, and plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What additional data are needed, and are the data available or do they need to be collected? • What information and results are available from prior practice improvement and system change efforts? • What questions and concerns have been raised about the data (e.g., measures, periods represented, missing or incorrect data)? Can these be addressed? • Which types of data analyses are most appropriate to answer the questions being asked? • How will individuals from, and affected by, the area of focus and who reflect the populations served be involved in the design of data collection plans and analysis of data?

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
<p>G. Review and analyze additional data to identify possible contributing factors and root causes that can be validated with available evidence.</p>	<p>Analyzing additional data will help the state better understand and provide evidence to support observations related to the strength or problem, contributing factors, and potential root cause(s).</p> <p>Involve a broad range of persons in the analysis of data, including those with lived experience, child welfare system partners, Tribes, and others with vested interests in the child welfare system and who reflect the population in communities served. These individuals will provide different and important perspectives, including stories and context behind the numbers. Be attentive to how these groups interpret the findings, and what questions they ask about the data.</p> <p>Assessing whether evidence supports the contributing factors and root causes will result in defensible theories of change.</p> <p>Evidence may be generated with targeted data collection and/or research findings from child welfare studies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the strength and relevancy of the data? • What information does the additional data (combination) provide? Does it tell the same story, more of the story, or a different story? • What events, factors, and conditions contribute or lead to the strength or problem? • 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? • What internal or external factors affect the root cause(s) and/or contributing factors? • Have underlying reasons for differences in experiences and outcomes for different populations/sub-populations been explored? What factors could potentially contribute to inequities and disparities? • What else is noticeable or may be occurring at the same time? • How would you describe the level of agreement among partners regarding the identified root cause(s) and/or contributing factors (e.g., consensus)? • What data or research supports the identified root cause(s) and/or contributing factors? • How are qualitative findings and guided discussions used to understand the stories and context behind the numbers? • Have you considered how implicit biases might affect interpretation of the data and how you can lessen biases? • What are the limitations of the analysis and its findings? • Do findings suggest a need for adjustments and improvements to existing plans and CQI change and implementation activities?
<p>H. Document observations and identify the most appropriate and</p>	<p>Taking time to document observations and determine which ones are the most salient, and what evidence provides the best support for those observations, are important steps in the process. The team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you characterize the observations? Are they new or existing observations? • What are the most relevant observations to highlight in the state's assessment of

Activity	Description	Questions to Consider
<p>salient evidence or combination of evidence to demonstrate results of the statewide assessment.</p>	<p>will want to ensure that all of the information needed to show the results of the statewide assessment is documented. Determine how best to concisely articulate the state’s observations and supporting data and evidence, including the use of tables and graphs to display information.</p> <p>Consider having an array of individuals review the information, observations, and explanations to make sure the information is understandable across system partners, including those with lived experience.</p>	<p>the seven practice outcomes and seven systemic factors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What feedback has the state received from system partners and individuals with lived experience and vested interests in the system regarding the observations and information in the statewide assessment? • What evidence best supports the state’s observations about the routine statewide functioning of systemic factors and system performance on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes? • What is seen as most noteworthy? And what evidence or combination of evidence is the most relevant and on point with the outcome or systemic factor item?

Additional Resources

- Capacity Building Center for States. (2019). *Strategies for authentic integration of family and youth voice in child welfare*.
https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/authentic-integration-families-cp-00029.pdf
- Capacity Building Center for States. (2018). *Strategic planning in child welfare: Strategies for meaningful stakeholder engagement*.
https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/sites/default/files/media_pdf/meaningful-stakeholder-engagement-cp-00031.pdf
- Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.). *Change and implementation in practice series* [webpage]. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/topics/cqi/change-implementation>
- Children's Bureau. (2022). *Assessing systemic factor functioning using data and evidence* [Guidance document in preparation]. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-instruments-tools-and-guides>
- Children's Bureau. (2020, June). *Systemic factors—results from the CFSRs: 2015–2018*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_systemic_factors_report_2020.pdf
- CFSR Information Portal. (n.d.). *CFSR official reports and results* [webpage].
<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/cfsr-reports>
- CFSR Round 3 statewide data indicators (supplemental context emailed to each state). See: CFSR Information Portal. (n.d.). *CFSR round 3 statewide data indicators* [webpage].
<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-3-resources/cfsr-round-3-statewide-data-indicators>
- Children's Bureau. (n.d.). *Child welfare outcomes report data* [webpage].
<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). *Kids count data center* [webpage].
<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>
- National Center for Juvenile Justice. (n.d.). *Disproportionality rates for children of color in foster care dashboard* [webpage].
https://ncjj.org/AFCARS/Disproportionality_Dashboard.aspx

