



Child and Family Services Reviews

Procedures Manual

August 2022
Updated January 2024



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

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Chapter 1: Overall Framework for the Child and Family Services Reviews

The Child and Family Services Reviews are a federal-state collaborative effort designed to ensure that quality services are provided to children and families through state child welfare systems. The Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has oversight authority and has administered the reviews since 2000. These reviews of child welfare systems identify strengths and challenges in practice for children and families in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being, as well as systemic factor functioning. The reviews work in tandem with other state and federal frameworks for system planning, reform, and effective implementation, such as the Child and Family Services Plan and a well-functioning continuous quality improvement system.¹

Purpose of the Reviews

Section 1123A of the Social Security Act (the Act) requires the Department of Health and Human Services to review state child and family services systems to ensure substantial conformity with the state plan requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. Through the Child and Family Services Reviews, the Children's Bureau also assesses state programs implemented under titles IV-B and IV-E related to child protection, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services.

In addition to reviewing for states' substantial conformity with applicable state plan requirements, the reviews are designed to help states improve child welfare services, case practices, and outcomes for children, youth, and families who receive services. Based on the strengths and areas needing improvement within child welfare systems identified by the reviews, states develop Program Improvement Plans to address areas in which they were not in substantial conformity with any of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors under review. Implementing Program Improvement Plan strategies helps states create lasting and statewide systemic change while also addressing the immediate needs of children and families.

Principles of the Reviews

The Child and Family Services Reviews are based on the following central principles and concepts:

- The reviews are a collaborative effort between the federal and state governments. Joint planning between state and federal staff occurs at multiple junctures throughout the process and includes completing a statewide assessment; planning and involvement in the case review process; conducting stakeholder interviews; identifying root causes, strategies, or interventions, and developing measurement plans for Program Improvement Plans; monitoring progress on related activities; and determining achievement of established goals.
- The reviews examine child welfare systems from two perspectives. First, they assess system practice and performance for children and families served by the state's child

¹ Title IV-B Child and Family Service Plan (ACYF-CB-PI-14-03), March 5, 2014; Continuous Quality Improvement in Title IV-B and IV-E Programs (ACYF-CB-IM-12-07), Aug. 27, 2012.

welfare agencies. Second, they examine identified systemic factors that affect the ability of state agencies to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

- The reviews rely on quality and relevant data and the 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.
- The review process collects information from a variety of sources so the Children’s Bureau can make determinations about a state’s performance. These sources include the statewide assessment; Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Reports; State Data Profile and supplemental context data; case records; case-related interviews with children, parents, resource families, caseworkers, and other professionals; and interviews with Tribes, legal and judicial communities, service providers, and youth and families with lived experience in the child welfare system. (See Appendix C, “Child and Family Services Review Process,” for a visual depiction of the process.) Information is obtained from individuals with lived experience and who reflect the race, ethnicity, and other populations who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system. 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 those with lived experience and all partners who have a role in it contribute to its design and operation. System partners may include Tribes, judicial and legal communities, agency caseworkers and supervisors, resource families, private agencies, service providers, federal partners, and communities.
- Through the reviews, the Children’s Bureau promotes states’ focus on the safety and well-being of children and families; strengths-based and family-centered practice; prevention-focused community-based services to prevent the necessity of foster care; individualized services that are timely, flexible, and accessible; and strengthening parents’ capacity to protect and provide for their children.
- The reviews capture state system strengths and areas needing improvement and include a program improvement process that states use to make improvements, where needed, and build on an agency’s identified strengths. The reviews promote the development of Program Improvement Plans designed to strengthen states’ capacity to support positive and equitable outcomes for children and families.
- The reviews promote ongoing state self-evaluation of programs, performance, systemic factor functioning, and outcomes, and the examination of underlying reasons for differences in experiences and outcomes for subpopulations.
- The reviews are best supported by a state’s maintenance and enhancement of its quality assurance system through a continuous quality improvement approach so that ongoing measurement of practices, processes, services, and components of the system can be used to improve child welfare services, case practices, and statewide systemic factor functioning that contribute to positive and equitable outcomes for the children and families served by the state.

- The reviews, and the results thereof, emphasize accountability. While the review process includes opportunities for states to make program improvements before having federal funds withheld for nonconformity, significant financial withholdings are associated with the failure to make the identified progress needed to improve performance.

Collaboration During the Review

The Child and Family Services Reviews promote change through collaboration that begins between the federal and state governments as they assess the effectiveness of the child welfare system in serving children and families and continues between child welfare agency leaders, Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system. Federal and state staff work in partnership throughout the Child and Family Services Reviews process; however, final decisions are the responsibility of federal staff.

The Child and Family Services Reviews require collaboration that focuses on identifying shared goals and activities and establishing a plan for improving the child welfare system. Most important, this collaborative process should result in changes that promote and contribute to improved practice and system performance. The overarching principles guiding this collaborative process include:

- The safety, permanency, and well-being of children is a shared responsibility. Child welfare agencies must make every effort to actively engage and involve Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system in the state who can help achieve positive results with respect to the outcomes and systemic factors subject to review.
- Child welfare agencies do not serve children and families in isolation. They should work in partnership with policymakers, legal and judicial communities, community leaders, and other public and private agencies to improve practice and system performance for children and families in their states. This includes partnering with a broad array of organizations that provide services to the diversity of children, youth, and families served by the child welfare system, and those whose actions affect family and community life.
- Family-centered and community-based practices are integral to improving system performance for children and families. As such, collaboration with families, including young people, is important in identifying and assessing strengths and barriers to improved outcomes for children, youth, and families. Engaging diverse individuals with lived experience, particularly those who are most likely to or have experienced negative outcomes, is vital to the process. Individuals with lived experience have unique insight and their voices are critical to understanding what is working well and causes of disparate outcomes. States can best prepare families and young adults for participation in the process by explaining the overall process and expectations and why their participation and voice are critical to improving practice for those served by the child welfare system.

States are encouraged throughout the review process to use a variety of approaches to continue the collaboration and consultation with Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience that inform the Child and Family Services Plan. For example, the agency might gather information by holding focus groups, conducting surveys, holding joint planning forums, or developing other strategies for linking the review process with the ongoing consultation process used for title IV-B (Child and Family Services Plan) planning. Children's Bureau expectations related to the use of data and inclusive and representative collaboration are consistent across all assessment and planning processes.

Genuine collaboration has a purpose and a goal. Collaboration requires planning, time, and a commitment to working together to create change. (See Appendix E, “Collaborating During the Child and Family Services Reviews.”)

Structure of the Reviews

The Child and Family Services Reviews are a federal-state partnership and involve a two-phase process as required by 45 CFR § 1355.33: (1) a statewide assessment and (2) an onsite review. If needed, a state will develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan to address areas not in substantial conformity.

- In the first phase, the staff of the state child welfare agency, partners selected by the agency who were consulted in the development of the Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report, and other individuals deemed appropriate and agreed upon by the state and the Children’s Bureau, complete a statewide assessment. Together, the agency and system partners review and engage in conversations about performance on the statewide data indicators and other data related to the seven Child and Family Services Review outcomes and seven systemic factors to better understand the overall child welfare system’s functioning. Reliance on data evidence should be the cornerstone of the statewide assessment process. To support a thorough and comprehensive assessment, states are encouraged to review their Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report, along with other relevant evidence, to determine how well the state’s vision and core tenets of the child welfare system contribute to the desired child welfare practice and system performance. Using sound measurement principles, the state and its partners gather, examine, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data and information to identify: (1) system strengths and challenges; (2) contributing factors and root causes of the identified strengths and challenges; and (3) progress made and/or lessons learned from the development, implementation, and monitoring of improvement activities.
- The second phase of the review process is an onsite review, which includes case reviews, case-related interviews for the purpose of determining state child welfare system performance, and, as necessary, stakeholder interviews that further inform the assessment of systemic factors. There are two possible paths to the case reviews conducted during the onsite review:
 - The Children’s Bureau-Led Review, which is a 1-week onsite review during which the federal-state team reviews a sample of cases using the federal Onsite Review Instrument at three sites and conducts case-related and stakeholder interviews; or
 - The State-Led Review, in which states conduct their own case reviews using the federal Onsite Review Instrument, review a specified number of cases over a defined time period, and conduct stakeholder interviews in collaboration with the Children’s Bureau. States must meet specific criteria and be approved in advance by the Children’s Bureau to conduct a State-Led Review. (See Appendix A, “State-Led CFSR Case Review Criteria.”)

- A state not in substantial conformity with one or more of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors under review must develop a Program Improvement Plan jointly with the Children’s Bureau that addresses identified areas of nonconformity.
- The state then implements the approved Program Improvement Plan, including the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan, seeking technical assistance as needed. The Children’s Bureau and the state monitor the plan’s implementation and the state’s progress toward goals and the negotiated Program Improvement Plan measures. Program Improvement Plan monitoring often involves onsite or virtual meetings, typically at 6-month intervals, to discuss states’ data analyses and progress on implementation, and to obtain feedback from system partners such as caseworkers, supervisors, families and youth with lived experience, Tribes, and the legal and judicial communities. This process supports the Children’s Bureau and the state in identifying successes, challenges, and barriers, and in strategizing and negotiating adjustments to Program Improvement Plan strategies and/or implementation needed to address and meet improvement and measurement requirements.
- If the state is unable to demonstrate the agreed-upon improvement after the 2-year Program Improvement Plan implementation period and subsequent post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period, the Administration for Children and Families must withhold a portion of the state’s title IV-B and IV-E federal child welfare funds.

Outcomes and Systemic Factors

In both phases of the Child and Family Services Reviews, states are assessed regarding seven expected outcomes for children and families and seven state plan requirements-based systemic factors that affect child and family outcomes. For a detailed list of the items assessed under the outcomes and systemic factors, see the Child and Family Services Reviews Quick Reference Items List, which can be found on the [CFSR Information Portal](#) under Round 4 Resources.

Assessment of Outcome Areas

Under the three domains of safety, permanency, and child and family well-being, states are assessed for the following seven outcome areas:

- Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
- Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.
- Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

For Safety Outcome 2, Permanency Outcome 2, and the three Well-Being outcomes, the qualitative case review item ratings for each outcome obtained through the onsite case reviews are used to determine substantial conformity. Determination of conformity with Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1 are informed by state performance on the statewide data indicators and case review ratings obtained through onsite case reviews, as referenced above. (For more information, see Appendix B, “Child and Family Services Reviews: Pathways to Substantial Conformity,” and Technical Bulletin #13A, available on the CFSR Information Portal.

Statewide Data Indicators

Statewide data indicators are aggregate measures calculated using data that states report to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). There are seven statewide data indicators comprising two safety indicators and five permanency indicators. State performance on the indicators is risk-adjusted to account for factors out of the state’s control, such as the age of children in foster care. State Risk-Standardized Performance is compared to national performance to determine substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1.

Safety Outcome 1

- Maltreatment in foster care
- Recurrence of maltreatment

Permanency Outcome 1

- Permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care
- Permanency in 12 months for children in care for 12–23 months
- Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more
- Re-entry to foster care in 12 months
- Placement stability

(See Technical Bulletin #13A and Appendix H, “Statewide Data Indicators and AFCARS Data Quality Checks,” for more information on the statewide data indicators.)

Assessment of Systemic Factors

The systemic factors refer to seven systems operating within a child welfare system that have the capacity, if well-functioning, to promote child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. The systemic factors, comprising title IV-B and IV-E plan requirements (“items”), are:

- Statewide Information System
- Case Review System
- Quality Assurance System
- Staff and Provider Training
- Service Array and Resource Development
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

The Children’s Bureau determines whether a state is in substantial conformity with federal requirements for the seven systemic factors based on the statewide functioning of each systemic factor requirement. The information used to inform systemic factor ratings comes from the data and information provided by states in the Statewide Assessment (see Chapter 2) and the

information collected during stakeholder interviews during the Child and Family Services Review onsite review phase. (See Chapter 6.)

Steps in the Review Process

The major steps in the review that are conducted by the Children’s Bureau and the state are:

- Joint pre-review planning to determine case review path and date of review
- Children’s Bureau transmission of the State Data Profile to the state
- State completion and submission of the Statewide Assessment to the Children’s Bureau
- Joint preparation for the onsite review, including:
 - Participation in planning calls
 - Development of case review procedures and sampling plan
 - Review of Statewide Assessment drafts
 - Discussion of review sites, review team structure, quality assurance staff, reviewers, and case-related interviews
 - Management of logistics for the onsite review
 - Selection of stakeholder interviewees and scheduling of stakeholder interviews
 - Organization of debriefings and results discussion
- Completion of the onsite review, including case reviews, stakeholder interviews, quality assurance activities, reconciliation of findings, and conducting debriefings/results discussions
- Children’s Bureau analysis of review data and issuance of the Final Report with determinations of substantial conformity
- State development of the Program Improvement Plan and Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan, as necessary, in consultation with the Children’s Bureau
- Children’s Bureau approval of the state’s Program Improvement Plan and Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan
- Joint evaluation of progress in meeting Program Improvement Plan goals and required amount of improvement for measures included in the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan
- State Program Improvement Plan completion and achievement of required amount of improvement for measures included in the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan
- Planning for the next Child and Family Services Review cycle

Chapter 2: Statewide Assessment

The statewide assessment, the first phase of the Child and Family Services Review, provides an opportunity for states to gather and analyze evidence (quantitative and qualitative data and information) to evaluate their child welfare programs, practices, and systems and consider their programmatic goals and the extent to which desired outcomes for the children and families served are being achieved. The statewide assessment:

- Helps the state and Children’s Bureau prepare for the onsite review by providing evidence and an analysis of the state child welfare system’s practice and performance
- Provides evidence for making decisions regarding substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors, identifies areas needing additional examination through stakeholder interviews, and assists in preparing for and determining the content of those interviews
- Identifies state practice or performance issues that require deeper understanding before or during the onsite review period
- Provides an opportunity for states to consider and critically analyze evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes for persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system
- Enables state agencies, Tribes, legal and judicial communities, other system partners, and those with a vested interest in the child welfare system, including families and youth with lived experience, to identify system strengths and areas needing improvement and to begin assessing the root causes to help develop their program improvement approach early in the review process
- Provides states with the opportunity to build/expand their capacity for continuous quality improvement

The state uses the Statewide Assessment to document the most recent, relevant, and compelling evidence available on the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors before the state’s scheduled onsite review. Both quantitative and qualitative data and information should be included, analyzed, and used to assess the impact of state policies and practices on the children, youth, and families being served by the child welfare system, identify the system’s strengths and areas needing improvement, and identify areas that need further examination through the onsite review.

The Children’s Bureau transmits the Statewide Assessment instrument and State Data Profile, including the supplemental context data, to the state approximately 6 months before the onsite review phase. The state submits its completed Statewide Assessment 4 months after receiving the State Data Profile and approximately 2 months before the start of the onsite review. (See Appendix D, “Statewide Assessment and Case Review Timeframes,” for a visual depiction of these timeframes). States are encouraged to submit to the Children’s Bureau drafts of the Statewide Assessment sections as they are developed so the Children’s Bureau can provide feedback to the state regarding needed content. This draft review process provides the state time to revise its Statewide Assessment before submitting the final version to the Children’s Bureau Regional Office.

Conducting the Statewide Assessment

States are encouraged to review and discuss their vision for their child welfare system. The vision provides the basis for the organization of system structures, programs, and functions to produce desired outcomes. States discuss how the state's child welfare system is organized and designed to achieve the vision; the degree to which system structures, programs, processes, and practices are aligned with the state's vision, goals, objectives, and strategies; and how all of this produces desired results and equitable outcomes for the children and families served.

A cornerstone of the statewide assessment process is the 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.

States should conduct the statewide assessment process through 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 inequality in the child welfare system. These persons should include individuals who were consulted in the development of the Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report and/or whose involvement is necessary for ongoing evaluation, analysis, and strategic planning. As noted above, this principle is grounded in the knowledge that a child welfare system is most effective in achieving its vision, goals, and improved outcomes for children, youth, and families when all Tribes and partners who have a role in it contribute to its design and operation.

Such collaboration is vital, occurs throughout the review process, and adds depth and detail to the evidence used to shape the Statewide Assessment. States are encouraged to use a variety of approaches in collaborating and consulting with Tribes and the array of system partners and individuals with lived experience throughout the review process, such as collaborative meetings, data collection and exploring sources of relevant evidence, sharing and analyzing data, and sharing drafts of their Statewide Assessment sections for comment and review. Together, the agency, Tribes, and system partners engage in conversations that explore root causes to better understand the overall child welfare system's functioning. These conversations are informed by relevant evidence that is gathered and analyzed to make accurate observations about performance, contributing factors, and root cause(s), and to identify defensible solutions and strategies/interventions.

The Statewide Assessment

States complete the Statewide Assessment instrument to capture the most recent assessment of system performance before their scheduled onsite reviews. The instrument enables states to gather and document information that is critical to analyzing their practice and system performance. The document includes a detailed Introduction and four sections as follows:

- The Introduction provides information about the background and purpose of the statewide assessment, the importance of stakeholder involvement, suggestions to assess the state's capacity to complete the assessment, the use of quality evidence, and preparation and instructions for completing the statewide assessment.
- Section I requests general information about the state agency and information regarding who and how Tribes, legal and judicial communities, families and youth with lived

experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners were involved in the development of the statewide assessment.

- Section II requests the state’s vision for the child welfare system and any cross-cutting issues or drivers of performance across the state (e.g., consent decrees, transformation initiatives).
- Section III requires an assessment of state performance on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes and supporting practices, including performance on the statewide data indicators as transmitted in the State Data Profile.
- Section IV requires an assessment of the statewide functioning of each of the seven systemic factors based on relevant evidence.

The state attaches a copy of their State Data Profile as an appendix to the Statewide Assessment.

In assessing performance on child and family outcomes and systemic factors, the state reviews and analyzes relevant evidence on its performance on each of the outcomes and systemic factors. The information reviewed and analyzed should include:

- The state’s most recent State Data Profile, including the supplemental context data
- Case review, quality assurance, continuous quality improvement, and other state administrative data
- Relevant stakeholder and child welfare system data from legal and judicial communities, service providers, other state agencies
- Data that provides states an opportunity to consider and critically analyze evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes for persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system
- Other relevant data that demonstrates performance, strengths, and challenges of the child welfare system

State Data Profiles/Statewide Data Indicators Related to Safety and Permanency Outcomes

The Children’s Bureau uses the data from state submissions to AFCARS and NCANDS to calculate state performance on seven statewide data indicators. This performance information is transmitted to the state in the State Data Profile. State performance is adjusted to control for factors beyond the state’s control (Risk-Standardized Performance), such as the age of children in foster care. The Children’s Bureau compares the state’s Risk-Standardized Performance to national performance for each of the statewide data indicators. Performance on the statewide data indicators along with case review performance determines substantial conformity for Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1 (see CFSR Technical Bulletin #13A for more information).

The Children’s Bureau transmits the State Data Profile, with the Statewide Assessment instrument, to the state approximately 6 months before the onsite review phase, allowing sufficient time for the state to complete the statewide assessment.

States should review performance on the statewide data indicators included in previously prepared State Data Profiles to identify and resolve any data quality issues affecting performance before submitting AFCARS/NCANDS data for the profile that will be transmitted to the state and used in the statewide assessment. Should the state decide to resubmit AFCARS/NCANDS data, the state should do so prior to the data profile resubmission due date. If data is resubmitted after the allowable timeframe, that data will be used in the next set of data profiles issued.

In conducting the statewide assessment, the state should review the state’s Risk-Standardized Performance in comparison to the national performance, and information provided about the state’s observed performance using the supplemental context data. Through data analysis and in collaboration with Tribes, system partners, and individuals with lived experience, states are to identify performance trends, including strengths and areas needing improvement; variation in the experiences and outcomes of different populations; analysis of factors driving performance; and relevant continuous quality improvement change and implementation activities and results.

Systemic Factors: Using Data to Assess Functioning

In Section IV of the Statewide Assessment, states should assert whether or not each systemic factor requirement is functioning as required. The Children’s Bureau uses information in the state’s submitted Statewide Assessment to determine whether each of the systemic factors is in substantial conformity, or if it is necessary to gather additional information through stakeholder interviews to make that determination. The assessment of systemic factor functioning is also required as part of the Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report, so the state may want to review these and other reports (e.g., Court Improvement Program strategic plans) when developing the Statewide Assessment to the extent that they contain relevant evidence and analyses.

The Children’s Bureau considers a systemic factor to be functioning if it is occurring and is being met consistently and on an ongoing basis across the state for all relevant populations. Beyond considering a description of law, policy, or process, a state must demonstrate through relevant evidence that the systemic factor is routinely functioning as required. States should consult “Assessing Systemic Factor Functioning Using Data and Evidence” to support efforts to analyze the systemic factors. These briefs provide examples of the types of data and methods of collection that can be used to demonstrate functioning for each systemic factor.

In their analysis of systemic factor functioning, states are encouraged to consider and critically analyze evidence of 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 inequality in the child welfare system.

States are encouraged to consider all available evidence for each systemic factor, identify areas where more information or data are needed, and then gather that additional evidence, when possible. In examining and analyzing data and deciding what combination of evidence to include in the Statewide Assessment, the state should consider if it is relevant to the systemic factor’s functioning. For systemic factors comprising multiple requirements (items), it is important to consider whether multiple types of data and information are necessary to characterize routine functioning. It is important for states to carefully review the requirements of each systemic factor item to ensure they provide relevant evidence to address the regulatory requirements. For

example, for Item 19: Statewide Information System, while it is interesting to provide information about a state's updates to its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System or Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System, it may not be relevant to whether the state can accurately identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for placement for every child in foster care.

The Children's Bureau reviews the state's final Statewide Assessment submission to evaluate if and how the state has demonstrated that each systemic factor is functioning statewide. The Children's Bureau may determine that the state has demonstrated specific factors to be functioning appropriately and that no further information or data are needed to determine substantial conformity for those factors. However, when the Children's Bureau determines that more information is needed to determine substantial conformity, it notifies the state in writing of the specific items within each systemic factor that require additional information and a list of stakeholder groups to be interviewed jointly by the Children's Bureau and the state. With the exception of Service Array and Case Review System, which require stakeholder interviews, if the Children's Bureau and the state agree that a systemic factor item is not functioning as required and will be rated as an Area Needing Improvement as a result, stakeholder interviews will not be required unless the state would like to use interviews to gain a better understanding of functioning to inform Program Improvement Plan efforts (see chapter 6 for more information). The state and Children's Bureau then begin planning and coordinating the stakeholder interviews and related onsite review activities.

Chapter 3: Onsite Review

The onsite review is the second phase of the Child and Family Services Reviews. The purpose of the onsite review is to gather state child welfare system performance information from the examination of a sample of cases to determine outcome achievement, and to conduct interviews with Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners to evaluate the systemic factors under review. States may engage in the onsite case review in one of two ways: (1) by conducting their own case reviews, if approved by the Children’s Bureau (the “State-Led Review” path), and submitting those data for the Children’s Bureau to use in substantial conformity determinations; or (2) by participating in a 1-week review of cases conducted by a team of federal and state reviewers (the “Children’s Bureau-Led Review” path). Both paths require federal participation in any stakeholder interviews conducted to make determinations of substantial conformity with the seven systemic factors.

Overview

During the case review, the federal-state team examines case records and conducts case-related and stakeholder interviews to collect qualitative and quantitative information on outcomes and systemic factors to supplement the evidence reported and analyzed in the Statewide Assessment.

The combination of this information is used to determine whether a state is in substantial conformity with federal requirements regarding the seven child and family outcomes and seven systemic factors, and to inform the development of plans for improvement and additional technical assistance.

The Children’s Bureau developed the following instruments and guides for collecting and recording information during the case review:

- **Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions:** This instrument, available in the Online Monitoring System and as a PDF, is mandatory and is used to conduct case reviews. It contains questions and instructions that the reviewers must answer and consider to determine the ratings for the 18 items within the seven outcomes under review and for analyzing and documenting information to support those ratings.
- **Case-Related Interview Guides and Instructions:** These guides provide a framework for reviewers when conducting case-related interviews on each case they are reviewing. There is a guide for use in interviewing each of the required interviewees: the child, the parents, the foster parent(s), and the caseworker. The guides suggest questions that will elicit information pertinent to each of the items in the Onsite Review Instrument and offer a way of explaining what the reviewer’s questions will be about.
- **Quality Assurance Guide:** This guide is used to facilitate discussions between reviewers and the quality assurance team to ensure the accuracy of ratings and proper application of the federal Onsite Review Instrument. The guide helps reviewers and those conducting all levels of QA to ensure that Onsite Review Instrument data are accurate, complete, and consistent, and that reviewers apply the Onsite Review Instrument correctly based on the case circumstances; understand the key practice concerns that will need to be addressed within the Onsite Review Instrument; obtain any needed clarification on rating process/criteria and applicability of items in the Onsite Review Instrument; and identify and address inconsistencies between information gathered from interviews and case documentation.

- **Reviewer Briefs and Talking Points:** While the Onsite Review Instrument is used in rating cases for determinations of substantial conformity, these documents provide supplemental instruction on expectations or special considerations reviewers should give to particular case circumstances when reviewing a case.
- **Stakeholder Interview Guide:** This guide provides the questions for conducting interviews with Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system regarding the items within the seven systemic factors under review. The review team is responsible for determining which stakeholder interview questions to use from the guide to address the systemic factors for which groups and how to frame the questions for the interviewees.
- **Guiding Principles, Framework, and Tools for the Statewide Assessment Process:** This document provides guiding principles, a suggested framework, and resources and tools states can use to complete a quality statewide assessment.
- **Assessing Systemic Factor Functioning Using Data and Evidence:** This document includes briefs that support states' efforts in collecting and using quality data and evidence that assesses and demonstrates systemic factor functioning. The briefs assist states in considering the sources of data, the methodologies for data collection, the scope of the data, and its reliability. The briefs help states think about what else can be learned from the data and evidence that may help inform strategies for the Program Improvement Plan as well as the Child and Family Services Plan, Annual Progress and Services Report, and the state's ongoing continuous quality improvement processes.

The Children's Bureau provides online training on these instruments and guides on the [Child and Family Services Reviews Information Portal](#)'s Round 4 Resources tab. The Online Monitoring System, housed on the portal, is a web-based online application consisting of the Onsite Review Instrument, the Stakeholder Interview Guide, and automated reporting tools. It is used for both Children's Bureau-Led Reviews and State-Led Reviews. For more information on how to use the Online Monitoring System, see the E-Learning Academy. The review instruments and related resources are also available on the Children's Bureau website.

Case Review Paths

As noted above, there are two ways of conducting case reviews for the Child and Family Services Reviews. The first path, known as State-Led Reviews, allows states that have secured Children's Bureau approval to use their own case review process to conduct case reviews during an identified case review period. The second path, known as Children's Bureau-Led Reviews, engages states, in partnership with the Children's Bureau, in a 1-week onsite review at three approved sites across the state.

State-Led Reviews

The Children's Bureau sets forth criteria for states to conduct their own case reviews that emphasize the importance of case reviews as an effective way for states to gain an understanding of how policy, programming, and practice affect the outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system.

"State-Led CF SR Case Review Criteria," found in Appendix A of this manual and on the CF SR Information Portal, identifies each criterion and provides a description of the applicable standards, additional instructions, acceptable evidence, and methods of verification to assist states in assessing their case review process against the criteria.

States electing to conduct State-Led Reviews must demonstrate to the Children’s Bureau that they meet all specified requirements 6 months before the start of their case review period. States must review a minimum of 65 cases using the federal Onsite Review Instrument over a defined review period of up to 6 months in geographic areas set forth in the state’s Children’s Bureau-approved case review procedures and sampling plan. During the case review period, federal staff participate in the state’s case review process in the form of Secondary Oversight, technical assistance, and other oversight activities. In addition, the federal-state team interviews select Tribal members, partners, and/or other key stakeholders regarding systemic factor functioning as informed by the Statewide Assessment.

States finalize the data from the case reviews to the Children’s Bureau by the specified due date. Case review information is then used along with evidence from the Statewide Assessment, stakeholder interviews, and Risk-Standardized Performance on the statewide data indicators to make determinations of substantial conformity as required per 45 CFR § 1355.34.

States that chose not to pursue, or that cannot meet the criteria for, a State-Led Review are scheduled for a Children’s Bureau-Led Review, conducted jointly by the state and the Children’s Bureau.

Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews

States engaged in Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews participate in a 1-week onsite review during which the federal-state team reviews a total of 65 cases and conducts case-related interviews at three locations in the state using the federal Onsite Review Instrument. In addition, the federal-state team may interview selected Tribal members, individuals with lived experience, system partners, and those with a vested interest in the child welfare system regarding systemic factor functioning as informed by the statewide assessment process.

Case Review Process Preparation

Preparatory activities vary depending on which of the two review types the state pursues. The chart below outlines the steps the state and the Children’s Bureau need to take to prepare the state for its case review for each review type. Additional information about these steps can be found in Appendix G1/G2.

Table 3-1: Preparatory Activities by Review Path

Preparatory Activities	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
Explore case review paths with the state	Children’s Bureau and the state consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state’s review path preference • The status of the state’s case review process • The state’s capacity to meet case review criteria 	Children’s Bureau and the state consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state’s review path preference • The status of the state’s case review process • The state’s capacity to meet case review criteria
Letter of Intent submitted by the state to the Children’s Bureau	No later than April 1st of the year prior to the state’s review year or other date specified by the Children’s Bureau	No later than April 1st of the year prior to the state’s review year or other date specified by the Children’s Bureau

Preparatory Activities	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
Children’s Bureau case review criteria approval activities	Approval decision no later than 6 months before the scheduled case review period	N/A
Children’s Bureau transmits Statewide Assessment instrument and State Data Profile to the state	Approximately 6 months before the scheduled case review period (see Appendix C for a visual depiction of these timeframes)	Approximately 6 months before the scheduled onsite case review (see Appendix C for a visual depiction of these timeframes)
Planning Calls	A series of calls over an 8- to 9-month period preceding the case review (see Appendix G1/G2 for more information about review planning)	A series of calls over an 8- to 9-month period preceding the onsite case review (see Appendix G1/G2 for more information about review planning)
Statewide Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State submits Statewide Assessment drafts, as able • State has 4 months to complete the Statewide Assessment and must submit it at least 2 months before the case review period • Children’s Bureau provides the state with information needed from stakeholder interviews approximately 1 month after receiving the completed Statewide Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State submits Statewide Assessment drafts, as able • State has 4 months to complete the Statewide Assessment and must submit it at least 2 months before the onsite case review • Children’s Bureau provides the state with information needed from stakeholder interviews approximately 1 month after receiving the completed Statewide Assessment
Sampling activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify case review sites, including the largest metropolitan area • Define the in-home services case population and develop the case review procedures and sampling plan (see Chapter 4 for more information) • States develop and submit example foster care and in-home services sampling frames to the Children’s Bureau for review and validation • Use 6-month sampling periods (+45 days for in-home services) beginning 12 months before the start month of case review and on a rolling schedule that adjusts forward 1 month/quarter per 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify three case review sites, including the largest metropolitan area • Define the in-home services case population and develop the case review procedures and sampling plan (see Chapter 4 for more information) • States develop and submit the foster care and in-home services sampling frames that will be used for the onsite case review to the Children’s Bureau for review and validation • Use 6-month sampling periods (45+ days for in-home services) beginning 12 months before the month of the onsite case review. This is the period of time used by the Children’s Bureau to select the case sample for the three sites

Preparatory Activities	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
	<p>month/quarter of the case review period. This is the period of time used to select the case sample in accordance with case review criteria approved by the Children’s Bureau</p>	
<p>Case review scheduling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State selects the random case sample; state prepares case records for review and schedules case-related interviews • State identifies its review and quality assurance teams, if not identified previously • State schedules stakeholder interviews to occur during the first half of the state’s case review period • Children’s Bureau and state conduct stakeholder interviews as agreed upon with the state • State works with the Children’s Bureau to incorporate Children’s Bureau participation and oversight into case review process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Bureau and state agree to review week date • After receipt and validation of sampling frames from the state, Children’s Bureau selects random case sample and provides to state. State prepares case records and schedules case-related interviews • Children’s Bureau and state identify the review and quality assurance teams • Children’s Bureau and state address information technology, cellular connectivity, and internet access during review week • State schedules stakeholder interviews to occur during the review week, unless otherwise agreed to by Children’s Bureau • State invites participants and stakeholders to end of review week debriefings in local sites

General Preparatory Activities

States should engage in the following activities to prepare for their Child and Family Services Review:

Explore Review Paths

To decide which review path to pursue, states should explore their capacity and desire to conduct their own case reviews in partnership with system partners and individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system, and discuss this with the Children’s Bureau. Considerations include:

- Status of the state’s case review processes currently in place and the degree to which the components meet Children’s Bureau case review criteria for State-Led Reviews
- State’s current and ongoing capacity to conduct the reviews in accordance with Children’s Bureau requirements

Letter of Intent

After exploring these factors, each state should formally communicate which review path it wants to pursue and the proposed review dates to its Children's Bureau Regional Office with a letter of intent no later than April 1 of the year prior to the state's review year or other date specified by the Children's Bureau. Although the state can choose the level of detail it wants to provide in the letter of intent, the letter should confirm the discussions between the state and the Children's Bureau about the state's capacity to conduct its own case reviews.

State Data Profiles

The Children's Bureau transmits State Data Profiles, including supplemental context data, that provide state performance information on the statewide data indicators. The State Data Profiles are transmitted to the state approximately 6 months before the onsite review phase. States should analyze the data along with a variety of other sources to complete the statewide assessment.

Statewide Assessment

States should collaborate with Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners to identify, gather, and analyze relevant evidence to assess and report on outcome performance and to demonstrate systemic factor functioning. (See Chapter 2 for more information about the statewide assessment process.)

Planning Calls

The state and the Children's Bureau participate in a series of preparatory calls to discuss the core elements of the Child and Family Services Review. These discussions are intended to be an extension of the joint planning and ongoing conversations between the state and Children's Bureau and vary in specific content based on which review path has been approved. General discussions include:

- Collaboration throughout the review process
- The onsite case review process and plan
- State outcome and systemic factor data
- State performance on the statewide data indicators
- Logistics of the review
- Program Improvement Planning and measurement (post-review)

The planning calls also address more specifically the following key elements of the case review process:

- Status of the review preparations
- Identification of reviewers, quality assurance staff, and site coordinators
- Review of joint planning discussions
- Overview of the state's review timeline
- State's needs for technical assistance
- Discussion of the state's case review process, procedures, and sampling methodology, including sites, schedule, case population, sampling plan, and due dates
- Feedback on statewide assessment and recommendations/plan for stakeholder interviews
- Training, scheduling, and review logistics

- Next steps
- Other topics as needed

The number, timing, and/or content of the planning calls can be modified with Children’s Bureau concurrence based upon the individual needs of the state. (See Appendix G1/G2 for review planning timelines.)

Site Selection

Cases are reviewed at a selection of sites that reflect a cross-section or range of environments in the state, including rural and urban areas. Case reviews provide evidence of state child welfare practice and system performance, as well as opportunities to further analyze system strengths and areas needing improvement. Three sites are selected for Children’s Bureau (CB)-Led Reviews. For State-Led Reviews, the number of review sites is negotiated with the state when a statewide random sample is not used. Selection of sites is a collaborative process between states and the Children’s Bureau, with the Children’s Bureau having final approval. States submit a written site selection proposal to the Children’s Bureau Regional Office for review, in consultation with the Children’s Bureau’s Measurement and Sampling Committee. Selection and approval of sites is to be completed at least 6 months before the start of the onsite review phase.

States and the Children’s Bureau use state data and information to explore prospective sites and child welfare system and practice dynamics to be examined during the case review. Guidelines for selecting sites provide maximum flexibility to determine the most appropriate review sites, given each state’s unique characteristics, practices, systems, and population. The state’s largest metropolitan subdivision is designated in 45 CFR § 1355.33(c)(2) as a required site for the case review. The largest metropolitan subdivision is included as a site to ensure that the Child and Family Services Reviews include the country’s urban centers, where typically a disproportionate number of families have contact with child welfare systems. Sites are required to have a large enough universe of cases to support sampling. In general, a site should have at least four to six times more in-home services and foster care cases than the number of cases scheduled for review in that site.

The Children’s Bureau recommends states consider and address data and information on a number of factors in their written proposals for selection of Child and Family Services Review sites, including designation of the metropolitan site, case population, diversity and characteristics of the state, children and families served, urban and rural characteristics, child welfare practice and system performance, new programs and initiatives, and community partnerships. (See CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals for additional information and guidance.)

Scheduling Required Stakeholder Interviews

The Children’s Bureau notifies the state of the systemic factor items that require additional information from stakeholder interviews approximately 1 month following receipt of the Statewide Assessment. If possible, states should be flexible when scheduling stakeholder interviews during the time period in which the Children’s Bureau will participate in the state’s case review. However, the Children’s Bureau and the state can negotiate an alternative schedule that allows stakeholder interviews to be conducted virtually or before the Children’s Bureau’s onsite participation, if necessary. States should include parents and youth with lived experience who reflect the diversity of the populations served by the system and a broad range of other system partners and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system. States need to consider plans for selection and preparation of these stakeholders. The Children’s Bureau and the state should finalize a schedule of stakeholder interviews at least 2 weeks in advance of the interviews. (See Chapter 6 for more information about stakeholder interviews.)

Sampling Activities

Case reviews and state improvement planning require reliable data to make observations and draw conclusions. The Child and Family Services Review is designed to evaluate the key areas of the state's IV-B and IV-E child welfare programs. As such, the state's case review procedures and sampling plan must identify the cases subject to review as comprehensively and clearly as possible to reflect an adequate representation of the state's child welfare population. Case review samples have common requirements across all states as well as requirements specific to each review type and individualized elements negotiated by the state and the Children's Bureau. (See Chapter 4: Case Sampling.)

Preparation for State-Led Reviews

Preparation for a State-Led Review includes activities to confirm that case review criteria are met; participation in planning calls; planning the state's approach to completing the Statewide Assessment; discussion of the state's case review procedures and sampling plan and the Children's Bureau's participation therein; and determination of the extent, scope, and scheduling of stakeholder interviews needed to make substantial conformity determinations and/or inform Program Improvement Plan development. In addition to the general preparatory activities described above, activities specific to State-Led Reviews are described below.

Oversight to State Onsite Review Team Members

The state assigns a senior state staff person to serve as the State Team Leader for the Child and Family Services Review. The State Team Leader provides oversight to the state review team and is the main point of contact for the Children's Bureau review team.

Children's Bureau Approval for a State-Led Review

For the Children's Bureau to determine that the state may use its own process for the case reviews, the state must demonstrate to the Children's Bureau the status of case review processes in place and the degree to which the components meet the criteria set out by the Children's Bureau. The Children's Bureau, using the case review criteria, reviews the information submitted by the state and other materials as needed to determine whether a state's case review process can be used to provide data for determinations of substantial conformity. The Children's Bureau issues all approval decisions in writing no later than 6 months prior to the start of the state's case review period.

As early as possible, the Children's Bureau begins working with states to discuss what criteria are currently in place and the areas where states need to consider additional case review development, enhancements, and/or modifications. In some cases, the Children's Bureau will notify a state of criteria not yet met. The state has no more than 60 days after being notified to make the identified changes to its case review process if it wants to continue to seek approval. At the end of that timeframe, the Children's Bureau either approves the state's case review process if all criteria have been met or, if not, notifies the state in writing that it is not approved to conduct its own review and schedules the state for a Children's Bureau-Led Review. The final decision regarding whether the state meets the established criteria rests with the Children's Bureau.

Early and throughout the case review period, the Children's Bureau provides feedback on the case review process. If the Children's Bureau identifies significant issues with the state's implementation of the case review process—for example, data quality or rating issues—the Children's Bureau provides immediate feedback to the state. Documentation of these issues as well as high-level feedback on review findings may be provided to the local site and the state. (See

Chapter 7 for more information about debriefings.)

Site Selection

For State-Led Reviews, there is no limit on the number of sites reviewed. At a minimum, sites should align with guidelines used for Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews (i.e., largest metropolitan area and two additional sites). Selection of sites is a collaborative process between states and the Children’s Bureau, with the Children’s Bureau having final approval. The Children’s Bureau recommends states consider and address data and information on a number of factors in their proposals for selection of Child and Family Services Review sites, including the designation of the metropolitan site, case population, diversity and characteristics of the state and children and families served, urban and rural characteristics, child welfare practice and system performance, new programs and initiatives, and community partnerships. Selection and approval of sites is completed at least 6 months before the start of the onsite review phase. (See CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals for additional information and guidance.)

Review Scheduling

Early in the planning process, the state should identify key logistical personnel who will act as the main points of contact for the Children’s Bureau during the case review period. During the State-Led Review approval process, the state provides its schedule for the case review period. This schedule is also the basis for discussions about how the Children’s Bureau will participate in and provide oversight of the state’s case review process, including scheduling of the stakeholder interviews deemed necessary to make substantial conformity determinations (see Chapter 6 for information on stakeholder interviews) and approval of the case review procedures and sampling plan (see Chapter 4 for more information on case review sampling).

Debriefings

In states that conduct debriefings as part of their case review process, the Children’s Bureau may observe and/or participate in those meetings depending on availability. For states that do not include debriefings as part of their case review process, the Children’s Bureau does not require them. In either case, the Children’s Bureau discusses any relevant observations and feedback about the case review process with the state throughout the case review period.

Preparation for Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews

In addition to the general preparatory activities described above, preparation for a Children’s Bureau-Led Review includes several key activities as described below.

Site Selection

As noted above, for a Children’s Bureau-Led Review, three sites are selected (i.e., largest metropolitan area and two additional sites) in collaboration with the state based on a review of relevant data and information submitted in writing by the state. States submit written site selection proposals to the Children’s Bureau Regional Office for review. Selection and approval of sites is completed at least 6 months before the start of the onsite review. (See CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals for additional information and guidance.)

Oversight of the State Onsite Review Team Members

The state assigns a senior state staff person to serve as the State Team Leader for the review. The State Team Leader provides oversight of the state onsite review team and is the main point of

contact for the Children’s Bureau onsite review team. Similarly, the state assigns a Local Site Coordinator for each of the review sites. Local Site Coordinators are responsible for:

- Ensuring that the case records to be reviewed are available
- Coordinating and scheduling case-related interviews
- Arranging local meeting space, meal options, lodging, and transportation as needed
- Coordinating the plan for the debriefing at the end of the review week

Local Site Coordinators should be administrators from the site under review or their designees. To avoid conflicts of interest, the Local Site Coordinator does not participate in team activities, such as stakeholder or case-related interviews. Local Site Coordinators should be available to the team during regular working hours to handle unexpected issues that may arise, such as the need to reschedule interviews and other logistical concerns.

Selection of Reviewers

At least 3 months before the onsite review, the Children’s Bureau collaborates with the State Team Leader to develop the federal-state review team and site assignments. The Children’s Bureau expects the state to be prepared to pair a state reviewer with each federal reviewer.

The state identifies the State Review Team members, ensuring that:

- Staff of the state’s public child welfare agency and external partners are included
- Conflicts of interest are minimized by not assigning reviewers to the site in which they work(ed) or have/had oversight responsibilities.
- Efforts are made to include team members who reflect the diversity of the populations served by the agency

The Children’s Bureau discusses the review team composition overall to determine the number of federal reviewers needed and identify potential conflicts of interest. Each reviewer pair comprises one person representing the state and one person representing the Children’s Bureau. The state and the Children’s Bureau should consider experience and role (for example, external partner or state agency staff) when establishing the pairs.

Reviewers and their site assignments should be finalized no later than 3 months before the onsite review.

Preparation of the Case Records for Review

The state should make available at the review sites all electronic and paper case records to be reviewed. The Local Site Coordinator must make computers and technical support available to reviewers so that they can view the electronic records; and/or obtain hard copies of the files or the portions of the files containing information relevant to the review.

The case records should be complete, including applicable information for periods preceding the period under review, which starts at the beginning of the sampling period and ends when the case review is complete or the case is closed, whichever occurs first. Case records also should be organized and up-to-date, including any files maintained separately, such as separate child protective services or adoption files or separate child and family records. States should confirm that any sealed foster care or adoption file is available if the case is part of the case review sample, as federal authority exists to review such cases (§ 471[a][8][D] of the Social Security Act).

Caseworkers and/or supervisors assigned to these cases must be available for interviews.

If necessary, the state should obtain confidentiality statements or releases of information before the onsite review to permit reviewers to read case records and conduct case-related interviews.

In addition, the Children's Bureau may require federal reviewers to sign an agreement that includes a confidentiality provision.

The state should also arrange for a secure site for overnight case record storage.

Case Review Scheduling

Scheduling Case-Related Interviews

Onsite review team members are responsible for reviewing the case records and interviewing individuals involved in the cases to which they are assigned. Generally, reviewers are expected to review one case per day. The Local Site Coordinators should allow time at the beginning of each day for reviewers to read the case records before the first interview is scheduled. Doing so enables reviewers to identify relevant issues to explore with each person interviewed. (See Chapter 5 for information about case-related interviews.)

Local Site Coordinators should schedule interviews at the agency office or off site, depending on the individual being interviewed. Each interview should be scheduled for 1 hour or less and allow time between interviews for travel between the appointments, when interviews occur off site. Local Site Coordinators also should prepare, in advance, a list of addresses, maps, and/or written directions to the interview sites and provide these to reviewers as needed. In addition, Local Site Coordinators may plan transportation to the interviews, but the Children's Bureau can arrange for rental cars for federal review team members.

Unless specific concerns exist about having reviewers interview a case participant alone, the assigned caseworker should not be present during the interview. In addition, if concerns exist about the safety of reviewers, the state may initiate a discussion regarding case elimination with the Children's Bureau, or the Local Site Coordinator can take the necessary precautions, such as arranging for appropriate security provisions or conducting the interview in another safe environment.

Special accommodations may be required to complete an interview. Provisions for age-appropriate interviews with children may be required depending upon the child's developmental age. Other special accommodations may be needed to address language needs—the Local Site Coordinator makes the necessary arrangements, including obtaining an interpreter, if needed. The pool from which Federal Review Team members are drawn includes individuals with an array of language skills. The Local Site Coordinator should let the State Review Team leader know in advance if it would be helpful to have reviewers with special language skills or capacities assigned to a particular site. The Children's Bureau will work to accommodate these requests whenever possible.

The Local Site Coordinator or his or her designee should prepare the individuals to be interviewed, including helping them understand the purpose of the review. The interviewees should be informed that their participation is voluntary but critical to the success of the review. (See Case-Related Interview Guides and Instructions for more information.) Once the Local Site Coordinator has scheduled the interviews, the appointments should be confirmed in writing.

The state must submit the review team's schedules to the Children's Bureau, including the

name, date, time, and location of case-related interviews, at least 2 weeks before the review.

Logistical Preparations

The state, in consultation with the Children's Bureau, makes logistical arrangements, including:

- Identifying lodging arrangements for onsite review team members
- Arranging locations and times for the entrance conferences at each site. The informal entrance conference at each site should focus on logistics and last no more than 30 minutes. Local agency leaders who wish to provide information to review team members about the review site may submit it in writing to the Children's Bureau Regional Office at least 1 month before the onsite review
- Coordinating transportation for State Review Team members to each site
- Ensuring that all state local site leaders and local site coordinators are well-oriented to the review process and materials, including reviewing in advance this *Procedures Manual*, instruments, and guides
- Preparing maps and other written directions for review team members as needed to assist them in getting to the review site and scheduled appointments
- Planning transportation for review team members to interviews, as needed
- Arranging private space/accommodations for interviews that will take place both in person and over the telephone
- Arranging for space for the onsite review team's case records, debriefings, and other planned meetings
- Ensuring that review team members have access to the review site during non-business hours, including parking and security arrangements
- Ensuring that the technical requirements for the web-based Onsite Review Instrument and Online Monitoring System are met, including making internet connections and power sources available
- Arranging locations and times for the end-of-the-week local site debriefing session

Debriefings

Local site debriefings on case reviews and systemic findings are held at the end of the review week at each review site. The debriefings are informal, guided discussions open to the entire onsite review team and those invited by the local office. The Children's Bureau encourages the state to invite key agency staff, whether local or state-level, who will benefit from hearing about the findings or have major or shared responsibility for program improvement planning, and system partners, including the local legal and judicial staff. The Children's Bureau documents high-level issues noted during the debriefings and provides the feedback to the local site and state. (See Chapter 7 for more details on debriefings.)

Chapter 4: Case Sampling

The onsite reviews, as well as Program Improvement Plan performance measurement and state continuous quality improvement efforts, require reliable forms of evidence from which to draw conclusions. It is not cost-effective or practical to collect and examine all the case data that might be available. Rather, it is necessary to draw a sample of information from the case population to enable detailed examination guided by the Onsite Review Instrument. To ensure that the state child welfare case population's cases subject to the Child and Family Services Review are included in the review, cases are sampled using a clearly defined sampling process and plan. In accordance with 45 CFR § 1355.33(c), the reviews require an onsite review of a random sample of foster care and in-home services cases for evaluating case practice that contribute to positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Case review procedures and sampling plans have common requirements across all states as well as requirements specific to the Children's Bureau-Led or State-Led Review path. All states will have some individually negotiated sample plan elements related to the in-home services case population, site selection, sampling periods and approach, and foster care/in-home services case type stratification.

Requirements Common to All Onsite Review Samples

The state case review sample must include a minimum of 65 cases served during the sampling period with a minimum of 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. For states conducting their own case reviews with samples larger than 65 cases, the Children's Bureau recommends that the state ratio of foster care and in-home services cases be considered when determining the number of cases by case type, as long as the minimum number is above the requirement for both case types.

A simple random sample design is recommended for the sample of foster care and in-home services cases, although cases may be stratified by geographical areas. The samples should be selected from a random ordered sampling frame that consists of cases subject to review and is approximately four to six times the number of cases planned for review. The cases in the sampling frame that are not selected for review may serve as substitutes for cases that are eliminated before or during the review.

Sampling Frames

The state case population subject to review should be sampled using a clearly defined sampling frame. A sampling frame is the actual set of units from which the random sample is drawn. In the case of a simple random sample, all units from the sampling frame have an equal chance to be drawn and to occur in the sample. The sampling frame coincides with the population of interest, which for the review is by family unit for in-home services cases and by individual child for foster care cases. The state's sampling frame may be based on the state's review schedule and agreed-upon sites reflective of the state's population subject to review. The state must provide the finalized sampling frame for foster care and in-home services cases for the selected review sites to the Children's Bureau no later than 4 months before the onsite review for a Children's Bureau-Led Review. States choosing to conduct a State-Led Review must provide example foster care and in-home services sampling frames for Children's Bureau review during the approval process.