Appendix: Data Analysis Checklist

The Data Analysis Checklist provides a short, easy way to help assess the quality and relevance of evidence used for analysis. The questions focus on the scope and methods used to generate evidence and are designed to confirm that the information is relevant and reliable to use for analysis, and to support observations and conclusions. This checklist is an optional resource that may be helpful for individuals planning, conducting, and/or reviewing data analysis done for a variety of purposes, including, but not limited to, Child and Family Services Plans (CFSPs), Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs), CFSR Statewide Assessments, Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), Court Improvement Program (CIP) Self-Assessments, and state program evaluations.



The Question

- Is it clear what question this analysis is answering?
*What is the analytic question?*¹⁰



The Evidence/Data/Methodology

- Can you identify the source and characteristics of the data? Are the data provided, and are they complete?
What is the data source?
How current are the data (through what month/quarter/year)?
- Is the information presented clearly labeled?
- Does the population selected for the analysis match the question?
What population is selected for analysis?
- Does the method of analysis match the question being asked or the observation being made?
 - *If the analysis is about a system outcome, does the method use aggregate data?*
 - *If the analysis is about a root cause, does the analysis rely on targeted data collection, either qualitative or quantitative?*
 - *If the analysis is about the quality of a system of care, does it rely on qualitative data collection, such as through focus groups?*
- Should there be a comparison group, and if so, is it included in the analysis?
What population is used for comparison?
- Does the analysis consider variation (e.g., by place, by population, over time)?

¹⁰ A research or analytic question is designed to guide the acquisition and generation of evidence that when processed (or analyzed) increases one's knowledge and is related to a theory or a hypothesis. A good data analytic question specifies the target population and the measurable change that population should experience. Sometimes the question is descriptive (e.g., How often do children placed in care move during their first year in care?), sometimes it is comparative (e.g., Are children who enter care in 2021 moving more now in their first year of care as compared with children placed in care in 2019?), and sometimes it is causal (e.g., To what extent are children who were placed in care in 2021 moving more in their first year of care because of pandemic-related issues?).

- Does the analysis consider whether observed variations may be a consequence of disparities in systems, structures, policies, and/or practices?
- Are the limitations of the data identified?
- Is the data source accurate and reliable?
- Does the analysis answer the question?



The Conclusion

- Are the arguments summarized and clear?
- Are all graphic representations of the data clearly explained in the narrative?
- Were associated factors or data used to better inform the analysis?
For example, if the analysis considered timely permanency, did it also refer to performance on re-entry to care?
- Is the conclusion verified or contradicted by other sources of data?
For example, did feedback from individuals with vested interests, focus groups, surveys, or other administrative data support the analytic findings or suggest possible alternatives?
- Are there perspectives not accounted for in the analysis?
- Do the results suggest that further analysis may be indicated?

After a decade of CQI system and performance measurement work, advancements in our knowledge of implementation science,¹¹ the introduction and application of the CQI change and implementation process, and the call to action to transform and create equitable child welfare systems, the Children’s Bureau believes that states are well-positioned to complete high-quality statewide assessments.

For more information or to request technical assistance with the process, contact your Children’s Bureau Regional Office.¹²

¹¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (August 12, 2017). *What is implementation science?* [blog post]. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-implementation-science>

¹² Children’s Bureau, *Children’s Bureau Regional Program Managers* [webpage]. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/childrens-bureau-regional-program-managers>