Foster Care Sampling Frames

The sampling frame for the state foster care population consists of the listing of children served statewide or by jurisdiction strata according to the state's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and

Reporting System-defined reportable cases during the sampling period. The exception are cases for children whose only placement setting during the entire sample period was a trial home visit. Although children on a trial home visit for the entire sampling period are included in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System-defined reportable case population, those cases will be included in the in-home services sampling frame as the placement setting does not meet the federal definition of foster care.

States provide the Children's Bureau a listing of AFCARS child population using a recent 6-month period and a secure site. The file must identify the geographic areas selected for the onsite review by demarcating the Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) codes. Some states use regions or districts instead of counties as review sites and may need to include an additional identifier or crosswalk to identify county codes with the state designated region/district/jurisdiction. The state can transmit the file to the Children's Bureau as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet or other commonly used spreadsheet format.

In-Home Services Sampling Frames

The sampling frame for in-home services cases consists of cases that were opened to provide families services and/or case management (directly by child welfare agency or through federally funded contracts) for at least 45 consecutive days during the sampling period. This sampling frame includes family cases opened for at least 45 consecutive days during the 6-month-plus-45-day sampling period, including:

- Child Protective Services reports assigned for investigation and the case was *opened* for case management and/or service provision;
- Child Protective Services reports assigned for an alternative response/assessment and the case was *opened* to continue working with the family to address identified needs (child welfare agency caseworker or a community agency);
- Cases involving families who were referred to and received community-based IV-B-funded prevention/intervention service(s);
- Family cases with one or more children whose only placement setting during the sampling period was a trial home visit; and
- Other non-foster care cases for which the state's title IV-B/IV-E agency is responsible as defined in state policy or through contract pursuant to the state's Child and Family Services Plan. This may include juvenile justice cases, mental health cases, and other in-home services cases funded with title IV-B funds and provided by the state IV-B/IV-E agency either directly or through contractual arrangements pursuant to the state's Child and Family Services Plan.

The state and the Children's Bureau engage in detailed conversations about the services provided under the state's IV-B/IV-E plans to have an accurate understanding of what cases to include in the in-home services sampling frame.

The sampling frame should support the identification of cases in which any child in the family was in foster care for 24 hours or more during any portion of the sampling period and the period under review to support the elimination of these cases from the in-home services sample.

Sampling Period

The foster care sampling period is the 6-month period beginning approximately 12 months prior to the case review period. The in-home services sampling period is the same 6-month period plus an additional 45 days to provide the opportunity for in-home cases opened on the last day of the sampling period to be opened for a minimum of 45 consecutive days.

The period under review starts at the beginning of the sampling period and ends when the case review is completed, or the case is closed, whichever occurs first. States conducting their own reviews across multiple months need to renew the sampling frame at least quarterly to maintain a consistent period under review of between 12 and 15 months. For example, cases to be reviewed in April 2023 would be drawn from the sampling period April 1–September 30, 2022, for foster care cases and through November 14, 2022, for in-home services cases. One option is to advance the sampling period 1 month for each month of the case review period. Cases to be reviewed in May 2023 would be drawn from the sampling period beginning May 1, 2022. A second option is to advance the sampling period every quarter of the case review period. For example, cases to be reviewed in May and June 2023 would use the same sampling frame as the April 2023 reviews, and the state would use the sampling period beginning July 1, 2022, for cases to be reviewed during the months of July through September 2023.

For states engaged in the Children’s Bureau-Led Review, the sampling period will begin the first day of the month 1 year (12 months) prior to the month of the onsite review.

Case Elimination

The state must have written procedures for case elimination. States are required to use the Children’s Bureau’s case elimination criteria to ensure applicability of cases regardless of review path chosen. The state includes the Children’s Bureau’s case elimination criteria for key case-related interviews that cannot be secured or interviewees that are not available. States may propose additional case elimination criteria beyond the required federal criteria and, if the Children’s Bureau approves, those criteria should be detailed in the state’s case review sampling plan. (See Children’s Bureau [Guidance for Case Elimination](#).)

States obtain consultation and Children’s Bureau approval for case elimination prior to eliminating a case and maintain a list of all case(s) with the reason(s) for elimination from the random case sample.

Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plans

After the state and Children’s Bureau have determined whether the state will conduct its own case reviews or engage in a Children’s Bureau-Led Review, a state-specific case review procedures and sampling plan is developed, endorsed by the Children’s Bureau Measurement and Sampling Committee and approved by the Children’s Bureau. All states will have some individually negotiated case review procedures and sampling plan elements, but all plans should cover the content in this chapter and in Appendix A, as applicable.

State-Led Reviews

States conducting their own reviews are subject to Children’s Bureau approval based on the criteria and approval requirements outlined in Appendix A. States must submit case review procedures and sampling plans that address these criteria and the content covered in this chapter along with example sampling frames to the Children’s Bureau by the final approval date for a State-Led Review, no later than 6 months prior to the start of the case review period.

Children's Bureau-Led Reviews

States participating in a Children's Bureau-Led Review must submit their case review procedures and sampling plan, addressing the content in this chapter, at least 6 months prior to the onsite review, and the foster care and in-home services sampling frames electronically to the Children's Bureau no later than 4 months prior to the onsite review.

Sample Preparation

Consultation calls with the Children's Bureau and the Measurement and Sampling Committee are arranged at least 8 to 9 months prior to the onsite review. Before selecting the in-home services and foster care samples, the Children's Bureau and the state should:

- Confirm the counties (or other geographical areas) where the onsite review will be conducted;
- Confirm the sample size and number of cases to be reviewed by case type, the metropolitan area site, and other agreed-upon stratification;
- Confirm the in-home services case population and start date that will be used to apply the criteria that cases be opened at least 45 consecutive days during the sampling period;
- Determine whether the state's in-home services cases are categorized by child or by family and, as necessary, discuss converting them to family cases;
- Confirm process to move cases for children with only a trial home visit placement setting during the entire sampling period from the foster care sampling frame to the in-home services sampling frame;
- Confirm that each review site selected for the onsite review has four to six times more in-home services and foster care cases than the number of cases scheduled for review in that site;
- Determine the case review schedule and sampling approach that will be used for the onsite review;
- Discuss process and specify due dates to submit case review procedures and sampling plan and sampling frames to the Children's Bureau;
- Obtain a list of all state counties or jurisdictions based on the FIPS or county codes. The Children's Bureau will provide a list of these codes to assist in the site confirmation process. If an insufficient number of in-home services or foster care cases is available, either another site must be selected or the issue will be resolved through discussion between the Children's Bureau and the state; and
- Confirm that any sealed foster care or adoption records will be available if they are selected for the sample, as federal authority exists to audit such cases (§ 471[a][8][D] of the Social Security Act). The Children's Bureau and state should develop a plan to access sealed records and locate and invite participation by adoptive families.

After the review sites have been determined, and upon receiving the sampling frames from the state, the Children's Bureau will analyze and validate the case sample lists. See Appendix A for more information.

Case Selection for Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews

After the state receives the randomized list of cases to be reviewed from the Children’s Bureau, the state verifies and finalizes the list of cases to be reviewed following case elimination procedures and consultation with the Children’s Bureau. When cases are eliminated, the state follows the sequential order in which the cases appear in the randomized sampling frames to select the replacement case.

Once the state and Children’s Bureau agree on the final list of cases to be reviewed, the state schedules the 65 cases for onsite reviews across the three sites. At each review site, the Children’s Bureau reviews approximately 15 to 35 cases (for example, the Children’s Bureau typically reviews up to 35 cases in the largest metropolitan subdivision and no fewer than 15 in the other two sites), unless otherwise agreed upon by the Children’s Bureau and the state.

If the state is unable to schedule 25 in-home services cases for review, there can be no substitution of foster care cases. Alternate in-home services cases should be prepared from the random-ordered sample lists at each site in the event that in-home services cases are eliminated during the onsite review. If the target number of in-home services cases cannot be reached or adjustments across sites are necessary, the Children’s Bureau will seek to review additional in-home services cases from the two non-metropolitan sites.

Table 4–1 below summarizes some of the similarities and distinctions between the review paths that relate to case review sampling:

Table 4–1. Case Review Sampling Elements by Review Path

Element	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
Sample size	Minimum of 65 cases—no upper limit	Limited to 65 cases
Review sites	At least 3 sites over a maximum of a 6-month case review period—maximum number of sites determined in consultation with CB	Limited to 3 sites in 1 week
Case type ratio	Reflective of state’s ratio as long as minimum 40 foster care/25 in-home services	40 foster care/25 in-home services
Sampling frame—foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized by individual child Served statewide or by jurisdiction strata According to state’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System reportable cases for the sampling period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized by individual child Jurisdiction strata According to state’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System reportable cases for the sampling period
Sampling frame— in-home services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case population defined jointly State-provided list by family unit Opened for at least 45 consecutive days during the sampling period including cases opened for services and/or case management pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan, including cases with only a trial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case population defined jointly State-provided list by family unit Opened for at least 45 consecutive days during the sampling period including cases opened for services and/or case management pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan, including cases with only a trial home

Element	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
	<p>home visit placement setting during the sampling period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the identification of cases in which any child in the family was in foster care for more than 24 hours during any portion of the period under review to support the elimination of such cases from the sample 	<p>visit placement setting during the sampling period</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the identification of cases in which any child in the family was in foster care for more than 24 hours during any portion of the period under review to support the elimination of such cases from the sample
Representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of a statewide sample or sites reflecting cross-section of state child welfare practice • Includes largest metropolitan area • Includes significant Tribal or other populations that are reflective of state demographics • Includes site with largest total case population (recommended by the Children’s Bureau) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of a cross-section of state child welfare practice based on 3 sites • Includes largest metropolitan area • Includes significant Tribal or other populations that are reflective of state demographics • Includes site with largest total case population (recommended by the Children’s Bureau)
Sampling period and sampling approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 6-month foster care and in-home services sampling period begins approximately 12 months prior to the start of the review month. The in-home services sampling period extends an additional 45 days beyond the foster care sampling period • States adjust the sampling period forward 1 month/quarter per each month/quarter of the case review period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 6-month foster care and in-home services sampling period begins approximately 12 months prior to the start of the case review month. The in-home services sampling period extends an additional 45 days beyond the foster care sampling period
Period under review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts at the beginning of the sampling period and ends when the case review is completed or case is closed, whichever occurs first. Periods under review will range from 12 to 15 months depending on the sampling approach and review month. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts at the beginning of the sampling period and ends when the case review is completed or case is closed, whichever occurs first. The period under review will be approximately 12 months.
Sampling activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted by the state after example sampling frames validated by the Children’s Bureau Measurement and Sampling Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States submit onsite review sampling frames for validation to the Children’s Bureau Measurement and Sampling Committee that are used to generate random sample and random ordered sampling frames that CB provides to state

Element	State-Led Reviews	Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews
Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan and sampling frames	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See content in chapter 4 and Appendix A • Submitted in time for the final approval deadline for a State-Led Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of 3 review sites • Description of in-home services case population • Sampling methodology • Sufficiency of sampling frame • Case elimination process • Finalized at least by 6 months prior to the onsite review
Case elimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must follow Children’s Bureau case elimination criteria • Must consult with Children’s Bureau regarding any proposed state-specific case elimination criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must follow Children’s Bureau case elimination criteria • Must consult with Children’s Bureau regarding any proposed state- specific case elimination criteria
Children’s Bureau consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available throughout the process on sampling design and case review procedures and sampling plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available throughout the process on sampling design and case review procedures and sampling plan

Chapter 5: Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions

For both State-Led and Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews, the use of the federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions is used to review in-home services and foster care cases. The Onsite Review Instrument contains questions, definitions, and instructions to guide how to rate state child welfare system performance related to the seven outcomes. A reviewer must complete the Onsite Review Instrument based on a review of the case record and interviews with key case participants, including the children, parents, foster parents, and caseworkers.

Using the Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions

The Onsite Review Instrument includes a Face Sheet for the reviewer to document general information about the case and the child, family, and case participants. That is followed by sections that focus on the safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.

Each of the outcomes includes one or more items that guide reviewers in assessing the child welfare system’s practice and performance in working with the child and family. While the Onsite Review Instrument itself includes detailed instructions on how to assess performance for each case being reviewed, reviewers should familiarize themselves with the general expectations for how the state can meet requirements and demonstrate performance before reviewing any cases.

The Children’s Bureau has developed resources that provide support and instruction to reviewers and quality assurance staff.² Reviewers and quality assurance staff are encouraged to utilize the array of resources available, which cover topics such as:

- Online Monitoring System and access to the automated Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions
- Ensuring accurate application of the Onsite Review Instrument
- Conducting comprehensive quality assurance
- Key case participants and interview questions
- Critical information needed to support item ratings
- Assessing and rating short-term cases
- Determining the involvement of non-custodial parents
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Reviewer briefs on item-specific topics
- Completed Onsite Review Instruments applied to mock cases and other material to support the state’s reviewer and quality assurance training

Reviewers must gather and analyze available information to rate each item appropriately through reviewing the case file and interviewing key case participants. It is critical that reviewers read all Onsite Review Instrument instructions and definitions to understand what the questions are asking and what is being assessed in each item. Reviewers should use their professional judgment in identifying and resolving conflicting information. Support and guidance on how to rate cases can be obtained through early discussions with quality assurance staff.

In reviewing each case, reviewers need to focus broadly on the child welfare system as it works in concert with its partners, such as the legal and judicial communities, law enforcement, and

² The expectations incorporated in the instrument are discussed in the “Reviewer Brief—Understanding the Federal Expectations for Rating Cases.”

service providers. It is important to identify how the system supported or impeded positive outcomes for the children and family in the case being reviewed.

Case-Related Interviews

Through the review process, the Children's Bureau wants to gain a full understanding of what occurred that affected child and family outcomes in a particular case. It is critical to obtain information from a variety of sources before making determinations about item ratings and outcomes.

Case-related interviews with key individuals involved in the case serve as an opportunity to determine what has occurred in the case, confirm case record documentation, collect information that might be missing from the record, and obtain input about case participants' experiences. The interview information should be considered equally valid with information obtained from the case file documentation.

When interviewing persons important to the case, reviewers are responsible for asking questions relevant to the items in the Onsite Review Instrument and ensuring that appropriate language is used to communicate effectively during the interview. (See Case-Related Interview Guides.) While an interpreter may be used, it is preferable for the reviewer to be linguistically and culturally competent in the language and culture of the person being interviewed. If information obtained during an interview conflicts with the documentation contained in the case record or obtained from another interview, reviewers have a responsibility to pursue the issue across multiple interviews. By using professional judgment and consulting with quality assurance staff, they can determine the most accurate responses to the relevant item questions.

Required Interviews With Key Case Participants

When scheduling case-related interviews with key case participants, state staff should keep in mind that there are often multiple parents and/or caregivers who should be included in the review process. Ensuring that all relevant participants in the case are available for interviews is critical for a successful review process.

The following individuals related to a case must be interviewed unless they are unavailable or unwilling to participate:

- The child (school-age)
- The child's parent(s) and/or caregivers
- The child's foster parent(s), pre-adoptive parent(s), or other caregiver(s), such as a relative caregiver
- The family's caseworker (when the caseworker has left the agency or is no longer available for interview, it is necessary to schedule interviews with the supervisor who was responsible for the caseworker assigned to the family)

As needed, on a case-by-case basis, other individuals who have relevant information about the case also may be interviewed, such as the child's guardian ad litem or advocate, professionals involved with the child or family, a parent's significant other, or family members. This may

include interviews identified by the reviewers, and in consultation with the quality assurance staff, during the case review.

The following key case participants in a case should be interviewed:

Children

Only school-age children are interviewed, unless other arrangements are made. Cases involving children younger than school age, children who are developmentally younger than school age, or children who are incapacitated due to physical or mental health issues or delays may be reviewed but do not require an interview with the child.

Children to be interviewed in in-home services cases include:

- All children in the family home.

Children to be interviewed in foster care cases include:

- The target child.
- Other children in the family home (optional, depending on case circumstances). There may be cases that warrant interviews with other children in the home because they are included in the assessment of safety outcomes, but this should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers to be interviewed in in-home services cases include:

- Parents/caregivers with whom the children were living when the agency became involved with the family and with whom the children will remain (for example, biological parents, relatives, guardians, adoptive parents).
- A biological parent who does not fit the definition above and may need to be included in interviews based on the circumstances of the case. Some things to consider in this determination are the reason for the agency's involvement, the identified perpetrators in the case, the status of the children's relationship with the parent, the nature of the case (court supervised or voluntary), and the length of case opening. If, during the period under review, a biological parent indicated a desire to be involved with the child and it is in the child's best interests to do so, the parent should be included in the case review and should be interviewed.

Parents/caregivers to be interviewed in foster care cases include:

- Parents/caregivers from whom the child was removed and with whom the agency is working toward reunification.
- Biological parents who were not the parents from whom the child was removed.
- Adoptive parents, if the adoption was finalized during the period under review.

If it has been documented that it is not in the child's best interests to involve a parent in case planning, or if the parent did not want to be involved in the child's life during the entire period under review, that parent does not need to be interviewed.

Foster Parents

Foster parents include related or non-related caregivers who have been given responsibility for care of the child by the agency while the child is under the placement and care responsibility and supervision of the agency. This includes pre-adoptive parents if the adoption has not been finalized. If there are multiple foster parents during the period under review, all foster parents should be interviewed.

Potential Exceptions to Conducting Interviews

- Preschool-age children
- Parents who cannot be located despite the agency's demonstrated efforts to locate them, or a parent who lives outside of the United States
- There is a safety or risk concern in contacting any party for an interview
- Any party who is unable to consent to an interview due to physical or mental health incapacity
- Any party who refuses to participate in an interview and the agency can document attempts to engage that person
- Any party who is advised by an attorney not to participate due to a pending criminal or civil matter
- Any party involved in a pending criminal or civil matter before a court or agency who believes they could (or who their legal representative believes could) be negatively affected by participation

States should contact the Children's Bureau to discuss any potential exceptions to conducting interviews and the need to eliminate cases due to a lack of required case-related interviews. (See [Guidance for Case Elimination](#) for more information about case elimination.)

Unacceptable Exceptions

- An age cut-off that does not take into account a child's developmental capacity, e.g., a policy of not interviewing children under age 12
- A party who refuses to participate in an interview, but the agency did not attempt to engage that person beyond a letter
- A party who cannot be located but the agency has not made attempts to locate the individual
- A party who speaks a language other than English

Optional Interviews

Interviews with other professionals knowledgeable about the case may be arranged but are not required as part of the case review process. When numerous service providers are involved with a child or family, the Children’s Bureau suggests that interviews be scheduled only with those most recently involved, those most knowledgeable about the family, or those who provide the primary services the family is receiving.

Other individuals who have relevant information about the case also may be interviewed, such as the child’s guardian ad litem or advocate, or other family members.

Arranging Interviews

Case-related interviews should take place after reviewers have had an opportunity to review case record documentation thoroughly, so they can explore relevant issues and confirm or verify information found in the case record with each person interviewed.

Interviews with parents, foster parents, and children should be conducted at the agency office or off site, depending on the individual being interviewed. When travel arrangements and the schedules of reviewers preclude travel to offsite locations, or when persons to be interviewed prefer not to have reviewers in their homes or offices, the state may arrange to hold the interviews in a central location. The use of telephone and/or video conferencing software applications to conduct interviews also may be arranged for individuals located outside the review site.

Interview Guides

The interview guides include suggested language for introducing the interview process to the interviewee as well as specific questions that can be asked to cover the key areas in the Onsite Review Instrument that should be informed by case participant information. The questions in the guides can be modified to fit the specific needs of participants as well as the circumstances of the case. The Children’s Bureau strongly recommends that the guides and instructions be used for interviews to ensure that adequate and consistent information is gathered through the interviews across the sample of cases being reviewed. Reviewers are encouraged to review the guides before their interviews so they can highlight questions that they plan on asking and develop additional questions that may be needed. For more information on conducting key case-related interviews with child(ren), parents/caregivers, foster parents, and caseworkers, see the Children’s Bureau’s “Case-Related Interview Guides and Instructions.”

Quality Assurance and Secondary Oversight of Case Reviews and the Onsite Review Instrument

Comprehensive quality assurance processes can assist states in:

- Guiding review teams through the case review process and clarifying the application of the Onsite Review Instrument to cases being reviewed
- Applying professional judgment appropriately to reconcile the information gathered and resolve disagreements about case ratings fairly and accurately
- Identifying topics to be further explored in reviewer training and guidance

- Tracking issues with the process or the Onsite Review Instrument that the Children’s Bureau needs to address and/or resolve
- Cultivating confidence in the results of the case review
- Viewing practice assessment as part of a fair and equitable process based on standardization and objectivity

All cases reviewed for the Child and Family Services Review, regardless of review path, must undergo initial quality assurance. Initial quality assurance ensures that reviewers are accurately rating cases and properly applying federal instructions.

The Children’s Bureau conducts Secondary Oversight in addition to the initial quality assurance activities. Secondary Oversight activities during the onsite review and Program Improvement Plan case reviews ensure that the cases reviewed during the onsite review period, Program Improvement Plan implementation, and post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period are accurate, consistent, and adhere to the instructions provided for use of the Onsite Review Instrument. These activities are intended to ensure the integrity of the completed Onsite Review Instruments, the information contained therein, and the accuracy of the ratings so the Children’s Bureau can rely on the data to make substantial conformity determinations that states can use to inform program and practice improvement. Secondary Oversight also ensures consistency among all cases reviewed within the state and ensures that the Children’s Bureau can support national consistency across all states. The Children’s Bureau tailors the scope and intensity of its Secondary Oversight activities during the onsite review and any required Program Improvement Plan case reviews based on the degree to which each state demonstrates accurate and consistent application of the Onsite Review Instrument.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Onsite Review Instrument quality assurance and Secondary Oversight processes extend the collaborative approach that the Children’s Bureau and the state employ throughout the review. These responsibilities are shared by both the state and the Children’s Bureau so that the results generated by the case reviews accurately reflect the practices on which the state’s performance on the outcomes is based. The roles and responsibilities of those conducting quality assurance on the Onsite Review Instruments may vary depending upon the case review path for which the state has been approved, but there are specific roles for Child and Family Services Review team leaders, those charged with primarily conducting quality assurance activities, and reviewers.

The review team shares responsibility for ensuring that ratings are accurate and consistent through the comprehensive and informed review of cases and two levels of quality assurance activities.

- Reviewers gather and reconcile the information needed to answer the relevant questions using the instructions within, and supplemental to, the Onsite Review Instrument and the support and guidance of the quality assurance team
- During initial quality assurance activities, the quality assurance staff assist in all phases of the review, from the preparation of the case for the review through the completion of the Onsite Review Instrument, by:
 - Answering questions about the proper application of the instrument
 - Working with reviewers on clarifying issues

- Assisting reviewers in reconciling information to arrive at appropriate case ratings
- The Children’s Bureau completes Secondary Oversight across cases and sites once quality assurance on the individual Onsite Review Instruments is completed

Initial Quality Assurance and Secondary Oversight in Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews

Overview

During Children’s Bureau-Led Reviews, Local Site Team members who are performing quality assurance engage the reviewer(s) as they review and rate each case. The Children’s Bureau assigns a quality assurance pair, comprising a federal and a state quality assurance Local Site Team member, to work with each reviewer pair to conduct initial quality assurance activities, including providing advice, support, and coaching throughout the case rating process, on all 65 cases.

After these and other initial quality assurance activities are complete, State Team Leaders performing quality assurance analyze a selection of cases to ensure rating consistency and accuracy across each review site. These Secondary Oversight activities may also include Children’s Bureau staff who are working remotely. Finally, the Children’s Bureau, in consultation with the state, reconciles and resolves necessary case rating changes.

Local Site Team Leaders performing quality assurance are responsible for fielding questions and conducting group debriefings with individuals conducting quality assurance throughout the review week. They are also responsible for communication with the overall State Team Leaders as rating issues arise. This communication should include a joint assessment of the reasons for any rating issues and how these could be addressed. At least 1 month before the onsite review, the Children’s Bureau and the state work together to agree on a process for resolving rating disagreements, including when during the review week State Team Leaders and the Children’s Bureau will discuss ratings and resolve issues. Ultimately, however, the Children’s Bureau retains final authority for ensuring that ratings are accurate, which may include changing case ratings when joint resolution cannot be reached.

Initial Quality Assurance While Reviewing the Case

The quality assurance team members will discuss and consult with the reviewer pair while working through each case. This ongoing consultation will provide opportunities for coaching the reviewers as they consider the child and family’s circumstances as documented in the case record and elicited during interviews. Taking into account the reviewers’ experience, the quality assurance team members will collaborate with them to:

- Determine early whether the case should be in the sample
- Develop a plan for reviewing the case record, including:
 - Determining the reason for agency involvement
 - Identifying key participants, such as parents and caregivers
 - Determining who should be rated for different items
 - Focusing on events and activities during the period under review

- Become familiar with the case, case participants, and case circumstances, and:
 - Input information into the Onsite Review Instrument as it is discovered
 - Identify questions about confusing information and/or a lack of information
 - Document thoughts about potential ratings and discuss what has been learned before completing them
- Consult with assigned quality assurance team members regarding questions or concerns

Initial Quality Assurance Related to Case-Related Interviews

During these initial quality assurance activities, the assigned quality assurance team members also support the reviewers in planning for case-related interviews, including:

- Verifying as early as possible who should be interviewed, identifying language and cultural factors that must be considered to ensure effective communication, and identifying who, with the appropriate skill set, will be available for interviews and when
- Identifying information, using the Onsite Review Instrument, that needs to be gathered through interviews
- Discussing the reviewers' approach to the interviews and adjustments that may be necessary based on the interviewees' needs
- Integrating the results of the interviews into case findings, ratings, and rating rationales

Together, the quality assurance team members and reviewers should consult this manual, its appendices, and other Children's Bureau resources for specific information regarding case-related interviews, including the Case-Related Interview Guides and Instructions. These guides provide suggestions about basic approaches to case-related interviews to help the interviewee feel comfortable with and understand the interview process. To that end, reviewers should introduce themselves, explain the purpose of the reviews, clarify their neutrality, and reassure the interviewee that anything they say during the interview remains confidential, with the exception of information indicating current safety concerns.

Validating Information

Another function that initial quality assurance serves in the case review process is that of cross-checking information and decisions within each Onsite Review Instrument to ensure that the reviewers are responding correctly to the instructions. The Children's Bureau Onsite Review Instrument Quality Assurance Guide, the resources noted at the beginning of this chapter, and this manual provide information on how to cross-check information and adhere to:

- Instructions that apply across the Onsite Review Instrument
- Item-specific instructions
- Instructions applicable to common case dynamics (e.g., short-term foster care cases)

Child Safety Concerns

The assigned quality assurance team member(s) should ensure that the reviewer knows to

immediately report safety concerns uncovered during the review of the case record or in an interview. It is important for the quality assurance team to help the reviewer determine when there is a safety concern and to follow the state's protocol to report it to the state's site leader for any action required to ensure safety.

Secondary Oversight

The focus of Secondary Oversight is to ensure consistency across the review sites and all states. The Children's Bureau accomplishes this by reviewing a selection of cases, either on site or remotely, for:

- Accuracy of ratings, changed ratings, and resolution of disputed ratings
- Challenging areas of the Onsite Review Instrument
- National consistency

State Quality Assurance and Children's Bureau Secondary Oversight in State-Led Reviews

States approved to conduct their own case reviews to generate the data the Children's Bureau will use to make conformity determinations will have defined how they will carry out quality assurance activities as part of the case review criteria approval process. The case review criteria (see Appendix A) detail the minimum requirements for State-Led Review quality assurance processes. These include providing training for the state's reviewers and those conducting quality assurance and ensuring that there is a written process for centrally tracking and resolving process and/or Onsite Review Instrument issues and sharing that information with the state's review team. States will need to develop and use quality assurance processes that adhere to the Children's Bureau's criteria and expectations and, when needed, have a process for activating protocols to correct ratings.

At least 1 month before the case review period, the Children's Bureau and the state work together to agree on a process for resolving rating disagreements, including when the state and Children's Bureau will discuss ratings and resolve issues. The Children's Bureau retains final authority for ensuring that ratings are accurate, which may include changing case ratings when joint resolution cannot be reached.

The process the state uses to complete quality assurance activities associated with the cases being reviewed and ensuring the consistency of ratings across multiple sites and reviewers may be unique to each state approved to conduct its own case review. Quality assurance activities and processes will be specified in the state's approved case review procedures and sampling plan and consistent with the case review criteria minimum requirements. How the Children's Bureau works with each state may vary, requiring discussion and consultation between the Children's Bureau and the state to determine, at a minimum:

- When, within the state's case review period, Children's Bureau staff and its review team members will observe how the state's reviewers are completing the Onsite Review Instrument and how the state is conducting initial quality assurance on cases. It is important that the Children's Bureau participate in the state's quality assurance activities early in the state's case review period so the Children's Bureau can assist the state in achieving accurate results for all the cases reviewed.
- How the Children's Bureau will conduct Secondary Oversight in relation to the state's quality assurance process. It may be necessary for the state and the Children's Bureau to discuss how the state can accommodate the Secondary Oversight in a way that is not typical for the state's selected quality assurance approach. For example, if quality

assurance typically occurs through ad hoc calls between the state reviewer(s) and quality assurance team member(s), the Children's Bureau may request a call at a prearranged time to support its observation of that interaction to gain insight into the topics covered and feedback given.

- The number and selection of the cases on which the Children's Bureau will conduct Secondary Oversight across the review period and after the state's initial quality assurance activities are complete to gain insight into:
 - The accuracy and consistency of ratings across the case review period
 - Any trends in ratings or changes in ratings across the case review period
 - National consistency
- Who, within the state, is responsible for resolving issues related to case rating decisions and how the Children's Bureau will engage with that person should concerns arise during quality assurance activities and Secondary Oversight.
- Appropriate methods and timing of feedback and continued consultation on the strength of the state's quality assurance process. It is necessary for the state to practice continuous quality improvement in conducting case reviews so that it can be responsive to feedback and concerns about the application of the Onsite Review Instrument.

The Children's Bureau provides support consistent with the state's quality assurance needs. In states with little demonstrated experience with the Onsite Review Instrument and/or in conducting quality assurance, the Children's Bureau's participation in observing the state's quality assurance processes may be more frequent and/or more intensive based on the areas of challenge the Children's Bureau has identified with the state. Further, the Children's Bureau is prepared to adjust its plans for Secondary Oversight, as needed, during the period of the case reviews in a state. Therefore, the state and the Children's Bureau will continue to revisit how Secondary Oversight may look over the course of the case review period, the Program Improvement Plan implementation period, and the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period.

Chapter 6: Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews are part of the onsite review phase of the Child and Family Services Reviews. This includes interviews with individuals and partners who have experience with the child welfare system and, as a result, can provide knowledge about its statewide functioning. Those interviewed must include Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system. The purpose of stakeholder interviews is to collect information needed to determine whether the state is in substantial conformity with the Child and Family Services Reviews systemic factor federal requirements. The interviews collect information regarding how the systemic factors are functioning to supplement the evidence provided in the statewide assessment. Stakeholder interviews are distinct from case-related interviews, which are designed to elicit information about specific cases. The process and structure for conducting stakeholder interviews is the same for both the State-Led Review and Children's Bureau-Led Review processes. In general, information from the stakeholder interviews, in combination with the evidence from the statewide assessment, is used to determine a state's substantial conformity with the systemic factors.

Assessment of Systemic Factors

The Children's Bureau assesses how well each systemic factor requirement is functioning across the state. The information used to inform systemic factor ratings generally comes from the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews, as necessary. The Children's Bureau may determine whether the state is in substantial conformity with systemic factors through the review of evidence contained in the Statewide Assessment. If more information is needed, the federal team conducts stakeholder interviews during the onsite review phase; however, stakeholder interviews may not be necessary for all systemic factors. Two systemic factors are exceptions to this process: Service Array and Case Review. For the Service Array systemic factor, the Children's Bureau uses information from both the Statewide Assessment and stakeholder interviews to determine substantial conformity. For the Case Review System systemic factor, the Children's Bureau may make substantial conformity decisions based solely on evidence contained in the Statewide Assessment. If no interviews are required to make a determination regarding substantial conformity for that systemic factor, the Children's Bureau will work with the state to determine which Case Review System systemic factor items will result in interviews, with the goals of integrating the legal and judicial communities fully into the Child and Family Services Review and gathering information that could be helpful for Program Improvement Plan development (see Chapters 2 and 7 for more information).

If, during the stakeholder interview, additional data evidence is identified that was not previously submitted as part of the state's Statewide Assessment, the state may submit the data evidence no later than the end of the week of the stakeholder interviews. This opportunity to provide additional information to inform substantial conformity determinations should not replace the state's focus on gathering and generating usable, relevant information early in the development of its Statewide Assessment.

Conducting Stakeholder Interviews

When stakeholder interviews are required to inform the functioning of a specific systemic factor, the federal-state team engages in a collaborative process to plan and coordinate stakeholder interviews in preparation for the onsite review phase. This includes identifying Tribes, legal and

judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system—and the information needed to determine substantial conformity for the targeted systemic factor. See (1) Stakeholder Interview Guide, which includes information on preparation for stakeholder interviews; and (2) Appendix E, Collaborating During the Child and Family Services Reviews.

When identifying the necessary stakeholder interviews, it is important to determine what information, in addition to the evidence presented in the statewide assessment, is needed for the Children’s Bureau to determine substantial conformity. The team should interview system partners including families and youth served by the agency who, together, are knowledgeable regarding the statewide functioning of the agency with respect to the identified systemic factor. Careful consideration should be given to identifying and individualizing questions, including those the state wants to explore for program improvement planning purposes, that should be asked of these stakeholders and be based on information the state provides in its Statewide Assessment.

If possible, stakeholder interviews should be scheduled during regular working hours and during the time period in which the Children’s Bureau will participate in the state’s case review process. However, the Children’s Bureau and the state can negotiate an alternative schedule that allows stakeholder interviews to be conducted off site or before the Children’s Bureau’s onsite participation, if necessary. However, stakeholder interviews should be completed no later than the halfway point of the case review period. The Children’s Bureau and the state should finalize a schedule of stakeholder interviews at least 2 weeks before the start of the review (see Chapter 3 for information regarding scheduling and Appendix G1/G2 for review timelines).

When planning group interviews, consider:

- Including individuals who have lived experience or work in the child welfare system. These individuals should have varying experiences (i.e., newer or seasoned) that reflect the period of time being assessed (approximately the last 3 years).
- Having no more than 12 to 15 participants in each interview. The number of participants should be manageable and provide an opportunity for all voices and perspectives to be heard.
- Identifying participants to engage in stakeholder interviews considering issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Identifying stakeholders who can provide observations, experiences, and expertise about the systemic factors as they are functioning in different areas of the state, such as metro, urban, and rural areas, and who are reflective of the racial, ethnic, and underserved populations affected by the system.
- Scheduling no more than 20 focus groups. The number of groups and the number of participants per group should be balanced with the need to gather relevant information that is reflective of systemic factor functioning.
- Avoiding mixing groups in a way that would limit feedback, such as pairing contracted providers with staff of the overseeing agency or caseworkers with their supervisors.
- Scheduling stakeholder interviews for approximately an hour to an hour and a half, depending on the number of individuals to be interviewed, with the schedule allowing

for travel between interviews, if necessary. The time needed for interviews varies depending on the number of systemic factor items to be addressed and the information needed to adequately address them

The Stakeholder Interview Guide contains questions that are helpful in gathering information needed to inform decisions about substantial conformity. It also provides information regarding preparation for stakeholder interviews.

Chapter 7: Determination of Substantial Conformity

After the completion of the onsite review phase of the Child and Family Services Review, whether for a State-Led or a Children's Bureau-Led Review, the Children's Bureau makes a determination regarding substantial conformity for each of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors under review based on the requirements set forth at 45 CFR § 1355.34. The Children's Bureau provides these findings, along with information on the state child welfare system's strengths and areas needing improvement in serving children and families, to the state in a Final Report prepared by the Children's Bureau after all data have been obtained.

A Program Improvement Plan is required for outcomes and systemic factors determined not to be in substantial conformity. The Program Improvement Plan process is discussed in detail in Chapters 8–10 of this manual. Appendix B, *Child and Family Services Reviews: Pathway to Substantial Conformity*, displays the criteria for determining substantial conformity with the outcomes and the systemic factors.

The Children's Bureau's Preliminary Feedback and Findings

During the onsite review, the Children's Bureau engages in discussions with the state to provide feedback and observations. In Children's Bureau-Led Reviews, this often takes the form of local debriefings on case review findings and stakeholder interviews. For State-Led Reviews, Children's Bureau participation will generally lead to the Children's Bureau's sharing its observations about findings, trends, ratings, and quality assurance activities during ongoing discussions. Any information shared with the state prior to receiving the Final Report should be considered preliminary feedback and findings. The Final Report includes the official determinations of substantial conformity made by the Children's Bureau once all information has been finalized.

Local Debriefings

Local debriefings allow for the sharing of site-specific information with the local participants who are most likely to benefit, including but not limited to caseworkers, supervisors, local administrators, and legal and judicial staff. The debriefings provide a forum to:

- Gather and share preliminary information about local review findings, including strengths and areas needing improvement
- Discuss trends and systemic issues identified during the case reviews
- Collect feedback on the review process
- Discuss next steps

Children's Bureau-Led Case Review Debriefings

For states engaged in a Children's Bureau-Led Review, local debriefings occur at each site at the end of the review week activities. The debriefings, facilitated by the Children's Bureau and the state, are informal guided discussions open to the entire onsite review team and those the local office invites. The Children's Bureau encourages the state to invite those key agency staff, whether local or state-level, as well as Tribes, partners, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system, who will benefit from hearing about the findings or will have major or shared responsibility for program improvement planning.

State-Led Case Review Debriefings

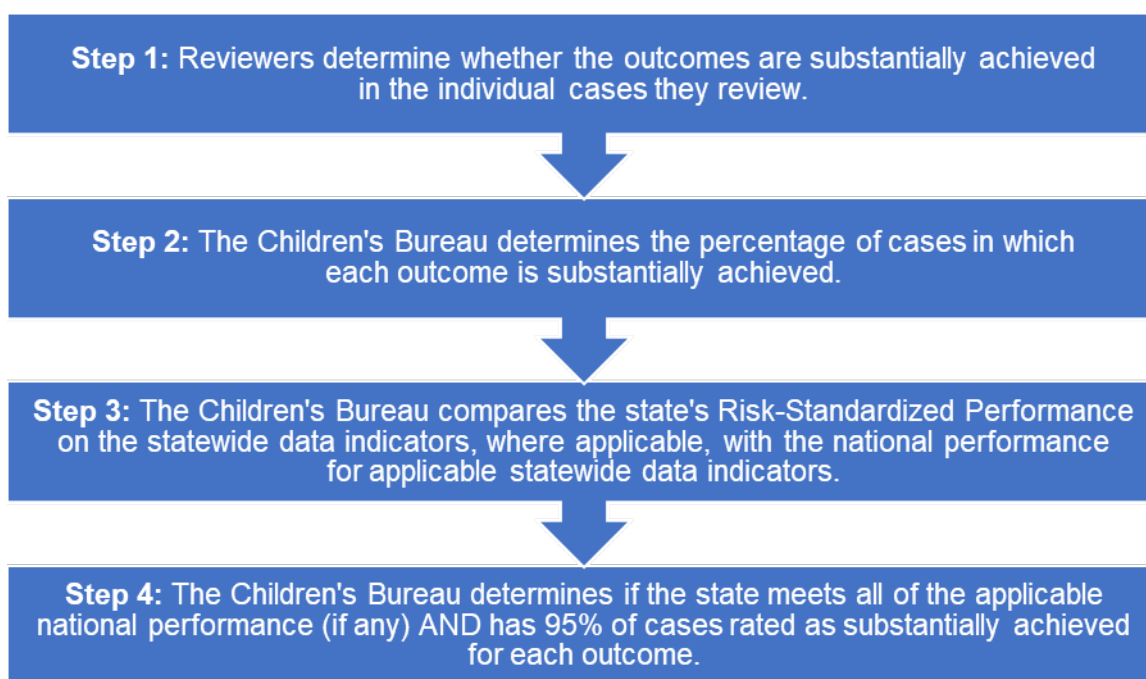
In states that conduct debriefings in the context of their State-Led case review process, the Children’s Bureau and the state will determine the level of Children’s Bureau participation in the debriefings. However, if the state does not have debriefings as part of its case review process, the Children’s Bureau will not require them.

Determination of Substantial Conformity With the Outcomes

Using the state’s Risk-Standardized Performance on the statewide data indicators as transmitted by the Children’s Bureau with the Statewide Assessment instrument and onsite case review data, the Children’s Bureau assesses seven outcomes under three domains (Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being) by examining 18 items, included in the “Quick Reference Items List.”

The diagram below in Figure 7-1 illustrates the process of determining substantial conformity with the outcomes.

Figure 7-1: Steps in Determining Substantial Conformity With Outcomes



Case Review Performance

The Onsite Review Instrument lists the items that reviewers examine in assessing achievement of each outcome. For each case, once the reviewers have examined the items and entered the relevant information, the Online Monitoring System provides the Onsite Review Instrument logic for rating each item as a Strength, an Area Needing Improvement, or Not Applicable. The system then records whether, for each case, each of the seven outcomes was Substantially Achieved, Partially Achieved, Not Achieved, or Not Applicable.

For an outcome to be rated as Substantially Achieved for a case, the following criteria must be met:

- Safety Outcome 1, “Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect”: Item 1 is rated as a Strength.
- Safety Outcome 2, “Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate”: All applicable items are rated as a Strength.
- Permanency Outcome 1, “Children have permanency and stability in their living situations”: All applicable items are rated as a Strength.
- Permanency Outcome 2, “The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children”: No more than one of the applicable items for this outcome is rated as an Area Needing Improvement and at least one item is rated as a Strength.
- Well-Being Outcome 1, “Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs”: Item 12 must be rated as a Strength and no more than one of the remaining applicable items may be rated as an Area Needing Improvement.
- Well-Being Outcome 2, “Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs”: Item 16 is rated as a Strength.
- Well-Being Outcome 3, “Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs”: At least one item is applicable, and all items are rated as a Strength.

Performance on Statewide Data Indicators as Compared to National Performance

The Children’s Bureau provides information on the state’s Risk-Standardized Performance compared to national performance in the State Data Profile that is transmitted to the state with the Statewide Assessment instrument. The Children’s Bureau determines if the state’s Risk-Standardized Performance is statistically better, no different, or worse than national performance for each statewide data indicator associated with the outcome. The state’s Risk-Standardized Performance must be better or no different than national performance on all applicable statewide data indicators associated with the outcome, and the state must meet the associated case review standards for the Children’s Bureau to consider the state in substantial conformity with an outcome. (For more information on substantial conformity requirements, see the tables in Appendix B.)

Determination of Substantial Conformity With the Systemic Factors

Through the statewide assessment process, the state compiles and evaluates information about the systemic factors using the most relevant and recent evidence. The Children’s Bureau examines this evidence at the time of the submittal of the Statewide Assessment instrument and determines whether it conclusively demonstrates that any systemic factors can be deemed in substantial conformity. When that determination is not possible, the Children’s Bureau determines the scope of stakeholder interviews needed during the onsite review and gathers the information necessary from the interviews to make substantial conformity decisions. Stakeholder interviews on the Service Array and Case Review System systemic factors will be conducted in all states (see Chapter 6 for more information on stakeholder interviews).

Using the statewide assessment and information gathered from stakeholder interviews, the

Children’s Bureau assigns a rating of Strength or Area Needing Improvement to each of the title IV-B/IV-E state plan requirements corresponding to the systemic factor based on how well the item-specific requirement is functioning as described in the applicable regulation or statute. By “functioning,” the Children’s Bureau means that the requirement is occurring or is being met consistently and on an ongoing basis across the state for all relevant populations. The Children’s Bureau considers the following factors when making determinations using the statewide assessment:

- Has the state provided evidence that is relevant and addresses the totality of the item?
- Does the evidence indicate that the systemic factor item is routinely functioning as required statewide?
- Are there significant methodological, scope, quality, or timeframe issues with the evidence the state provided that prevent the Children’s Bureau from relying on it?
- Does the state assert (or at least not contravene/contradict) that the evidence represents their statewide performance on the systemic factor item?

If the Children’s Bureau can respond “yes” to the above factors when considering the evidence in the Statewide Assessment, no further stakeholder interviews will be necessary except for the Service Array and Case Review System systemic factors. The Children’s Bureau then considers any additional information gathered from the stakeholder interviews in combination with the statewide assessment to determine whether a state is in substantial conformity with the systemic factors.

For a state to be found in substantial conformity with a systemic factor, the evidence obtained from the statewide assessment and/or stakeholder interviews, if necessary, must support the following criteria:

- Systemic Factor 1: Statewide Information System: Item 19 must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 2: Case Review System: At least four of the five items for this systemic factor must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 3: Quality Assurance System: Item 25 must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 4: Staff and Provider Training: At least two of the three items for this systemic factor must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 5: Service Array and Resource Development: At least one of the two items for this systemic factor must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 6: Agency Responsiveness to the Community: At least one of the two items for this systemic factor must be rated as a Strength.
- Systemic Factor 7: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention: At least three of the four items for this systemic factor must be rated as a Strength.

Final Report

The Final Report is a compilation of information on the state child welfare system’s strengths

and areas needing improvement regarding each of the outcomes and systemic factors reviewed through the Child and Family Services Reviews.

Content of the Final Report

The Final Report documents the Children’s Bureau’s determination of substantial conformity or nonconformity for each outcome and systemic factor reviewed during the state’s Child and Family Services Review. The review findings, supported by evidence from the Statewide Assessment, completed Onsite Review Instruments, stakeholder interviews, and performance on the statewide data indicators, form the basis of the report.

To protect the confidentiality of individual children, families, and representative stakeholders, the report does not identify interviewees or cases reviewed.

The report is accompanied by a cover letter that includes a statement about substantial conformity. If a state is not in substantial conformity, the letter also estimates the amount of any withholding of federal funds and the date by which the state must submit a Program Improvement Plan to the Children’s Bureau Regional Office.

The Child and Family Services Review Final Report provides the state with initial insight into which items may be contributing to the achievement or lack thereof of the outcomes and systemic factors. States should consider the report, along with the Statewide Assessment, as a foundation for conducting further analysis to inform the development of the Program Improvement Plan. A deeper exploration of strengths and challenges uncovered by the review and other continuous quality improvement change and implementation activities will be a focus of Program Improvement Plan development discussions.

Dissemination of the Final Report and Results Discussion

The Children’s Bureau aims to release the Final Report to the state within 30 days from the date on which the Children’s Bureau received all finalized case review data. Concurrent with the issuance of the Final Report, the Children’s Bureau and the state schedule a formal discussion of the results.

The Children’s Bureau encourages the state to invite to the discussion:

- The entire review team
- Agency staff from the locations reviewed
- Key agency staff who will benefit from hearing the review findings, including staff who will have major responsibility for planning program improvements
- Community partners, including but not limited to Tribes, legal and judicial communities, other system partners, and youth and individuals with lived experience and 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 inequality in the child welfare system and others whose active engagement and voice is necessary to evaluate the strengths and areas needing improvement in the child welfare system as a whole.

Chapter 8: Framework for Systemic Improvement— Integration of the Child and Family Services Plan, Annual Progress and Services Report, and Program Improvement Plan

The Program Improvement Plan is designed to create lasting and statewide systemic change in key areas identified in the Child and Family Services Review, while also addressing the practice and systemic concerns found during the review that affect the system's ability to meet the needs of children and families served. As such, the Program Improvement planning, development, implementation, monitoring, and adjustment process must focus on strengthening system functioning, which leads to better outcomes for children and families.

The Child and Family Services Plan is a 5-year strategic plan that sets the stage for a state to fulfill its vision and accomplish its goals for strengthening the child welfare system statewide (§ 432(a)(2) of the Social Security Act). It also identifies the state's comprehensive array of child welfare services, from prevention and protection through permanency; describes how the state meets federal requirements; and establishes the state's strategies for child welfare system and outcome improvement over a 5-year period. The Annual Progress and Services Report is the annual update to the Child and Family Services Plan. The Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan documents the state's focused improvement plan for a 2-year period to address areas found not in conformity with the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors under review. Implementing Program Improvement Plan strategies helps states create lasting and statewide systemic change while addressing the immediate system and practice improvement needs of children and families.

Cornerstones of the Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report and Child and Family Services Review/Program Improvement Plan are:

- Reliance on a wide range of quality and relevant data and the use of evidence to evaluate and demonstrate outcome performance and systemic factor functioning, including equity in the programs administered, families served, practices, and child and family outcomes
- Broad and meaningful engagement of Tribes, system partners, and individuals with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system

The substantial, meaningful, and ongoing collaboration required for the development and implementation of the state's Child and Family Services Plan should be sustained throughout the Program Improvement Plan process. As the state develops and implements its Program Improvement Plan, the state should consider how these collaborative partners can help guide, support, and monitor the work.

The state's most recent Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report, Statewide Assessment, recent Child and Family Services Review findings, and ongoing continuous quality improvement efforts are the starting point for the development of the state's Program Improvement Plan. The Child and Family Services Plan includes the state's assessment of safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes and the seven systemic factors. It also includes goals, objectives, and interventions to improve practice and systems that contribute to positive outcomes for children and families as well as measures/benchmarks to gauge improvement. As such, the state and the Children's Bureau jointly consider whether existing Child and Family Services Plan efforts need to be incorporated, strengthened, or

modified for the Program Improvement Plan, or what new efforts are needed to meet the Program Improvement Plan's requirements. Coordination and integration of federal requirements across federal improvement plans and programs will help states build on and strengthen existing processes, findings, plans, and lessons learned.

These ongoing federal monitoring processes are best viewed as being part of, and integral to, the state's continuous quality improvement change-and-implementation cycle as they 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, monitoring, and adjustments of federal and state program improvement plans.

Joint Planning for the Child and Family Services Plan, Annual Progress and Services Report, and Child and Family Services Review Processes

Joint planning is an ongoing collaboration between the state and the Children's Bureau that occurs in consultation with the state's Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system. The aim of joint planning is to guide the state's systemic, resource, programmatic, and practice adjustments to lead to improved outcomes for children and families. Meaningful collaboration means that families, children, youth, and other partners are engaged to identify and work toward shared vision, goals, and activities; assess outcomes; and develop strategic plans to increase the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the child welfare system (45 CFR § 1357.15(l)).

Joint planning occurs throughout plan development, implementation, monitoring, and adjustments. It relies on and is informed by an accurate understanding of the data and information used to identify and continually assess strengths, challenges, and trends in practice and systemic functioning, including a critical analysis of evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes. States are encouraged to use a variety of approaches and activities for collaboration and consultation, including holding focus groups, conducting surveys, holding joint planning forums, or developing other strategies for linking the Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report processes with the Child and Family Services Review process.

The Children's Bureau's integrated approach to joint planning around the Child and Family Services Plan, Annual Progress and Services Report, and Child and Family Services Review processes helps develop a common and accurate understanding of the state's child welfare system and practice. Within the regulatory framework of the Child and Family Services Review, it also reinforces the state's efforts to build and institutionalize capacity to self-monitor child and family outcomes, systemic functioning, and improvement practices. This style of collaboration and the integration of planning activities also creates an opportunity to reduce duplication and align the state's workflow, plans, and processes.

Chapter 9: Developing the Program Improvement Plan— Overview of Program Improvement Plan Development, Approval, and Implementation

Effective systemic improvement begins with identifying and understanding relevant data evidence as well as the underlying factors affecting the state's performance, and provides an opportunity to consider and critically analyze evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes. Using this information, strategies or interventions can be chosen for target populations based on research and evidence of effectiveness. A well-chosen strategy or intervention then requires effective implementation to achieve the desired outcomes.

States will be best prepared to submit a Program Improvement Plan within the required timeframe when the state has completed a comprehensive and accurate Statewide Assessment and uses its Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report process and ongoing continuous quality improvement efforts as a foundation for Program Improvement Plan development. The state should be prepared to strategically address the areas needing improvement in its Program Improvement Plan and submit it within the required timeframe by engaging with its partners and the Children's Bureau in ongoing review of relevant evidence of state performance and an analysis of the content of the Statewide Assessment and Final Report.

The following timeframes apply to the Program Improvement Plan development and implementation process:

- The state must submit the Program Improvement Plan to the Children's Bureau Regional Office for approval within 90 calendar days from the date the state receives written notification from the Children's Bureau that it is not operating in substantial conformity with any one of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors.
- The Children's Bureau works with the state to develop the Program Improvement Plan in collaboration with its system partners, who have lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system, and reflect people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system.
- If the Children's Bureau does not approve the state's initial Program Improvement Plan submission, the Children's Bureau will provide additional information to help the state revise it. The state must submit a revised Program Improvement Plan to the Children's Bureau Regional Office within 30 calendar days of receiving written notice that the submitted Program Improvement Plan was not approved.
- The Children's Bureau approval notice indicates the commencement date of the state's Program Improvement Plan. The state's Program Improvement Plan must be designed so that its implementation is completed no later than 2 years from the commencement date. Not all Program Improvement Plan elements will require this much time to address. Two years is the maximum length of time for those elements requiring more extensive action.

- Strategies or interventions affecting child safety must be implemented first and in less than 2 years. The priority given to safety should be reflected in both the level of effort and the timeframe for implementing the safety provisions of the Program Improvement Plan.

If the Children's Bureau and the state cannot reach consensus regarding the content of the Program Improvement Plan or the degree to which program or data improvements are to be achieved, the Children's Bureau retains the authority to assign the contents of the plan and/or the degree of improvement required for successful completion (45 CFR § 1355.35(a)(2)). Under such circumstances, the Children's Bureau will provide the state a written rationale for the content and the degree of improvement required.

Program Improvement Plan Development

To support Program Improvement Plan development within the required timeframes, the Children's Bureau encourages states to explore creative ways to engage those with a vested interest in the child welfare system and whose active engagement and voices are necessary to evaluate the strengths and areas needing improvement in the child welfare system as a whole.

The development of the state's Program Improvement Plan is a continuation of its Statewide Assessment, including review and analysis of relevant data evidence of the state's performance on each of the outcomes and systemic factors. In collaboration with states' system partners and individuals with lived experience, states need to:

- Identify available and needed data to deepen understanding of practice and system processes;
- Identify and review results of prior data exploration and progress made from development, implementation, and monitoring of the state's prior Program Improvement Plan, most recent Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report, Statewide Assessment, Court Improvement Program Self-Assessment and Strategic Plan, and Continuous Quality Improvement activities;
- Identify and explore contributing factors and root causes of performance, including evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes; and
- Develop and/or revisit theories of change that may be integrated into the Program Improvement Plan. A theory of change is a roadmap that charts the path from an identified problem, need, or opportunity to the desired outcome(s).

Once the data have been analyzed, the state, in collaboration with those engaged in the development of the Program Improvement Plan and the Children's Bureau, identify specific goals, strategies, or interventions, and key activities to address the areas needing improvement in the Program Improvement Plan, focusing on cross-cutting themes that emerge from the analysis.

The Children's Bureau encourages states to prepare for Program Improvement Plan development meetings by:

- Identifying Tribes, system partners, and individuals with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system to participate in the development of the state's

Program Improvement Plan;

- Holding pre-planning meetings to identify and discuss areas to be addressed in the Program Improvement Plan so participants are well-informed and able to work collaboratively, efficiently, and effectively during the meetings;
- Clarifying expectations, roles, and responsibilities of all participants (federal team, state team, technical assistance providers) and ensuring that a communication plan is in place; and
- Identifying the data and information needed to identify contributing factors of, and inform decision-making about, performance on the outcomes and systemic factors, and evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes. Identified evidence, including the State Data Profile and supplemental context data, should be provided to everyone participating in the development of the state's Program Improvement Plan. Additional data may be identified, collected, and shared throughout the Program Improvement Plan development process.

Program Improvement Plan Content

Program Improvement Plans must include goals, strategies, or interventions, and key activities that address underperformance in identified outcomes, systemic factors, and statewide data indicators. States should identify a Program Improvement Plan format, considering any templates developed by the Children's Bureau, that supports the state in clearly articulating these elements.

A **goal** is a broad, positive, and measurable statement expressed in terms of improved practice and/or system performance that supports positive outcomes in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being for children and their families or systemic functioning of the child welfare system. Goals should be related to the overarching vision of the child welfare system as well as the outcome(s) or systemic factor(s) the system aims to address.

Strategies or interventions are the implementation of specific child welfare practices and programs that will be used to make improvements and may affect areas of need across more than one goal. Strategies or interventions answer the question: what is the state going to do to address areas needing improvement?

Key activities are benchmarks or metrics such as process measures, implementation milestones, or qualitative markers that answer the question: "How will the state assess whether the strategy or intervention is being implemented as planned and having the intended impact?" Key activities must be associated with targeted timeframes for completion. Key activities help the state and the Children's Bureau determine whether the state is on track to make improvements within the required timeframes and allow for the opportunity to make adjustments to improve performance.

Timeframes identify when the state anticipates that a key activity will be achieved; timeframes should be realistic and achievable. Implementation of the Program Improvement Plan must be completed no later than 2 years from the date it is approved by the Children's Bureau, although not all elements will require this much time to address.

Consistent with 45 CFR § 1355.35(a)(1) and (d)(4)(e), the Program Improvement Plan must:

- Identify the goals, and strategies or interventions, and how these will improve

outcomes identified as not in substantial conformity

- Address all case review items rated as Areas Needing Improvement in the Final Report
 - Address each statewide data indicator with Risk-Standardized Performance for applicable reporting periods that is worse than national performance
 - If performance on a statewide data indicator cannot be calculated due to data quality issues evidenced by the unavailability of data or exceeding data quality limits, the Program Improvement Plan must also address how the state will resolve data quality issue(s)
- Identify the goals, and strategies or interventions, to strengthen each systemic factor identified as “not in substantial conformity” as well as evidence of change resulting from the implemented strategy or intervention. The Children’s Bureau and state negotiate which systemic factor items must be addressed based on the state’s Child and Family Services Review findings and the state’s proposed strategies or interventions to address each systemic factor. States are encouraged to address the most challenging items identified within a systemic factor rather than all items designated as Areas Needing Improvement. The Children’s Bureau encourages the state to monitor all systemic factor items in their Annual Progress and Services Report.
 - Identify the key activities, jointly selected with the Children’s Bureau, and dates by which each action step is to be completed and benchmarks of progress for monitoring implementation and improvement.
 - Articulate the scope of the program improvement efforts with respect to the state’s target population(s); the geographic scope, including implementation sites; and relevant timeframes—including any plans for phased-in implementation. This can be done at the level of strategies or interventions, or key activities, as appropriate.
 - Describe how the plan builds on the state’s prior program improvement plans.
 - Identify the state’s capacity and technical assistance needs to support implementation of the Program Improvement Plan.
 - Include the progress reporting schedule, and format (e.g., the Children’s Bureau template, state template) that will be used for the duration of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period.
 - Include the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan—see the Measurement Plan section below, which specifies the required information and elements.

Program Improvement Plans should:

- Be consistent with the overall vision for the child welfare system as described in the Child and Family Services Plan, the Annual Progress and Services Report, the Statewide Assessment, and the Court Improvement Program’s strategic plan.
- Include how the goals, strategies or interventions, and key activities included in the Program Improvement Plan address the areas identified as needing improvement by the Child and

Family Services Review, and are based on the state's root cause analysis and theory of change, including potential impact on persons of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequity in the child welfare system.

- Include strategies or interventions that will be implemented by the legal and judicial communities to support the overall vision and stated goals of the Program Improvement Plan.
- Include strategies or interventions that are intended to address cross-cutting themes in underperformance, thereby allowing the state to focus its improvement efforts over the course of the Program Improvement Plan.
- Include implementation and monitoring efforts by the state and how the state's plans for implementation drive the Program Improvement Plan. Include a discussion of how system partners and individuals with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system who reflect the diversity of populations served were engaged in development of the Program Improvement Plan and will be engaged in ongoing implementation and monitoring activities.

In addition to the formal submission of the Program Improvement Plan, the state and the Children's Bureau should discuss the state's work plan and initiatives that support the full implementation of the plan. Such work or implementation plans are not required to be documented or submitted to the Children's Bureau. However, the Children's Bureau encourages the exchange of this information to ensure sufficient detail and context for the state and the Children's Bureau to evaluate the state's progress in implementing and completing the Program Improvement Plan along with consideration of any support that may be needed.

Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan

Consistent with 45 CFR § 1355.35(a)(iv) and (v), the Program Improvement Plan must identify the required amount of improvement and methods to evaluate state progress toward its measurement goals. The Children's Bureau uses performance on the statewide data indicators and select case review items to measure progress during the Program Improvement Plan implementation period and the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period. The Children's Bureau determines the statewide data indicators and case review items requiring measurement in the Program Improvement Plan based on findings in the Final Report and State Data Profiles issued after the Statewide Assessment and prior to Program Improvement Plan approval. Statewide data indicators with Risk-Standardized Performance worse than national performance and case review items for Safety Outcomes 1 and 2 and Well-Being Outcome 1 rated as Areas Needing Improvement require that a specified amount of improvement be achieved by the end of the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period.

States should review Technical Bulletin #13A for more information on the statewide data indicators, Program Improvement Plan measurement requirements, methodology for establishing baselines, methods that will be used by the Children's Bureau to determine the required amounts of improvement, and methods for states to demonstrate the required amounts of improvement achieved as specified in Program Improvement Plan.

The Children's Bureau requires approval of the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan when the Program Improvement Plan is approved. The approved measures, amount of improvement required, approach to measurement, and related methodologies form the state's

Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan. The measurement plan must include the elements identified below:

- Baselines and goals for each statewide data indicator for which the state's Risk-Standardized Performance is worse than national performance. Baselines and goals are calculated and provided to states by the Children's Bureau.
- Case review items requiring measurement, plan to establish state baseline performance, and amount of improvement required for each measure. Measurement Plans require updates after approval of the Program Improvement Plan to identify baseline performance, minimum applicable cases, and amount of improvement required for each case review item after Measurement Period 1 (baseline) is completed. This information is calculated and provided to states by the Children's Bureau based on case review data submitted by the state.
- Measurement method used for Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment (i.e., aggregate or case record review measure). The Children's Bureau recommends that states use an aggregate measure, if approved, for this item.
- Case record review measurement and sampling plan that specifies the following in accordance with Technical Bulletin #13A:
 - Data collection instrument (e.g., federal Onsite Review Instrument using the Online Monitoring System). The Children's Bureau may approve alternative case review instruments and information collection methods proposed by the state that measure the same items as those found needing improvement in the Child and Family Services Review. This means that the items in a state case review instrument must correspond to the items and rating instructions in the Onsite Review Instrument
 - Measurement sites and how they relate to Program Improvement Plan implementation sites (e.g., all or subset)
 - Case review schedule
 - Sample size and stratification
 - Description of case population
 - Sampling frame parameters
 - Sampling approach
 - Sampling periods
 - Periods under review
 - Case elimination criteria (see Guidance for Case Elimination)
 - Measurement periods
 - Children's Bureau criteria to maintain comparability across measurement periods

to evaluate goal achievement (i.e., similar case distribution, minimum applicable case requirement)

- Approach to meet minimum applicable case criteria for each item
- Case record review procedures (see relevant case review criteria for State-Led Reviews in Appendix A) describing processes to:
 - Ensure accurate and consistent application of the Onsite Review Instrument
 - Address and document application of case elimination criteria
 - Avoid conflicts of interest between reviewers and quality assurance team members when assigning cases
 - Conduct case-related interviews of key informants on every case to inform the ratings, including the following individuals: child (if school-age and developmentally appropriate), parents, caregiver/foster care provider, and caseworker or supervisor. Follow a written protocol for acceptable case-specific exceptions to an interview
 - Ensure accurate and consistent case review ratings, including training for case reviewers and those conducting quality assurance activities
 - Ensure consistency of ratings across multiple sites and reviewers, and third-party (i.e., someone who has not reviewed the case) quality assurance of cases reviewed for accuracy of ratings in accordance with the federal Onsite Review Instrument
 - Address safety concerns identified in a case under review
- Measurement Progress Report frequency

To ensure that Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plans meet Children’s Bureau criteria and are based on best practice measurement principles across states, all measurement plans are reviewed by the Children’s Bureau Measurement and Sampling Committee before state finalization and Children’s Bureau approval. After the Children’s Bureau has approved the state’s Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan, the state must notify the Children’s Bureau and seek its approval for any substantive changes before the end of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period. Failure to do so may result in the Children’s Bureau not being able to determine whether the state has successfully completed its Program Improvement Plan measurement requirements.

The Measurement and Sampling Committee provides states with consultation on the development and application of the Measurement Plan and Children’s Bureau methods to calculate baseline performance, amount of improvement required, and state achievement of the required amount of improvement. The committee applies Technical Bulletin #13A and criteria for State-Led Child and Family Service Reviews (e.g., sampling populations) (see Appendix A) in providing consultation to states. State consultation calls with the committee are scheduled through the Children’s Bureau Regional Office and Child and Family Services Reviews Unit leads within the Children’s Bureau. The committee is available to provide states consultation before and throughout the Program Improvement Plan implementation and post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation periods.

The state must meet the required amount of improvement by the end of the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period for the Children’s Bureau to determine that the state has successfully completed its Program Improvement Plan consistent with 45 CFR § 1355.36(d).

Approach to Developing and Implementing a Successful Program Improvement Plan

The Program Improvement Plan provides an opportunity for states to effectively engage in program improvement activities that result in measurable improvement in case practice and outcomes for children, youth, and families. It is important that the state work in collaboration with the Children’s Bureau during the entire Program Improvement Plan development and implementation process to ensure agreement regarding areas that require improvement under federal regulations and the selection of priorities for improvement that will most significantly affect the state’s outcomes for children and families.

Identifying the Planning and Implementation Team and Developing a Communication Plan

Strong Program Improvement Plan development includes planning and implementation team(s) that have the authority, skills, and support to accomplish change efforts. States are encouraged to use this team of system partners and persons with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system to lead the development, implementation, and monitoring of the Program Improvement Plan. It is also recommended that the state create and periodically adjust a plan for ongoing bi-directional communication with the broader group of internal and external partners for use during each step of the process.

Throughout the Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report and program improvement processes, the state should continually review and assess its collaboration efforts and make adjustments as needed. In determining who to engage as implementation team members and support the state Program Improvement Plan process, the state should consider the following activities:

- Discussing and analyzing data, including differences across subpopulations
- Identifying strengths and needs, including indicators of disproportionality and disparity
- Understanding contributing factors and root causes
- Prioritizing needs and selecting improvement strategies or interventions for target populations
- Determining the potential impact of proposed policies, programs, practices, strategies, or decisions on individuals who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system
- Monitoring Program Improvement Plan progress and making adjustments to sustain the improvements beyond the Program Improvement Plan period

Assessing Needs

States should review state performance on the statewide data indicators, case review results, and systemic factors in addition to other relevant data and information when assessing needs and opportunities. States should also review the stage (e.g., piloting, scaling up, statewide implementation) and results of planned (e.g., Child and Family Services Plan, Court

Improvement Program strategic plan) and prior implemented strategies or interventions.

Establishing Program Improvement Plan Goals

A goal in the context of the Program Improvement Plan is broad and measurable, and expressed in terms of improved system performance in the domains of Safety, Permanency and Well-Being for children and their families or the systemic functioning of the child welfare system. The Program Improvement Plan must state the goal as a positive change to the outcomes and systemic factors for each area requiring improvement.

Understanding Target Populations

Before selecting strategies or interventions, the state should identify and understand the specific characteristics and needs of the population(s) whose safety, permanency, or well-being outcomes the state needs to positively affect. This includes, in addition to legal and judicial representatives, those with lived experience. These persons provide different and important perspectives that can contribute to the development and implementation of an equity and inclusion framework that can reduce disparities and promote system and outcome improvements for all children and families served in the child welfare system.

Understanding a target population allows the state to select the most appropriate strategy or intervention, target it to the children and families whose outcomes most need to be improved, select strategies or interventions that are culturally responsive, minimize unintended consequences, and avoid selecting strategies or interventions that will not be effective. Because this analysis can take some time, the state is encouraged to begin analyzing data on the target populations as soon as possible using existing state data and the State Data Profile, including the supplemental context data. The state should also review and update this analysis as needed when it receives additional updated State Data Profiles, Child and Family Services Review results, and other relevant data.

Selecting Strategies or Interventions

Strategies or interventions are the implementation of specific child welfare practices, programs, or policies that will be used to make improvements, and may be directed at improvements in more than one goal. For each strategy or intervention, the state should be able to clearly articulate the target population(s) and how and why it will address the identified problem that will lead to the required improvement.

When selecting strategies or interventions, the state, in collaboration with the Program Improvement Plan development team, should consider:

- Identifying cross-cutting themes and selecting strategies or interventions that can address more than one performance area, thereby allowing the state to focus its improvement efforts over the course of the 2-year Program Improvement Plan implementation period
- The extent to which potential strategies or interventions go beyond technical fixes (e.g., changing a policy or developing a training) to address adaptive challenges (e.g., workplace culture or underlying beliefs about concurrent planning) and evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes

- Whether the strategies or interventions under consideration are supported by evidence, research, or experience; focus on a target population(s); and directly respond to the underlying reasons for the areas of concern
- Selecting strategies or interventions that address improvements in the day-to-day practice of child welfare rather than focusing strictly on new policies and procedures. By focusing on casework practice at the local level, the state is most likely to link its vision, policies, and procedures to the actual interactions that occur with children, youth, and families. This integration of policy and practice in the field supports the state in achieving lasting improvements in its child welfare system
- Selecting strategies or interventions that are guided by the principles of family-centered practice, equity and inclusion, community-based services, individualizing services that address the unique needs of children and families, and strengthening parents' capacity to protect and provide for their children
- Selecting strategies or interventions that can be implemented within the 2-year Program Improvement Plan implementation period

Although states may need to do additional planning and study to support improvement, the state's Program Improvement Plan should focus on actual implementation of change efforts. (See *Creating an Implementation Plan* below for more information).

Assessing Readiness to Implement the Strategies or Interventions

Once the state has identified possible strategies or interventions, the state, along with those involved in Program Improvement Plan development, should assess its readiness to implement each selected approach within the required Program Improvement Plan time frames. The state should determine whether an approach has or can gain the support of leadership and system partners. The state also should consider the infrastructure and resource needs associated with each strategy or intervention, including:

- Staffing
- Training, coaching, and mentoring
- Administrative infrastructure
- Automated systems
- Policies and regulatory requirements
- Financial resources
- Data collection and analysis
- Technical assistance

By considering these factors before implementation, the state can be better positioned to successfully implement the selected improvements within the required timeframes.

Implementation Sites

States identify a select group of sites or localities to be designated in the Program Improvement Plan as the target sites for implementation of selected strategies or interventions. These localities are considered Program Improvement Plan implementation sites. Selection of implementation sites is guided by evidence used to develop the Program Improvement Plan, selected strategies or interventions, demonstrated practice improvement needs, and readiness for implementation of the selected strategy or intervention.

Creating an Implementation Plan

The state should consider developing a more detailed implementation plan or work plan to guide its day-to-day Program Improvement Plan work. The state's implementation or work plan does not need to be submitted to the Children's Bureau for approval, but such a plan will be helpful to lay out how each strategy or intervention in the Program Improvement Plan is designed to achieve the goal within the timeframes, as well as to create a common understanding within the state of the collaboration needed among the person(s) responsible to accomplish the key activities.

When developing an implementation or work plan, the state and its partners should consider:

- How to sequence implementation of the strategies or interventions so that actions and resources needed for each build on and support each other and are not overwhelming to field staff or those affected by the change
- The proposed scale of the strategies or interventions and the selected implementation sites and plans for expansion over the 2-year Program Improvement Plan implementation period
- How the scale and sequencing of implementation activities for the strategies or interventions during the Program Improvement Plan are designed to achieve the required amount of measurable improvement on a statewide basis within the Program Improvement Plan period
- How the scale and sequencing of the improvements will affect practice that supports positive child and family outcomes within the Program Improvement Plan timeframe
- How the scale and sequencing of improvements to systemic factors will result in improved statewide functioning
- Plans for putting in place the necessary infrastructure and resource supports
- Plans for monitoring the progress and effectiveness of implementation

Technical Assistance

The state should assess the need for technical assistance to build capacity to develop and implement the Program Improvement Plan in conjunction with the state's overall vision and strategic plan for child welfare services as articulated in the Child and Family Services Plan and updated as needed through the Annual Progress and Services Report. In doing so, the state should consider and discuss with the Children's Bureau, as applicable, the availability of Children's Bureau technical assistance resources, how the Program Improvement Plan is designed to build on and make progress beyond past plans, and what the state's needs may be for technical assistance to make such progress (45 CFR § 1355.34[a][1][vi]).

The state should articulate to the Children's Bureau its plan for using federal or non-federal sources of technical assistance, if any, to support program improvements for each outcome and systemic factor found not to be in substantial conformity (45 CFR § 1355.34[a][1][vii]), but may do so in the form the state deems most appropriate. For example, the state may describe, cross-reference, or amend any existing plan for technical assistance or any description in the state's Child and Family Services Plan/Annual Progress and Services Report or note its needs in its

Program Improvement Plan.

Program Improvement Plan Reporting Schedule

The Program Improvement Plan must identify the format for reporting Program Improvement Plan and Measurement Plan progress and the schedule for submitting written progress reports to the Children’s Bureau. States must provide quarterly status reports unless the Children’s Bureau and the state determine that a less frequent reporting schedule is sufficient to identify, analyze, and discuss the progress of, and make any necessary adjustments to, the Program Improvement Plan (see Chapter 10 for additional information on Program Improvement Plan Implementation and Monitoring).

Monitoring Progress

The state and the Children’s Bureau must be able to monitor and assess whether a Program Improvement Plan strategy or intervention is being implemented as planned and having the intended impact. One way to do this is with key activities (see Program Improvement Plan Content section for more information on key activities). Another method by which the Children’s Bureau and the state assess progress is through the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan (see Technical Bulletin #13A and the Measurement Plan section of this chapter). The Children’s Bureau recommends that states consider developing and using other metrics and fidelity measures, as appropriate, to determine whether a strategy or intervention is being implemented as designed and having the intended impact.

To help monitor implementation activities and assess the impact of strategies or interventions and the potential need to make adjustments, states should use feedback loops with agency staff and affected Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system.

Chapter 10: Program Improvement Plan Implementation and Monitoring

Once the Children’s Bureau approves the Program Improvement Plan, the state must meet measurement and reporting requirements. The Children’s Bureau and the state engage in continuous evaluation and monitoring of Program Improvement Plan implementation and determine what adjustments, if any, are necessary.

Initial Implementation and Assessment of Progress

At this stage, implementation of the strategies or interventions begins. The state, with Tribes, system partners, and individuals with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system, initiates activities and uses feedback loops and process measures to assess implementation, which is an ongoing process. Initiating activities to implement strategies or interventions, obtaining feedback, addressing implementation challenges, and potentially identifying and requesting adjustments to address challenges and strengthen implementation is a continuous process.

The state should assess the early results, feedback, and information, and analyze preliminary data about the implementation of each strategy or intervention. The state should monitor:

- Whether the roll-out of the strategy or intervention is on schedule
- Whether the strategy or intervention is being implemented as intended and consistently across all sites
- Early indicators of success or unintended consequences

Based on the feedback, information, and data, the state makes adjustments to strengthen implementation of each strategy or intervention.

Ongoing Assessment of Progress and Adjustment of Strategies or Interventions

States should collect and review relevant evidence to assess whether the strategy or intervention is having the intended effect. Information should be collected from an array of data sources and individuals, who will provide different and important perspectives, including anecdotes and context to help understand what is working well and where adjustments may be needed. Based on these data, the state should make any necessary adjustments. Toward this end and similar to initial assessments of implementation, the state reviews data and information in areas where the strategy or intervention has been implemented to determine:

- Whether the indicators of practice and system performance have improved
- Whether the improvement is consistent across implementation sites
- Whether there have been unintended consequences, including whether actions taken worsen or ignore existing disparities

If there is a lack of progress, the state should determine the underlying reason(s), which could include insufficient training, lack of effective communication with staff, lack of buy-in, incomplete or uncoordinated implementation, or a concern with the focus or scope of the strategy or

intervention—including unintended negative effects on marginalized populations served by the child welfare system. The state should review the information and data from the initial implementation sites, lessons learned, and the implementation plan to determine when and how to expand. The roll-out schedule in the implementation plan should be revisited and adjusted, if necessary, based on the initial data and feedback. The state also should assess whether supports and readiness activities for the next sites have begun and whether those sites are prepared to begin implementation. After a full analysis, the state, in consultation with the Children’s Bureau, should make needed adjustments. If necessary, based on the level of adjustment needed, the state may request to renegotiate with the Children’s Bureau Program Improvement Plan strategies or interventions, key activities, or timeframes. (See Renegotiation of the Program Improvement Plan below for more information.) Planning for sustainability of a strategy or intervention takes place throughout implementation; however, at this stage, the state should revisit sustainability and take additional steps to ensure that practice and system improvements are maintained after completion of the Program Improvement Plan.

Program Improvement Plan Monitoring

The Children’s Bureau and the state continue to partner in monitoring the state’s implementation of the strategies or interventions and progress in completing the Program Improvement Plan.

Reporting of Progress

The state must submit written progress reports (preferably electronically) to the Children’s Bureau that address Program Improvement Plan implementation and progress toward achieving the required amount of improvement specified in the Program Improvement Measurement Plan. The Children’s Bureau provides states with written feedback on these progress reports.

States must provide quarterly progress reports unless the Children’s Bureau and the state determine that a less frequent reporting schedule is sufficient to identify, analyze, and discuss the progress of, and make any necessary adjustments to, the Program Improvement Plan. The state must submit each written report within the agreed-upon timeframes (for example, 30 days after the end of the reporting period).

The Children’s Bureau continues to collaborate and communicate with the state on its progress outside of these formal Program Improvement Plan written reports. This includes discussions through calls, onsite or virtual visits, and facilitation of technical assistance, as needed, throughout the Program Improvement Plan implementation and post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period.

Progress Report Content

States should identify a Program Improvement Plan progress report format, considering any templates developed by the Children’s Bureau, that supports the state in clearly articulating its progress, successes, barriers, completion of strategies, key activities, and identified timeframes. If a state will be using a reporting format other than the one provided by the Children’s Bureau, the state is encouraged to review the format with the Children’s Bureau to ensure that all important elements are addressed.

Program Improvement Plan progress reports must include:

- For each strategy or intervention, the progress made to complete the key activities identified in the Program Improvement Plan, including an explanation for delays in completion.
- State performance on each of the statewide data indicators and case review measures included in the Program Improvement Measurement Plan. For case review items included in the state's Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan, states need to specify the measurement period, the number of applicable cases reviewed, the number of strength ratings, and performance expressed as a percentage (strength ratings divided by number of applicable cases). Performance data for specified 12-month periods is also required for states using an aggregate measure for Item 1.
- Notification to the Children's Bureau when the required amount of improvement specified in the measurement plan is achieved, and corresponding evidence as directed by the Children's Bureau.
- Explanation of insufficient progress toward measures, challenges in implementation and monitoring, or unanticipated barriers (e.g., loss of funding), as well as steps being taken to address these concerns.
- If appropriate, a summary of analysis of data and evidence undertaken to understand challenges in progress toward achieving the required amount of improvement and/or barriers in implementing action steps and strategies, in addition to technical assistance required to address findings of analysis.

Program Improvement Plan Evaluation

The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with the state, evaluates the terms and conditions of the approved Program Improvement Plan as follows:

- The Children's Bureau monitors the state's progress in completing the provisions of the Program Improvement Plan through review of the state's submitted Program Improvement Plan reports and discussions with the state.
- The Children's Bureau and the state must jointly evaluate the state's progress in implementing the Program Improvement Plan and achieving the required amount of measurable improvement. This involves the Children's Bureau meeting with the state implementation team(s) to assess how the Program Improvement Plan is being implemented across the state. These meetings frequently take place at 6-month intervals but must occur at least annually so that the Children's Bureau can provide support and feedback to the state on its implementation progress.
- Statewide data indicators and case review items requiring measurement are evaluated based on whether the state has met the required amount of improvement as specified in the measurement plan and according to Technical Bulletin #13A.
- The Children's Bureau recommends that states collect and review relevant evidence to evaluate progress on all case review items addressed in the Program Improvement Plan and not limit the collection and analysis of data to only those items requiring measurement in the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan. States are

strongly encouraged to use the Onsite Review Instrument in its entirety and ongoing as child welfare practice in one domain affects practice in the other domains. A comprehensive understanding of practice and system performance is critical to evaluating successful implementation, including potential differences across jurisdictions and subpopulations.

- Key activities are evaluated to determine whether they have been completed and whether the intent of the proposed strategy or intervention has been met.

The Children's Bureau may determine, based on sufficient information, that key activities have been completed and/or the required amount of improvement has been achieved at any point during the implementation of the Program Improvement Plan. When that occurs, the Children's Bureau and the state are not required to further evaluate those key activities or measures during the remainder of the Program Improvement Plan implementation or post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation periods. When a state completes all requirements related to an outcome or systemic factor, the Children's Bureau notifies the state that associated penalties are rescinded.

If, at the conclusion of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period, the state has not demonstrated the required amount of improvement as specified in the measurement plan, the state has the 18-month post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period following the end of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period for continued measurement (refer to Technical Bulletin #13A). The state and the Children's Bureau will jointly determine a schedule and format for reporting and monitoring during the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period.

Renegotiation of the Program Improvement Plan

In accordance with 45 CFR § 1355.35(e)(4), the state may request to renegotiate the Program Improvement Plan with the Children's Bureau, as needed. Requests for changes to the Program Improvement Plan, including changes to the measurement plan, should be submitted in writing to the Children's Bureau Regional Office for approval before the anticipated completion of the strategy or intervention and/or key activity, and for measurement items before the end of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period. The Children's Bureau will then discuss with the state the issues leading to the request.

The Children's Bureau and state may renegotiate elements of the Program Improvement Plan, as needed, but the new plan must meet the following criteria:

- All Program Improvement Plan requests for renegotiation must be received and approved by the Children's Bureau within the 2-year Program Improvement Plan implementation period
- The renegotiated elements of the Program Improvement Plan are designed to correct the areas of the state's program determined not to be in substantial conformity
- The terms of the renegotiated elements of the Program Improvement Plan are approved by the Children's Bureau and incorporated into the Program Improvement Plan

Extensions of the Program Improvement Plan

The amount of time needed to implement the provisions of the Program Improvement Plan does not extend beyond 2 years from the date of the original Program Improvement Plan approval

date unless the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services approves an extension not to exceed one additional year. The circumstances under which requests for extensions will be approved are expected to be rare. States should describe the exceptional circumstances and provide compelling documentation of the need for such an extension, and link requests for extensions to specific Program Improvement Plan interventions requiring additional time. States must submit the request to the Children's Bureau in writing at least 60 days before the approved Program Improvement Plan implementation completion date.

Chapter 11: Assessment of Program Improvement Plan Completion

When it is determined that the state has completed all requirements of the Program Improvement Plan related to an outcome and/or systemic factor, and/or achieved the required amount of improvement as specified in the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan, the Children's Bureau makes a decision regarding substantial conformity. This may occur:

- During the Program Improvement Plan implementation period;
- At the end of the Program Improvement Plan implementation period;
- During the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period; or
- At the end of the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period.

Implementation of the Program Improvement Plan must be completed within 2 years from the date on which it is approved by the Children's Bureau. Not all Program Improvement Plan elements may require this length of time to address, and 2 years is an outside time limit for those elements requiring more extensive planning and action (45 CFR § 1355.35[d][1]).

When there is no measurement requirement associated with an outcome, the state must successfully complete the strategy or strategies associated with each specific goal as negotiated between the state and the Children's Bureau to be considered to have successfully completed that requirement of the Program Improvement Plan. When a strategy in the Program Improvement Plan is completed, the state is not required to report on that strategy for the remainder of the implementation period.

When the required amount of improvement specified in the Program Improvement Plan Measurement Plan is achieved, the Children's Bureau and the state are not required to report on that measure during the remainder of the Program Improvement Plan implementation or post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period (45 CFR § 1355.35[e][3]).

Decisions regarding successful completion of Program Improvement Plans are made in accordance with the regulation at 45 CFR § 1355.34, which sets forth the requirements for determining substantial conformity through the Child and Family Services Reviews. When the state completes all requirements of the Program Improvement Plan related to an outcome and/or systemic factor, the Children's Bureau Regional Office notifies the state in writing regarding the decision and that associated withholding of funds is being rescinded.

Withholding of Funds

The withholding of funds is suspended while the state is implementing an approved Program Improvement Plan. If the Children's Bureau determines, however, that the state failed to submit Program Improvement Plan reports, or that the state is not making satisfactory progress toward achieving the goals and required amounts of improvement in a timely manner, then the withholding of funds begins (45 CFR §§ 1355.36[e][2][i] and [ii]).

After the relevant completion date specified in the Program Improvement Plan, the Children's Bureau notifies states in writing of its final assessment of the status of their Program Improvement Plans. The notification advises the state of the amount of title IV–B and title IV–E funds to be withheld, and the state's opportunity to appeal that decision.

Appendix A: State-Led CFSR Case Review Criteria

States electing to conduct State-Led Reviews must demonstrate that they meet all specified requirements to qualify for this process. The state must submit the documentation required in each section of this appendix and demonstrate that the criteria are in place and functioning no later than 6 months prior to the scheduled CFSR.

For Criterion 2, the state must submit its proposed case review sampling plan and sampling frames for review and verification at least 6 months prior to the scheduled CFSR.

Criterion 1—The state operates an internal case review process at least annually that assesses state child welfare system performance in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being. [See chapters 3 and 5 of the *CFSR Procedures Manual* for additional information regarding all aspects of the case review process.]

Additional Guidance:

States must be operating an internal case record review process at least annually that looks at key performance areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. States must demonstrate that their case review process is operating as required no later than 6 months prior to the scheduled CFSR.

To demonstrate an operating case review process, criteria in this appendix must be met, including use of the federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI). If the state is not currently using the OSRI, the state must: (a) provide a plan and timeline for the ongoing use of the OSRI in the State-Led Review and (b) demonstrate accurate use of the OSRI, no later than 6 months prior to the state's scheduled CFSR.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

Children's Bureau (CB) staff will review materials and have discussions and/or onsite meetings to assess the operation of the case review process. If any aspect is found not to be operational, including use of the OSRI, the CB and state will collaborate to ensure the requirements are met no later than 6 months before the state's scheduled CFSR.

1A—The state must provide training on a regular basis for all reviewers (including individuals completing third-party quality assurance of cases) participating in the case review process.

Additional Guidance:

The state provides training for all reviewers examining cases in the federal review sample used to determine substantial conformity. The training must include:

- An overview of the review and quality assurance (QA) process;
- Conflict-of-interest guidelines;
- Conducting case-related interviews;
- An overview of the process for addressing safety concerns identified in a case under review;
- Expectations regarding writing high-quality rating Rationale Statements;

- In-depth instructions on the use of the OSRI and all related CB-issued guidance; and
- The state’s policy document addressing the relevant items of the OSRI, including child abuse allegation assignment and response timeframes—timeframes for initiation of reports and face-to-face contact, the use of differential/alternative response and concurrent planning, the use of contracted case management, medication management policies/protocol, and well-child and dental exam policies.

The state provides training for all individuals completing third-party QA of cases reviewed for accuracy of ratings. The training must include:

- In-depth instructions on the use of the OSRI and all related CB-issued guidance; and
- An overview of the written policies and processes for (1) ensuring consistency of ratings, both on specific cases and across cases and sites, and (2) tracking questions and issues on application of the OSRI.

The state has a process in place to ensure timely access to training and oversight/supervision for new reviewers and/or QA staff entering the case review process at any time. This includes:

- A written process for selecting individuals to complete third-party QA of cases, including an onboarding plan for training and oversight when new staff are hired or recruited to conduct case reviews and/or third-party QA.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a copy of the curriculum and process to ensure all reviewers (including individuals completing third-party QA of cases) are trained.

- The state also provides a copy of the onboarding training and oversight plan.
- If time permits, CB staff may attend a state training.

1B—The state must adhere to instructions contained in the federal OSRI for rating cases.

Additional Guidance:

The state has a written process for tracking questions that arise among reviewers and individuals conducting third-party QA. The process includes a feedback loop to all reviewers and individuals conducting third-party QA that updates all participants on questions and answers about the use and application of the OSRI. Questions and issues on the instrument ratings and/or case review process should be tracked centrally by the state to ensure that issues are resolved, questions are answered, and information is provided to all reviewers and third-party QA staff.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a copy of the written process for consistency of ratings. The state should demonstrate that the process for tracking and resolving OSRI questions and/or case review process issues is done centrally and that all information is shared with reviewers and third-party QA staff.

1C—The state must have a process in place to address safety concerns identified in a case under review.

Additional Guidance:

The state has written instructions that outline the process for reviewers to follow when a safety concern is identified in a case under review.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a written copy of the process for addressing safety concerns identified in a case under review.

1D—The state must ensure that individuals who had direct contact, supervision, oversight, or consultation for the case being reviewed do not complete the case review or conduct quality assurance on the case.

Additional Guidance:

The state has a written policy that defines what constitutes a conflict of interest and resolves such conflicts so that they are not permitted during the review. The written process must require that:

- State team members may not be assigned as site leaders or reviewers, or conduct third party QA in the same site in which they work or have oversight responsibilities.
- Individuals may not review or conduct third-party QA on any case in which they participated or consulted in any way.
- Individuals having a conflict of interest must report to the site leader, and the site leader will immediately re-assign the case.
- Any individuals having a conflict of interest will not participate in any team or reviewer debriefing of cases that affects ratings of cases.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a written copy of the conflict-of-interest policy and process for resolving conflicts.

1E—The state must use the federal OSRI to collect information on all CFSR items, and implement and adhere to guidance CB provides to accompany the instrument.

Additional Guidance:

At a minimum, the state uses the OSRI for the federal review sample used to determine substantial conformity for CFSR purposes. All reviewers are provided training on the use of the instrument. For approval, states must demonstrate accurate and consistent use of the OSRI no later than 6 months before the state's CFSR.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

CB staff will have the option to attend state reviews during the approval process. The state will allow

CB access to its Online Monitoring System (OMS) site to review completed instruments to confirm the correct application of the OSRI and accuracy of ratings. If the state is not using the OMS for its state reviews prior to its scheduled CFSR, the state will allow CB access to completed instruments to review for accuracy.

1F—The state must include case-related interviews of key informants on every case to inform the ratings—including all of the following individuals: child (if age and developmentally appropriate), parents, caregiver/foster care provider, and caseworker or supervisor—and follow a written protocol for making case-specific exceptions to conducting an interview with a key case participant.

Additional Guidance:

The following individuals related to a case will be interviewed unless they are unavailable or unwilling to participate:

- The child (school age)
- The child's parent(s)
- The child's foster parent(s), pre-adoptive parent(s), or other caregiver(s), such as a relative caregiver, if the child is in foster care
- The child and/or family's caseworker(s) or a caseworker's supervisor, if the caseworker is unavailable (when the caseworker has left the agency or is no longer available to interview, it may be necessary to schedule interviews with the supervisor who was responsible for the caseworker assigned to the family)

Potential exceptions to conducting interviews:

- Preschool-age children
- Parents who cannot be located despite the agency's demonstrated efforts to locate them
- Parent living outside of the United States for whom, despite the agency's demonstrated efforts, it is determined that the parent is not accessible by phone or video
- There is a safety or risk concern in contacting any party for an interview
- Any party who is unable to consent to an interview due to physical or mental health incapacity
- Any party who refuses to participate in an interview and for whom the agency can document attempts to engage
- Any party who is advised by an attorney not to participate due to a pending criminal or civil matter
- Any party involved in a pending criminal or civil matter before a court or agency, or their legal representative, who believes they could be negatively affected by participation

Unacceptable exceptions to conducting an interview:

- An age cut-off that does not take into account a child’s developmental capacity, e.g., a policy of not interviewing children under age 12
- A party who refuses to participate in an interview, but the agency did not attempt to engage the individual beyond a letter or telephone call
- A party who has not been located and the agency has not made attempts to locate the individual
- A party who speaks a language other than English

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a written protocol for conducting case-related interviews, including potential and unacceptable exceptions for interviews. The protocol includes conditions under which a case will be eliminated—or kept in the sample—based on the inability to complete all interviews, and includes the process for discussing and documenting potential exceptions to conducting interviews with CB.

Criterion 2—The state uses a uniform sampling process and methodology. [See Chapter 4, *CFSR Procedures Manual*, for additional information regarding case sampling.]

2A—The state’s sampling methodology must coincide with the case review schedule and agreed-upon sites and consist of the state’s case population subject to review. Sites should consist of the largest metropolitan area, key program areas operating in the state, Tribes with significant case populations served by the child welfare system, and a geographical cross-section of the state.

Additional Guidance:

States must provide their written site selection proposal and proposed case review procedures and sampling plan for the CFSR review period. The proposals must meet the required criteria, and sampling frames need to be reviewed/verified at least 6 months prior to the CFSR. The duration of the review period must be no longer than 6 months. States may use a statewide random sample or a sample stratified by site (e.g., geographic area, county, jurisdiction). Any stratified sample must include the largest metropolitan area and sites that reflect key programs operating in the state (e.g., alternative response, Juvenile Justice), significant Tribal case populations, and geographic cross-sections of the state. CB recommends that the locality with the largest total case population (foster care and in-home services) be considered as an additional site when it differs from the largest metropolitan area. See chapters 3 and 4 of the *CFSR Procedures Manual* for additional information on site selection and case sampling activities.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

- Written site selection proposal for the CFSR, in accordance with “Child and Family Services Reviews Round 4 Site Selection Proposals”
- Proposed case review schedule for the CFSR, including number of cases by site, case type, and dates of review

- CB staff will discuss with the state its proposed case review schedule, proposed sites and rationale for selection of sites, and proposed sampling methodology
- CB staff will provide a copy of the state's written site selection proposal and proposed case review procedures and sampling plan to the CB Measurement and Sampling Committee (MASC) for review and endorsement to help ensure plans are based on best-practice measurement principles, guidance is consistent across states, and plans meet CB measurement and sampling criteria

2B—States use a simple random sample design for the sample of foster care and in-home services cases. Sampling frames may be statewide or stratified to achieve an adequate number of cases to review from each site. Sampling periods must begin at least 12 months prior to the start of the CFSR and may be renewed monthly or quarterly. Case review procedures and sampling plans must specify the sampling approach that will be used (i.e., rolling monthly/quarterly, fixed).

Additional Guidance:

The sampling frame coincides with the population of cases subject to review, which for in-home services cases is by family unit and for foster care cases is by individual child in foster care.

Samples will be selected from the random-ordered sampling frame consisting of cases subject to review. Sampling frames should have at least 4 to 6 times the number of cases planned for review at each site. The cases in the sampling frame that are not selected for review will be used to replace cases that are eliminated before or during the review.

CB recommends that each state use rolling monthly or quarterly sampling periods to maintain a 12- to 15-month period under review (PUR) during the CFSR review period.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

- Proposed case review procedures and sampling plan that includes a description of the state's methodology to produce a random sample using the state-identified sampling frames, including the proposed stratification, and dates for the sampling period(s) and PUR(s).
- Information identifying the total number of cases for the foster care and in-home services case population, including sub-case types, in the state and each site, and the number proposed for the CFSR.

2C—The sample must consist of a minimum of 65 cases served during the sampling period(s) with a minimum of 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. States that review more than 65 cases should consider using the state ratio of foster care and in-home services cases as long as the minimum number of cases is met for both case types.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

- Proposed case review procedures and sampling plan that identifies the total number of cases for the foster care and in-home services case population, including sub-case types, in the state and each site, and the number proposed for the CFSR.

- For states proposing sample sizes above the minimum 40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases, a rationale for the proposed ratio of foster care and in-home services cases.

2D—The sampling frame for the foster care population must consist of the listing of children served statewide or by jurisdiction strata according to the state’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)-defined reportable case population for the defined 6-month sampling period(s).

Additional Guidance:

States must identify and extract an example sampling frame that consists of the state AFCARS-defined foster care case population for a recent 6-month sampling period. States using a rolling sampling approach are encouraged to use a recent 6-month sampling period that is different from the AFCARS periods of October-March and April-September to demonstrate the ability to accurately apply the rolling sampling period methodology.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

- A copy of an example foster care sampling frame and the corresponding syntax used to identify the case sample population for a recent 6-month sampling period. CB will provide information for states to upload files to a secure site for review and verification by MASC.
- The sampling frame should include the AFCARS encrypted record number, Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) code, corresponding site identifier as applicable (e.g., region, section, district), the child’s date of birth, date of latest removal from home, date of placement in current foster care setting, current placement setting, and date of discharge (as applicable).

2E—The sampling frame for the in-home services case population must consist of the listing of family cases opened for 45 or more consecutive days to provide services and/or case management, directly by the child welfare agency or through federally funded contract(s), during the sampling period and in which no children in the family were in foster care for 24 hours or longer during any portion of the sampling period.

Additional Guidance:

The 45 days begins on the date the in-home services case was opened for case management and/or services.

In-home services cases should consist of the non-foster care cases served directly or through contract pursuant to the state’s CFSP (including alternative or differential response cases) that are opened for case management and/or services and served through federally funded programs. States will consult with CB and MASC to define the CFSR in-home services case population.

The in-home services case population for Round 4 will also include an unduplicated list of family cases for children whose only placement setting during the sampling period was a trial home visit (THV) and the duration of the THV was 45 or more consecutive days from the start of the sampling period.

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

- Description of the in-home-services case population.
- Copy of an example in-home services sampling frame and the corresponding syntax used to identify the unduplicated case population for a recent 6-month plus 45-day sampling period. CB will provide information for states to upload files and corresponding syntax to a secure site for review and verification by MASC.
- The sampling frame should include a unique numerical identifier for each family, case open date, case closure date if applicable, case type and sub-case type, and FIPS code. For family cases with a child(ren) placed in a THV setting, the file should also include the child(ren)'s AFCARS encrypted record number, date of latest removal from home, date of placement in current setting, current placement setting, and date of discharge (as applicable).

2F—The state must have a process in place to consistently address and document CB-required and state-specific case elimination requirements.

Additional Guidance:

States are required to have a written protocol to apply federal and state-specific case elimination procedures consistently. The case elimination procedures will also address when to eliminate cases when the state is unable to arrange key case participant interviews.

Following are required case elimination criteria:

- In-home services case open for fewer than 45 consecutive days during the PUR
- In-home services case in which any child in the family was in foster care for more than 24 hours during the PUR
- An in-home services case in which a child was on a THV (placement at home) at the start of the sampling period and the THV was fewer than 45 consecutive days
- A foster care case in which the child is in foster care for fewer than 24 hours during the sampling period
- A case that was discharged or closed according to agency policy before the sample period
- A case open for subsidized adoption payment only and not open to other services
- A case in which the target child reached the age of 18 before the PUR
- A case in which the selected child is or was in the care and responsibility of another state, and the state being reviewed is providing supervision through an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) agreement
- A case appearing multiple times in the sample, such as a case that involves siblings in foster care in separate cases or an in-home services case that was opened more than one time during the sampling period(s)

- A case reviewed in the past 12 months
- A foster care case in which the child's adoption or guardianship was finalized before the PUR and the child is no longer under the care of the state child welfare agency
- A case in which the child was placed for the entire PUR in a locked juvenile facility or other placement that does not meet the federal definition of foster care

The following cases are subject to review unless circumstances warrant exclusion as agreed to by the Children's Bureau:

- Cases involving administrative, civil, or criminal litigation
- Cases involving current or former employees of the child welfare agency and contracted provider agencies

Acceptable Evidence/Method of Verification:

The state provides a copy of the case review procedures and sampling plan that includes the written process (policy or procedures), CB and state-specific criteria for eliminating and replacing cases, and the corresponding tracking/reporting form.

Appendix B: Child and Family Services Reviews: Pathways to Substantial Conformity

The tables below show how the Children’s Bureau determines whether a state is in substantial conformity with the Child and Family Services Reviews outcomes and systemic factors.

Table B-1: CFSR Outcomes provides information on the outcomes (and the items and statewide data indicators within each), how the Children’s Bureau rates the items, how it determines substantial achievement for each case reviewed, how the statewide data indicators are factored in, and how substantial conformity with the outcomes is determined.

Table B-2: CFSR Systemic Factors provides information on the systemic factors (and the items within each), how the items are rated, and how substantial conformity with the systemic factors is determined.

Table B-1: CFSR Outcomes

Outcome	Items and Ratings	Statewide Data Indicator
<p>Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.</p>	<p>In 95% of the applicable cases, Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment is rated as a Strength.</p>	<p>For maltreatment in foster care, the state is no different or better than national performance. AND For recurrence of maltreatment, the state is no different or better than national performance.</p>
<p>Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.</p>	<p>In 95% of the applicable cases, there are Strength ratings for both Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Child(ren) in the Home and Prevent Removal or Re-entry Into Foster Care AND Item 3: Risk Assessment and Safety Management; OR Item 2 is not applicable and Item 3 is rated as a Strength.</p>	<p>NA</p>

Outcome	Items and Ratings	Statewide Data Indicator
<p>Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.</p>	<p>In 95% of the applicable cases, there are Strength ratings for Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement, Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child, and Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement;</p> <p>OR</p> <p>There are Strength ratings for Items 4 and 6, and Item 5 is not applicable.</p>	<p>For Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Foster Care, the state is no different or better than national performance.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>For Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12 to 23 Months, the state is no different or better than national performance.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>For Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24 Months or More, the state is no different or better than national performance the national performance.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>For Re-Entry to Foster Care in 12 Months, the state is no different or better than national performance.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>For Placement Stability, the state is no different or better than national performance.</p>
<p>Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.</p>	<p>In 95% of the applicable cases, there is a Strength rating for <i>at least one</i> of the following items:</p> <p>AND</p> <p>There is an area needing improvement in <i>no more than one</i> of the following items:</p> <p>Item 7: Placement With Siblings Item 8: Visiting With Parents and Siblings in Foster Care Item 9: Preserving Connections Item 10: Relative Placement Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care With Parents</p>	<p>NA</p>

Outcome	Items and Ratings	Statewide Data Indicator
Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.	In 95% of the applicable cases, there is a Strength rating for Item 12: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents; AND There is an area needing improvement in <i>no more than one</i> of the following items: Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning, Item 14: Caseworker Visits With Child, Item 15: Caseworker Visits With Parent(s).	NA
Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.	In 95% of the applicable cases, Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child is rated as a Strength.	NA
Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.	In 95% of the applicable cases, there are Strength ratings for both Item 17: Physical Health of the Child and Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child.	NA

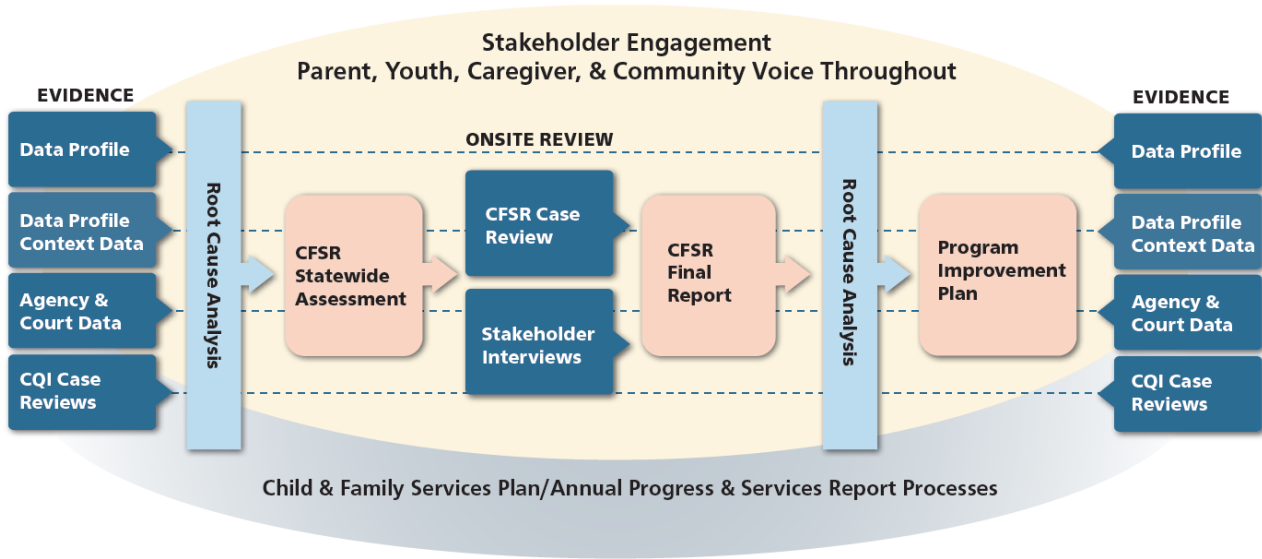
Table B-2: CFSR Systemic Factors

Systemic Factor and Items	Substantial Conformity Determination
Systemic Factor 1: Statewide Information System Item 19: Statewide Information System	Substantial conformity requires that Item 19 be rated as a Strength.
Systemic Factor 2: Case Review System Item 20: Written Case Plan Item 21: Periodic Reviews Item 22: Permanency Hearings Item 23: Termination of Parental Rights Item 24: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers	Substantial conformity requires that at least four of the five items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength.
Systemic Factor 3: Quality Assurance System Item 25: Quality Assurance System	Substantial conformity requires that Item 25 be rated as a Strength.

Systemic Factor and Items	Substantial Conformity Determination
<p>Systemic Factor 4: Staff and Provider Training</p> <p>Item 26: Initial Staff Training Item 27: Ongoing Staff Training Item 28: Foster and Adoptive Parent Training</p>	<p>Substantial conformity requires that at least two of the three items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength.</p>
<p>Systemic Factor 5: Service Array and Resource Development</p> <p>Item 29: Array of Services Item 30: Individualizing Services</p>	<p>Substantial conformity requires that at least one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength.</p>
<p>Systemic Factor 6: Agency Responsiveness to the Community</p> <p>Item 31: State Engagement and Consultation With Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP [Child and Family Services Plan] and APSR [Annual Progress and Services Report] Item 32: Coordination of CFSP Services With Other Federal Programs</p>	<p>Substantial conformity requires that at least one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength.</p>
<p>Systemic Factor 7: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention</p> <p>Item 33: Standards Applied Equally Item 34: Requirements for Criminal Background Checks Item 35: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes Item 36: State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Placement</p>	<p>Substantial conformity requires that at least three of the four items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength.</p>

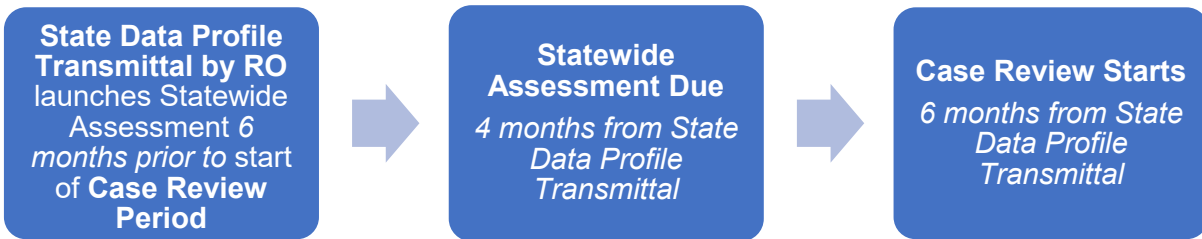
Appendix C

Child and Family Services Review Process



Appendix D

Statewide Assessment and Case Review Timeframes



Appendix E

Collaborating During the Child and Family Services Reviews

The Children’s Bureau designed the Child and Family Services Reviews as a vehicle for promoting change through collaboration. This begins with federal-state joint planning in the development and implementation of the Child and Family Services Plan and collaboration in assessing the effectiveness of the child welfare system in serving children and families. It continues with collaboration between child welfare agency leaders and Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners with a vested interest in the child welfare system in both processes. Those internal partners include child welfare administrators and staff. Partners external to the agency include Tribes and Tribal organizations; policymakers; other agencies serving children, youth, and families; the legal and judicial communities; the community; and children, youth, and persons with lived experience, including young adults over age 18 who may or may not still be receiving services.

These collaborations are critical during all phases of the Child and Family Services Reviews. The information presented below is intended to (1) offer guidance to states in fostering enhanced collaborations during the Child and Family Services Reviews; and (2) provide a structure for the Children’s Bureau staff responsible for assessing state child welfare agency efforts, to enhance or forge new collaborations in conjunction with the Child and Family Services Reviews.

The information below covers:

- Overarching Principles of Child and Family Services Reviews Collaboration
- Child and Family Services Reviews Collaborative Partners
- The Collaborative Process
- Engaging Collaborative Partners
- Evidence of State Collaboration With Tribes, System Partners, and Persons With Lived Experience During the Child and Family Services Reviews
- Monitoring System Partner Involvement
- Technical Assistance in Support of State Collaborative Efforts
- Working With Key Partners

Overarching Principles of Child and Family Services Reviews Collaboration

The Child and Family Services Reviews require a collaborative approach that focuses on identifying a shared vision, goals, and activities, and establishing a purpose, framework, and plan. Most important, the collaborative process should result in changes that promote improved outcomes for children and families. The overarching principles guiding this collaborative process are:

- The safety, permanency, and well-being of children is a shared responsibility, and child welfare agencies should make every effort to reach out to other partners in the state who can help to achieve positive results with respect to the Child and Family Services Reviews child welfare outcome measures and systemic factors.
- Child welfare agencies do not serve children and families in isolation; they should work in partnership with policymakers, legal and judicial communities, community leaders, and other public and private agencies to improve outcomes for children and families in their states. This includes partnering with organizations that directly serve children, youth, and families and those whose actions affect family and community life.

- Family-centered and community-based practices are integral to improving outcomes for children and families. As such, collaboration with families, including young people, is important in identifying and assessing strengths and barriers to improved outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Meaningful collaboration has a purpose and a goal. It takes time and effort to promote meaningful collaboration. There also are varying degrees of collaboration that serve the Child and Family Services Reviews process and, more importantly, children, youth, and families.

Child and Family Services Reviews Collaborative Partners

The Child and Family Services Reviews process defines key partners that should be engaged in the statewide assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan development, implementation, and monitoring (these include partners with whom the state is required to collaborate in developing the Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Reports, as noted at 45 CFR § 1357.15(l)):

- Tribal representatives
- Legal and judicial communities, including, but not limited to, Court Improvement Programs, judges, court administrators, agency attorneys, and attorneys representing parents and children
- Families and youth with lived experience, including young adults over age 18 who may or may not still be receiving services
- Child welfare agency internal partners, such as state and local agency staff, training staff, contract staff, supervisors, and administrators
- Child welfare agency external partners and representatives from (1) other state and community-based service agencies; (2) state and local governments; (3) professional and advocacy organizations; and (4) agencies administering other federal and federally assisted programs. [These programs include those funded by the U.S. Departments of Education, Housing, and Labor, and others in the Department of Health and Human Services including Head Start, the Family and Youth Services Bureau, the Office of Family Assistance (and the Child Care Bureau within that Office), and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention within the Department of Justice. These programs are responsible for education, labor, developmental disabilities services, juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse prevention and treatment, family support, services to runaway and homeless youth, domestic violence intervention, child care, Medicaid, and housing.]
- Partners that represent the diversity of the state's population, especially in relation to those served by the child welfare system
- Other entities related to children and families within the state, such as the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention lead agencies, citizen review panels, Children's Justice Act task forces, and Child and Family Services Plan and Promoting Safe and Stable Families partners

The Collaborative Process

Collaboration takes planning, time, and a commitment to working together to create change. State child welfare agencies can build new, or strengthen existing, collaborations by focusing on the following core elements:

- **A common goal.** Collaboration requires a common goal; collaboration for collaboration's sake does not create change. The shared goal of Child and Family Services Reviews-driven collaborations is improving outcomes for children and families.
- **Benefit to all parties.** All participants understand the benefit of the collaborative goal. While each agency or individual might view improving child welfare as the altruistic goal of the Child and Family Services Reviews, states identify the practical benefits for the system and the individuals and system partners they wish to engage. These benefits might include, for example: (1) Increased collaboration between states and Tribes toward the provision of individualized services to improve reunification outcomes; (2) increased focus on the quality of legal proceedings that support timely achievement of permanency; and (3) more effective training for foster parents to help improve the well-being of children with specialized needs..
- **A vehicle for collaborating.** The Child and Family Services Reviews process is an excellent vehicle for collaboration, but the collaborative effort must be intentional and well-planned so that each partner knows their role(s) and the required time and resource commitment.
- **Strong leadership.** States provide strong leadership and engage Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience and a vested interest in the system, who have the ability and authority to help create change. The Children's Bureau encourages states to use the Child and Family Services Reviews process, and other required or ongoing child welfare planning efforts (for example, title IV-B), to identify who has the authority, responsibility, and/or expertise to help reform their child welfare systems.
- **A process for ensuring meaningful involvement of Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience.** States develop a process for ensuring that engagement is meaningful, those involved feel valued, and all partners are supported to be active participants in Child and Family Services Reviews activities, including the statewide assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan development, implementation, and monitoring.
- **Encouraging the voices of those with lived experience.** States should create a process that openly welcomes and values the participation of families and youth with lived experience, including young adults over age 18 who may or may not still be receiving services. States prepare families and youth so they feel comfortable and confident in their participation and ensure other system partners are engaging families and youth as equals in the process and allowing their voices to be heard.
- **Shared success.** States take opportunities to share early and ongoing successes to encourage continued involvement with collaborative partners. When states and partners identify areas in which progress has been made, the acknowledgement of those successes contributes to sustaining the momentum of change.
- **Use of Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience to engage new partners.** States encourage their partners in the work of the Child and Family Services

Reviews to bring new individuals into the process, whenever appropriate. For example, a substance abuse agency director, who witnesses positive changes in relationships with the child welfare agency as a result of involvement in the Child and Family Services Reviews, becomes one of the agency's best advocates for engaging others in the process.

- **A shared vision for the future.** States develop strategies for keeping people involved over the long term. Success and forward planning contribute to continued engagement. Through ongoing collaboration and discussion, states, Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience continually consider next steps, which is required for the intentional long-term commitment needed during the Child and Family Services Reviews and through the program improvement process.
- **Ongoing evaluation.** States develop a process for continually assessing the outcomes of collaborative efforts, especially with regard to creating meaningful and lasting changes in policy and practice. More important, states examine how those changes are resulting in improved outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Engaging Collaborative Partners

States enhance their ongoing engagement of Tribes, system partners and persons with lived experience in the examination of the state's child welfare system and processes by both focusing on the elements described above and undertaking the following steps:

1. Continually promoting the Child and Family Services Reviews process and findings; state child welfare agencies that set up procedures for doing this have been the most effective in involving others.
2. Identifying which partners need to be involved throughout the Child and Family Services Reviews process and who then might help with development of the Statewide Assessment, participating in onsite reviews, and Program Improvement Plan development and implementation. States may not only want to consider ways to build on current established processes for family and youth participation but also find creative ways to ensure they involve and engage persons with lived experience that reflect the race, ethnicity, and other characteristics of those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system.
3. Conducting targeted outreach through the appropriate channels. If a state child welfare administrator needs the cooperation of the director of the state mental health agency, for example, the administrator might jointly work through the head of the human services agency that manages both the child welfare and mental health services agencies. That person can help facilitate the mental health director's involvement by authorizing the time and resources necessary for them to collaborate.
4. Reviewing the advantages of Child and Family Services Reviews collaboration, and jointly identifying barriers encountered in previous collaborations and strategies for overcoming those barriers.
5. Establishing a process to both prepare and debrief system partners, particularly families and youth, about fully engaging and participating in the collaboration.

6. Jointly assessing and identifying the contributions, time commitment, and resources that each participant might bring to the process.
7. Jointly establishing the “rules of engagement.” This means providing clarity to participants about the Child and Family Services Reviews process, engaging them in developing effective procedures for working together, and setting an equitable workload-sharing system.
8. Jointly establishing timelines for all Child and Family Services Reviews-related meetings, activities, products, and communications.
9. Exploring how to encourage and sustain the involvement of Tribes, system partners, and those with lived experience during the different stages of the Child and Family Services Reviews process, which should be individualized for each partner engaged. Judges, for example, may offer their staff to assist in assessing court-related strengths and needs and identifying strategies for improving court processing of child welfare cases. Those judges, however, should themselves be closely involved in making final decisions about new court procedures and ensuring that those will be institutionalized. Agency collaboration with youth and families might require a different level of preparation (for both agency staff and the youth and family members) and support.

Moreover, partners likely will be participating in the Child and Family Services Reviews process in addition to their regular jobs. In those situations, their time should be used wisely and their contributions acknowledged. The use of incentives for those involved may demonstrate appreciation.

Evidence of State Collaboration With Tribes, System Partners, and Persons With Lived Experience During the Child and Family Services Reviews

At each stage of the collaborative process, there will be different levels of evidence that demonstrate the state’s capacity to engage its external partners in the Child and Family Services Reviews process. Table E-1 below provides illustrative examples of the continuum of state child welfare agency collaboration, from limited to strong. The Children’s Bureau Regional Offices and state child welfare agencies can use the information in the table to periodically assess the status and effectiveness of state involvement with collaborative partners. By doing so, they can determine the extent to which the state is building meaningful partnerships for creating positive change in child welfare policy and practice and improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Table E-1: Evidence of State Collaboration With Tribes, System Partners, and Persons With Lived Experience During the Child and Family Services Reviews and Program Improvement Plan Processes

Opportunities for Collaboration	Evidence of Limited or No Collaboration	Evidence of Strong Collaboration
Engagement of other partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state has started to consult with at least one other partner agency to identify critical issues for the statewide assessment or Program Improvement Plan. • The state has not made any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state has worked to engage a broad group of Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience in the development and ongoing analysis of the Program Improvement Plan and new statewide

Opportunities for Collaboration	Evidence of Limited or No Collaboration	Evidence of Strong Collaboration
	<p>strong efforts to engage or consult with Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience in the development of the statewide assessment or Program Improvement Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is simply a list of Tribes, and collaborative partner agencies, in the statewide assessment; there is no other indication of their level of collaboration in the Child and Family Services Reviews or statewide assessment. 	<p>assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external partners convey a shared ownership of the statewide assessment and Program Improvement Plan processes, including development, implementation, and outcomes. • External partners have responsibility for implementing Program Improvement Plan strategies or activities demonstrating a shared sense of ownership of improvement.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entities identified as Tribes and partners simply are invited to give input through one-time meetings or statewide assessment or Program Improvement Plan focus groups. • Tribes and system partners are invited to collaborate only by reviewing and commenting on draft Child and Family Services Reviews materials. • There is no other evidence of ongoing communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience are invited to develop and provide input on the state's Child and Family Services Reviews documents and processes in a structured way and on an ongoing basis, and there is a well-defined and regular feedback loop between the child welfare agency and partners. • The state has established standing meetings that are regularly attended by collaborative partners; they track meeting participation and outcomes. • Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience are actively involved in producing draft and final materials. • The state agency and its partners have assigned responsibility (and authority) to key staff for communicating regularly, internally and externally, about the Child and Family Services Reviews process.

Opportunities for Collaboration	Evidence of Limited or No Collaboration	Evidence of Strong Collaboration
Needs assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state agency has developed a statewide assessment process for the Child and Family Services Reviews that is separate from other needs assessment processes established by the agency or others. The state agency relies solely on its own data when analyzing strengths and areas needing improvement and does not examine data available from other sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state's statewide assessment process builds on the assessments conducted through existing vehicles such as the Child and Family Services Plan, Court Improvement Program, Children's Justice Act, consent decrees, and other agency needs assessment efforts. The state and its collaborative partners compile, analyze, and discuss and explain user-friendly data on a regular basis and in service to the development of the statewide assessment and the Program Improvement Plan and share with others whenever possible.
Joint strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state's external partners do not participate in any joint planning efforts with the child welfare agency. The state provides external partners with limited time to review draft plans and reports and does not respond to comments provided, and final state products do not reflect the comments of those partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state's external partners work with the agency to develop, contribute to, review, and adjust their strategic plans. They explore overlapping issues and strategies and determine how to work together to address those. The state's external partners provide input on all of the federal child welfare programs and support the coordination of such activities with those conducted during the Child and Family Services Reviews process, as applicable. The strategic plans of the state child welfare agency and of external partners reflect mutual goals and activities.
Sharing of resources and adjusting work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited (or no) evidence that external partners are contributing resources (in-kind or direct funding) to address the issues identified through the previous Child and Family Services Reviews or to support the current statewide assessment process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state's external partners have identified and/or made specific contributions to the previous Child and Family Services Reviews and the current statewide assessment process. External partners have identified areas in which they can

Opportunities for Collaboration	Evidence of Limited or No Collaboration	Evidence of Strong Collaboration
		<p>contribute to making positive changes in outcomes through the Program Improvement Plan; for example, co-locating a mental health or public health specialist in the child welfare agency or co-locating a social worker in a school-based family resource center.</p>
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no indication that the Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience will continue participating in future Child and Family Services Reviews or ongoing evaluations of state performance. • There is no process or vehicle for promoting and sustaining the collaboration; for example, not sharing with partners agency data or ongoing evaluations of progress noted through the quality assurance process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are established procedures and vehicles for collaborating in an ongoing manner, such as system partner involvement in ongoing monitoring of progress through the state’s quality assurance process or data sharing. • The state and its partners have identified specific actions that other agencies will undertake to support the Child and Family Services Reviews and other outcome-driven activities on an ongoing basis. This might include, for example, engagement in Program Improvement Plan implementation and monitoring, and involvement in Child and Family Services Reviews-related activities between previous Program Improvement Plan completion and the subsequent Child and Family Services Reviews. • The state’s external partners coordinate with the child welfare agency to advocate for improvements in services for children and families through their state legislature or the state budget process.

Opportunities for Collaboration	Evidence of Limited or No Collaboration	Evidence of Strong Collaboration
Policies/laws/regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes are made to policies without collaboration with key system partners and persons with lived experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific policies/laws/regulations have been established as a result of the collaboration process. Agency leadership works together under the established protocols to advocate for legislative change or comment
Research/data/evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no process for sharing data among system partners in support of the planning and evaluation of programs and services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a process for sharing data among the state agency, Tribes, and external partners for the purposes of (1) identifying shared clients and promoting coordinated services/delivery; and (2) identifying policy and practice issues that require improvements or that can serve as best practices. The roles of the collaborative partners in contributing to improved outcomes are continually evaluated, and the development of new strategies for making those improvements is ongoing. There is a process for evaluating the impact of the collaborative process.
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is limited (or no) evidence that the leadership of the state agency or its external partner agencies are committed to collaboration. The leadership is not communicating with staff about the importance of, and/or strategies for, interagency collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is evidence that state agency and external partner leadership support strong collaboration through regular meetings or communication structures. The state agency's vision and mission, internal structure, and management practice promote collaboration and are shared with staff and the community. Senior staff are assigned responsibility for promoting collaboration within the child welfare agency and with its external partners.

Monitoring the Involvement of Tribes, System Partners, and Persons With Lived Experience

The Children's Bureau and state child welfare agency leaders share joint responsibility for monitoring state efforts to engage Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience and a vested interest in the child welfare system, and other system partners, both at the state and local levels, in the Child and Family Services Reviews process. The Children's Bureau and state child welfare agency leaders can use the following strategies to ensure that state agencies establish Child and Family Services Reviews planning processes, both internal and with the Children's Bureau, that promote involvement in meaningful ways:

- **Assess how the state agency is involving Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience.** The Children's Bureau and state agency leadership can consider how often the state child welfare agency collaborates with its system partners and individuals and their efforts to do so. What are the focus and outcomes of those collaborations regarding both process and substance? The Children's Bureau also should watch for other signs of state collaboration, which might include, for example: (1) collaborative meetings that the child welfare agency attends or hosts; (2) websites that convey information to, or solicit information from, Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners; (3) cross-training of the agency and its system partners; or (4) the routine engagement of key system partners in Program Improvement Plans or other child welfare reform action strategies and analysis.

The following questions also can be useful in assessing the degree to which an agency is engaging Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience:

- What collaborative relationships did the agency have in place before the most recent Child and Family Services Review? After the most recent Child and Family Services Review?
- Which partners currently appear to be actively involved, and which are not and why?
- Do the individuals engaged represent the diversity of the state population, particularly those being served by the child welfare system?
- What role(s) are Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners playing? Are they simply providing input, or do they appear to be playing a role in conducting Child and Family Services Reviews processes or developing and reviewing related materials?
- What process(es) does the agency plan to use to provide feedback to its partners on how their input will be used?
- What strategies is the state using to continually educate/communicate with Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners about the Child and Family Services Review and the Program Improvement Plan?
- What strategies does the state agency currently employ or plan to employ to ensure the continuation or enhancement of the collaborative relationships

developed or strengthened through the Child and Family Services Reviews and Program Improvement Plan processes?

- **Check the engagement of Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience in relation to the outcomes and systemic factors under review.** For each of the Child and Family Services Reviews outcomes and systemic factors, the Children’s Bureau Regional Office and state agency leadership might use the following questions to explore new ways for engaging Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners in improving child welfare policies and practices. The Children’s Bureau should note that the inclusion of a question or strategy about collaboration in a specific area below does not denote it as a requirement to be assessed during the review of outcomes. Rather, the Children’s Bureau might use the questions to guide their assessment of, or conversations with, the state child welfare agency about the state’s ongoing Child and Family Services Reviews-related collaborative efforts to address needed improvements in state policies and practices related to those outcomes and systemic factors:
 - How does the state agency currently engage its partners in designing and assessing its policy and strategies for each of the items under the Child and Family Services Reviews outcomes and systemic factors?
 - Who does the agency engage in relation to the items, how does it do so, and what have been the results?
 - What are the agency’s plans for enhancing its engagement of collaborative partners related to specific items under the outcomes and systemic factors?
- **Prepare for the next review.** Before each new cycle of reviews (and throughout the Child and Family Services Plan and Child and Family Services Reviews processes), the Children’s Bureau Regional Office and state child welfare agency leadership can explore how the state is continually enhancing its plans for engaging Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners by reflecting on the following:
 - What did the agency learn by engaging with system partners during the previous Child and Family Services Review, and how will the agency integrate those lessons into future Child and Family Services Reviews planning?
 - Which of the processes used to solicit input during the previous Child and Family Services Review might be useful during the current review in reaching out to system partners and individuals with whom the agency needs to engage?
 - What have been the benefits of the collaborative relationships with regard to the state’s child welfare reform efforts, and how were those benefits communicated?
 - What evidence suggests that input from Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners is being valued and respected by the state agency during the Child and Family Services Reviews process?
 - How can the state build on positive collaborative experiences?
 - Does the state have a continuous feedback loop for collecting and responding to

Tribal, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners' perspectives on the agency's efforts to engage them in the Child and Family Services Reviews process?

- Which Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners is the child welfare agency planning to engage in the development of the statewide assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan; how will it do so (for example, through focus groups, meetings, or websites); and what are the anticipated results?
- What plans does the state have for building on the successful partnerships created to date, and how will it reach out in new ways to those previously reluctant to engage in the Child and Family Services Reviews planning process and continue to identify potential new partners?
- What type of guidance or technical assistance appeared to help or might be needed to achieve greater involvement of Tribes, system partners, and persons with lived experience?

Technical Assistance in Support of State Collaborative Efforts

Collaboration requires a time commitment and available resources, *and* it is contingent on the interest of agency leaders and the state's current political context. The Children's Bureau and state agency staff can use the following questions to assess whether technical assistance might help the state enhance its collaborative process:

- What types of collaborations and partnerships currently exist?
- Is the state child welfare agency the convener/leader of those collaborations/partnerships or a participant in a process facilitated by others?
- How strong is the evidence of these collaborations, as reflected in the statewide assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan?
- What changes have resulted from those collaborations/partnerships, and what has been the impact on outcomes for children, youth, and families?
- With whom/with which agencies has the agency been unable to establish a collaborative partnership?
- What have been the barriers to those collaborations, and how might technical assistance help address those?

States should consult with their Children's Bureau Regional Offices to explore accessing Children's Bureau-supported technical assistance, if needed.

Working With Key System Partners: Tribes, Legal and Judicial Communities, Youth and Persons With Lived Experience

Engage key partners—Tribes, legal and judicial communities, and youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system. State child welfare agency staff managing the Child and Family Services Review process need to determine the best methods for doing so. In selecting those methods, states should consider both the issues specific to each group and

the more general issues of collaboration, such as:

- Transportation issues (Where are Child and Family Services Reviews meetings scheduled? How will participants get to those?)
- Meeting dates and times that accommodate participants' other commitments and schedules (for example, not during school hours)
- Systems for sharing information about the Child and Family Services Reviews with the key Tribes, legal and judicial communities, and youth and persons with lived experience
- Ensuring geographic diversity and diverse representation within and among the groups participating
- Ways to mentor or otherwise support key system partners and persons with lived experience during their involvement

The section below highlights the benefits of collaborating with Tribes, legal and judicial communities, and youth and persons with lived experience during the Child and Family Services Reviews; provides strategies for doing so; and outlines potential roles they can fulfill during the statewide assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan processes.

Collaborating With Tribes

State child welfare agencies can engage Tribal representatives in the Child and Family Services Reviews process by identifying and then working with the leaders of:

- Local Tribes
- Local Tribal organizations, such as urban service centers
- Local chapters of national organizations addressing Tribal issues
- Statewide Tribal organizations
- Tribal child-placing agencies or social services

Benefits of Collaborating With Tribes

- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities for the provision of care to Tribal children to better serve Native American children and families
- Provides opportunities to improve outcomes for Native American children served by the child welfare agency
- Enhances mutual understanding of the role of governmental agencies in formulating or implementing policies that have Tribal implications

Strategies for Collaborating With Tribes

Statewide Assessment

States can engage Tribal representatives in the statewide assessment process through:

- Providing formal notification of the Child and Family Services Reviews to the Tribal chairpersons/executive directors and social services directors, and requesting that they designate appropriate persons to be involved throughout this collaborative process

- Using the Child and Family Services Reviews process to formalize and enhance consultation and collaboration with Tribes; consulting early in the process and engaging Tribal representatives in meaningful roles, discussions of key issues, and decision-making
- Developing materials about the Child and Family Services Reviews to share with Tribal representatives; these materials should help them understand the benefits of the Child and Family Services Reviews to their efforts to support children and families. See, for example, the CFSR Fact Sheet for Tribal Child Welfare Officials.
- Including Tribal representatives on teams formed to complete the statewide assessment and/or associated work groups
- Inviting Tribal representatives to participate in surveys and focus groups
- Holding key statewide assessment meetings or focus groups on Tribal lands, in Indian Country, and/or on reservations, and at times convenient for Tribal members
- Asking Tribal representatives to identify any Tribal data that they would like to share related to children served by the state child welfare agency and to help analyze state agency data
- Identifying child welfare issues related to Native American children served by the state agency, and exploring strategies for resolving those with Tribal representatives, including building on the sharing of information that occurs in developing state and Tribal Child and Family Services Plans and reporting annual progress in each entity's Annual Progress and Services Report
- Identifying areas in which states and Tribes could work together better to improve their child welfare systems
- Initiating cross-training opportunities for state and Tribal child welfare agency staff
- Involving Tribal representatives in drafting sections of the Statewide Assessment
- Soliciting Tribal representatives' comments on Statewide Assessment drafts

Onsite Review

States can engage Tribal representatives in the onsite review through the following activities:

- Notifying key Tribal representatives about the timeline for planning and conducting the onsite review
- Inviting Tribal representatives to designate staff to participate as reviewers during the onsite review
- Conducting stakeholder interviews with Tribal representatives (and providing before the interview a list of the questions that may be asked)
- Inviting Tribal representatives to attend debriefings and results sessions

Program Improvement Plan

States can engage Tribal representatives in the Program Improvement Plan process through the following activities:

- Providing a copy of the Final Report to Tribal representatives, meeting to discuss the report, and inviting them to the results discussion
- Including Tribal representatives on teams formed to develop the Program Improvement Plan and associated work groups
- Establishing Memoranda of Understanding or Agreement. Through these agreements, the state agency and Tribes agree to work together to address child welfare policies and practices needing improvement. A Memorandum of Agreement, for example, might identify state and Tribal roles in recruiting foster parents. The partnerships created by these memoranda also enable state agencies to focus improvements on issues important to Tribes and reassure Tribes of the agency's willingness to collaborate
- Asking for assistance in identifying areas needing improvement
- Engaging Tribal representatives in analyzing state and local data to identify Tribal issues and concerns and promising practices
- Ensuring that the state's ongoing quality assurance efforts address issues concerning Native American children and include Tribal representatives in measuring program improvement activities
- Inviting Tribal representatives to participate in the development and review of Program Improvement Plan drafts
- Teaming Tribal representatives with state child welfare agency staff to implement and monitor Program Improvement Plan activities. Ideally, state agencies engage Tribal representatives throughout the Child and Family Services Reviews process by participating in the statewide assessment and onsite review, or in serving as onsite reviewers, as appropriate. Engagement in Program Improvement Plan planning and implementation therefore flows logically from the collaboration established during the stages of the review cycle. In situations in which Tribal representatives were not involved in the Child and Family Services Reviews before the Program Improvement Plan process, states might provide a thorough and targeted explanation of the process and outcomes and ask Tribes for input into designing, and assistance in carrying out, Program Improvement Plan strategies
- Including Tribal representatives on Program Improvement Plan evaluation teams
- Identifying technical assistance needs for both Tribes and state child welfare agencies
- Initiating cross-training opportunities for state and Tribal child welfare agency staff about practice issues related to agency/Tribe jurisdiction over child welfare cases
- Holding Program Improvement Plan meetings on Tribal lands, in Indian Country, and/or on reservations

- Acknowledging both the uniqueness of Tribal child welfare circumstances and perspectives and the shared goal of improving outcomes for children and families

Collaborating With Legal and Judicial Communities

State child welfare agencies can involve the legal and judicial communities in the Child and Family Services Reviews process by establishing working relationships with individuals and organizations such as:

- Chief Justice
- State Court Administrator
- Court Improvement Program Director
- Local judges
- Local court administrators
- Agency attorneys
- Attorneys for Children
- Guardians ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocates
- State bar association
- Parents' attorneys
- State judicial organizations
- Juvenile probation officers
- Governor's Task Force, as appropriate

Benefits of Collaborating With the Legal and Judicial Communities

The legal and judicial communities play an integral role in supporting positive outcomes for children and families engaged in child welfare services. Engaging them fully in the Child and Family Services Reviews process:

- Increases the legal and judicial communities' awareness of the scope and benefits of the process
- Ensures that the experience and perspectives of the legal and judicial communities inform the Child and Family Services Reviews and Program Improvement Plan processes
- Ensures that new strategies for improving child welfare agency and legal and judicial collaboration are designed by both agency and legal and judicial community members
- Promotes legal and judicial community interest in implementing and monitoring the impact of Program Improvement Plan strategies
- Builds ongoing relationships between agency and legal and judicial community members that affect day-to-day practice
- Promotes a coordinated and integrated approach to addressing issues identified by the Court Improvement Program and the Child and Family Services Reviews process to be coordinated in the state's Program Improvement Plan

Since the launching of the Child and Family Services Reviews, the Children's Bureau has strongly encouraged states to use the process to enhance their collaboration with the legal and judicial communities. In addition, the scope of the Court Improvement Program, as amended and reauthorized by the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 (Public Law

107–133), was expanded to (1) include improvements that the highest courts deem necessary to provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in foster care, as set forth in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and (2) implement corrective action plans, as necessary, in response to findings about state child welfare systems identified by the Child and Family Services Reviews.

Strategies for Collaborating With the Legal and Judicial Communities

Statewide Assessment

States can engage legal and judicial communities³ in the statewide assessment process through:

- Engaging Chief Justices early in the process by notifying them of the purpose and timelines of the Child and Family Services Reviews
- Disseminating materials about the Child and Family Services Reviews to share with legal and judicial community members; the materials should help them understand the benefits of the Child and Family Services Reviews to their operation and to children and families. See, for example, the CFSR Fact Sheet for Legal and Judicial Communities
- Notifying the legal and judicial communities of the Child and Family Services Reviews timeline, including explaining the various steps in the process and when the statewide assessment will take place, starting the review process
- Developing plans for engaging legal and judicial community members, and reporting on those plans during the Child and Family Services Reviews planning conference calls
- Including legal and judicial community members in the development of the statewide assessment
- Conducting surveys, focus groups, and informational meetings with, or in conjunction with, legal and judicial community members
- Collaborating with the legal and judicial communities in identifying legal and judicial issues affecting safety and permanency as well as relevant systemic factors
- Developing cross-agency data teams to compare state agency, court, and other identified data evidence within the legal and judicial communities regarding procedures for ensuring children’s safety and permanency. For example, states can create teams of child welfare agency and legal and judicial community members to explore patterns in the data evidence regarding the number of pending terminations of parental rights
- Engaging legal and judicial community members in cross-training opportunities
- Requesting the assistance of members of the legal and judicial communities in preparing the narrative portions of the Statewide Assessment relative to the work of those systems

³ Adapted from: Hardin, M. (2002). *How and why to involve the courts in your Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)*. National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law.

- Asking key legal and judicial communities' members, both those involved in the previous Program Improvement Plan development process and others, to review and comment on Statewide Assessment drafts
- Creating a special Child and Family Services Reviews legal-judicial subcommittee to examine safety, permanency, and well-being issues and report on those involved in the development of the Statewide Assessment

Onsite Review

States can engage the legal and judicial communities in the onsite review through:

- Notifying key legal and judicial community members about the timeline for planning and conducting the onsite review
- Working with the Court Improvement Program Director and senior members of the court to designate staff to participate as reviewers during the onsite review
- Working with the legal community to explain case-related interviews and the value of their and their clients' participation in these interviews when asked
- Working with the Court Improvement Program Director to assist in assembling stakeholder interviews with legal and judicial community members (and providing a copy of the questions that they will be asked)

Program Improvement Plan

States can engage legal and judicial communities in the Program Improvement Plan process through:

- Inviting members of the legal and judicial communities to the results discussion.
- Providing the Final Report broadly to the Chief Justice and other juvenile or family court judges, Court Improvement Program Director or Coordinator, and attorneys across the state
- Notifying key legal and judicial community members about the Program Improvement Plan timeline and purpose of the Program Improvement Plan
- Engaging Court Improvement Program staff in exploring how best to integrate the Court Improvement Program Strategic Plan and the Program Improvement Plan
- Including key legal and judicial community members on the Program Improvement Plan development teams and associated work groups
- Requesting court and attorney involvement in the development of Program Improvement Plan strategies to address onsite findings, particularly as they relate to the role of the court and the practice of the lawyers and inviting them to conceive strategies that relate to attorney and judicial practice
- Using existing court data to measure the results of Program Improvement Plan action strategies, and exploring opportunities for new court data collection activities in support of the Program Improvement Plan

- Inviting legal and judicial community members to develop and review Program Improvement Plan drafts
- Identifying technical assistance needs; for example, strategies for achieving timely filings for terminations of parental rights
- Initiating cross-training opportunities for child welfare agency and legal and judicial community members on Child and Family Services Review-related issues such as Adoption and Safe Families Act requirements
- Partnering to develop strategies for approaching the state legislature to request needed legislative changes
- Ensuring that the Program Improvement Plan is aligned with the Court Improvement Program strategic plan
- Ensuring continued engagement of legal and judicial community members throughout Program Improvement Plan implementation and monitoring and the post-Program Improvement Plan evaluation period
- Committing to support implementation of specific aspects of the Court Improvement Program's strategic plan for system improvements
- Including legal and judicial community members on Program Improvement Plan evaluation teams
- Sharing child welfare data with legal and judicial systems and requesting to review these systems' data on an ongoing basis

Collaborating With Youth and Persons With Lived Experience

State child welfare agencies can engage youth and persons with lived experience in the review process by identifying and then working with a diverse group who are being or have been served by the child welfare system. Opportunities may include:

- State, regional, and local child welfare advisory boards
- Governors' councils
- Local chapters of national child welfare organizations
- Transitional Living programs
- Community-based family-serving organizations
- Youth life skills groups
- The child protective services component of the child welfare agency (to engage persons who received child welfare services in the home)
- State or local runaway or homeless youth programs
- State or local foster care, foster youth, or foster parent associations
- State or local mental health association subcommittees on youth and families
- State or local bar association subcommittees
- Local Court Appointed Special Advocate or Guardian ad Litem chapters
- State or local children's advocacy center organizations

Benefits of Collaborating With Youth and Persons With Lived Experience

Youth and persons with lived experience bring a unique perspective to the Child and Family Services Reviews process. As former service recipients or volunteers in their local communities, they offer child welfare agencies insights into how services can best be provided. There are significant benefits to engaging them in the Child and Family Services Reviews process, which:

- Offers those who receive child welfare services the opportunity to provide input into systemic change
- Ensures input about what works and what does not, and their service needs
- Offers child welfare agency staff the opportunity to consider new strategies on the basis of the creative perspectives that youth and persons with lived experience provide
- Empowers youth and persons with lived experience by meaningfully engaging them; valuing their contribution to their communities and the child welfare system; and strengthening their sense of competence, usefulness, and belonging

Strategies for Collaborating With Youth and Persons With Lived Experience

Statewide Assessment

States can engage youth and persons with lived experience in the statewide assessment process through:

- Identifying existing statewide organizations, advisory or advocacy groups, or other standing committees that can help to promote their engagement in the Child and Family Services Reviews process by both recommending participants and providing training and mentoring during their involvement
- Working with state or local ombudspersons to identify youth who might be involved
- Training staff to work collaboratively with youth and persons with lived experience, who can serve as co-trainers and co-facilitators
- Developing systems for preparing youth and persons with lived experience to collaborate with the state and its other partners during the statewide assessment process. These might include, for example, inviting them to Child and Family Services Reviews-related public forums or trainings, and developing materials for them and about their potential role in the process. See, for example, the CFSR Fact Sheet for Youth (scroll to Fact Sheets).
- Including two or more youth or persons with lived experience who are being or have been served by the child welfare system—either through in-home or foster care services—in the development of the Statewide Assessment (and subgroups of youth, as appropriate), providing a clearly defined role, setting expectations, and assigning a senior staff person to provide an orientation and to mentor them during the process. By engaging them, states can provide a measure of safety for them and increase their confidence in speaking up on issues relating to them
- Defining the types of information that the members involved in the development of the Statewide Assessment feel it needs to gather from youth and persons with lived experience, and developing questions for doing so

- Developing, facilitating, and conducting surveys of, and focus groups with, youth and persons with lived experience regarding their experience with the child welfare agency, and using the results to outline areas to be further assessed through the onsite review and to guide program analysis, service realignment, and practice improvements. These surveys and focus groups should target or include, when possible, those engaged through child protective services and those who experienced out-of-home care
- Meeting with existing advisory or advocacy groups to gather input for inclusion in the Statewide Assessment about how child welfare services meet the goals of ensuring youth's safety, permanency, and well-being

Onsite Review

States can engage youth and persons with lived experience in the onsite review process through:

- Developing systems for preparing and debriefing youth and persons with lived experience, especially those who are being or have been served by child welfare systems to participate in stakeholder interviews during the onsite review. Begin by inviting them to Child and Family Services Reviews-related public forums or trainings and developing related materials targeted to their age group and role in the process
- Conducting and debriefing stakeholder interviews with youth and persons with lived experience (and providing before the interview a copy of the questions they may be asked)
- Inviting youth and persons with lived experience and/or representatives of their organizations to attend the state's exit conference at the end of the review week for Children's Bureau-Led Reviews

Program Improvement Plan

States meaningfully engage youth and persons with lived experience in the Program Improvement Plan process through:

- Including a diverse array of individuals on the Program Improvement Plan development team and in Program Improvement Plan development and implementation work groups
- Inviting youth and persons with lived experience from the committee responsible for developing the Chafee State Plan to participate in the Program Improvement Plan development and implementation process to address overlapping areas of improvement
- Engaging youth and persons with lived experience in assessing Program Improvement Plan progress on issues related to the child welfare system; for example, they can serve on a Program Improvement Plan monitoring subgroup charged with reviewing Program Improvement Plan progress quarterly
- Asking youth and persons with lived experience to review and comment on Program Improvement Plan drafts and participate in subsequent revision discussions
- Asking staff from youth-serving organizations and persons with lived experience to participate in the ongoing evaluation of state data relative to child welfare outcomes; for example, taking a role in assessing youth and parent involvement in the development of their case plans

- Teaming state child welfare agency staff with staff of state or local youth organizations or persons with lived experience to help design and implement specific Program Improvement Plan action steps

Appendix F: CFSR Round 4 Statewide Data Indicators Data Dictionary

Statewide Data Indicators: General Data Notes

- In cases where AFCARS records contain inconsistent information between two data submissions, the data elements from the latest submission are used.
- For the purposes of the CFSR indicators, children who turn 18 while in care are considered to have discharged from the foster care system on their 18th birthday and are not counted as achieving permanency.
- Children who enter care at age 18 or older, and who are age 18 or older on the first day of the 12-month period, are excluded from indicator calculations.

Table F-1. NCANDS Data Quality Checks

These checks are applied only to victims of maltreatment. A victim is a child for whom the state determined that at least one maltreatment report for that child was substantiated or indicated. It does not include children receiving alternative response or unsubstantiated reports. It does include children who died, and the death was confirmed to be the result of child abuse and neglect.

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Limits	Notes
Child IDs for victims match across years	Percent of unique victims in a NCANDS Child File that have a match in the next NCANDS Child File	Number of unique victims reported in a NCANDS Child File	Of children in the denominator, the number of victims also reported in the next NCANDS Child File	< 1%	Individual records are not excluded from indicator calculations unless the overall percentage of matching child victim IDs is less than 1%
Child IDs for victims match across years, but dates of birth/age and sex do not match	Among victims, percent of unique Child IDs that match across years, but: (a) sex does not match, (b) date of birth does not match (only applicable to children under the age of 1), or (c) age difference between	Among victims, number of unique NCANDS Child IDs that match across two consecutive NCANDS Child Files	Of NCANDS Child IDs in the denominator, number of those IDs with a different sex or an age difference between years that is outside of the expected range. For children under the age of 1, this also	> 5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An age difference outside of the expected range occurs when the child's age difference between the 2 years is less than 0 or greater than 3 • Children missing sex or age at report are not included in this DQ check • Children under age 1 without DOB are excluded from this DQ

Appendix F: CFSR Round 4 Statewide Data Indicators Data Dictionary

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Limits	Notes
	years is outside of expected range		includes those IDs with differing dates of birth		check and related indicator calculations
Missing age for victims	Percent of victims with a missing age	Number of victims in NCANDS Child File	Of children in the denominator, number of children missing child age	> 5%	NCANDS validation process automates calculation of child victim age by subtracting DOB from report date, when DOB is included in the submission
Some victims should have AFCARS IDs in Child File	Percent of victims with an AFCARS ID in NCANDS Child File	Number of victims in NCANDS Child File	Of children in the denominator, number with an AFCARS ID in NCANDS Child File	< 1%	
Some victims with AFCARS IDs should match IDs in AFCARS Files	Some victims with AFCARS IDs should match IDs in AFCARS Files	Number of victims who have AFCARS IDs reported in NCANDS Child File	Of children in the denominator, number that match using AFCARS ID to a child record in AFCARS, during the same year	No	Individual records with this condition are not excluded from indicator calculations unless the state does not have at least one case with matching AFCARS IDs

Appendix G1: Logistics and Planning Materials—State-Led Review Planning Timeline

This appendix includes a schedule and planning chart for the State-Led Review Planning Timeline, the CB-Led Review Planning Timeline, and the State Team Pairings Chart.

State-Led Review Planning Timeline

This schedule of activities/tasks is intended to support states and the federal Child and Family Services Review team in preparing for a State-Led Review up to and following the Children’s Bureau’s approval of the state’s request for a State-Led Review. Based on the state’s proposed case review period start date, specific due dates for each task can be identified by the state and the Children’s Bureau, using the timeframes provided below. This timeline may also be used to develop agendas for ongoing planning calls between the Children’s Bureau and states in preparation for the case review period. Activities may be performed by states, the state Child and Family Services Review team, or together.

Table G–1. State-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for Discussion/Completion	Due Date
Identify Key State and Federal Contacts and Roles	Approximately 8–9 months before the start of the case review period	[Date]
Key Dates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – State’s approach to case review period – Period under review – Sampling frames and sampling periods—in-home services (IHS) and foster care (FC) cases – State Data Profile to be used for the statewide assessment and determination of substantial conformity – Statewide assessment due date – Due date for Policy Requirements document submission – Site selection finalization – Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan due date – Call schedule—plan for ongoing communication 	Approximately 8–9 months before the start of the case review period) Policy Requirements due before CB approval for a State-Led Review Sites finalized before CB approval for a State-Led Review (no later than 6 months before the start of the case review period)	[Date]

Appendix G1: Logistics and Planning Materials—State-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for Discussion/Completion	Due Date
<p>Technical Assistance Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select and schedule from topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online Monitoring System overview/training – Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions training (online) – Systemic factors assessment – State Data Profiles—performance on the indicators and data quality – Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan – Engagement of system partners and individuals with a vested interest in the child welfare system, including youth and families with lived experience who reflect the race, ethnicity, and other populations served – Implementing CQI (in preparation for Program Improvement Plan) 	<p>Approximately 8–9 months before the start of the case review period (may need to revisit again 5 months before the start of the case review period)</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Status Updates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and implementation status, if applicable • Identification of state case review onsite schedule • Timing of federal participation • State QA and federal participation in the review process 	<p>Approximately 8–9 months before the start of the case review period</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Policy Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – State’s use of contracted case management (specifically discuss requirements for face-to-face contact between the child/family and the agency caseworker) – Differential/Alternative Response and implications for IHS sample – Permanency goals – Unique case practices such as use of safety resources (non-FC placement of children outside of their homes) – Item 1 relevant policies – Placement types – Medication monitoring policies/protocol – Well-child and dental exam policies – Case closure policy – Use of concurrent planning 	<p>8–9 months before the start of the case review period</p> <p>Policy Requirements due before CB approval for a State-Led Review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>

Appendix G1: Logistics and Planning Materials—State-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for Discussion/Completion	Due Date
<p>Statewide Assessment Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who from the state will participate in developing the Statewide Assessment—helpful to have overlapping membership among the Statewide Assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan development teams to facilitate cross-review-phase experiences and information-sharing • Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involvement of Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners – Statewide Assessment instrument and related resources; go over expectations for data in systemic factors assessment – Joint planning activities – Process and timeframes (CB will send Statewide Assessment instrument to state with State Data Profile approximately 6 months before onsite review period; final Statewide Assessment due back to CB within 4 months of date state received the Statewide Assessment instrument with the State Data Profile) – Plan for development, submission of drafts to CB – Additional call schedule to discuss Statewide Assessment, if needed • Note that stakeholder interviews cannot be determined and scheduled until final Statewide Assessment is submitted 	<p>Approximately 8–9 months before the start of the case review period</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Site Selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use information in CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals for discussion • Schedule Measurement and Sampling Committee (MASC) call • Send proposal with relevant data to MASC before call • Finalize sites 	<p>Begin discussions 8–9 months before the start of the case review period</p> <p>Finalize sites at least 6 months before the start of the case review period as part of CB’s approval for a State-Led Review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Sampling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule MASC call • Discuss IHS and FC sampling frames with MASC Note date state will send example sampling frames for IHS and FC to MASC (in preparation for receiving approval for State-Led Review) 	<p>MASC begins discussions 8–9 months before onsite review period. Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan finalized by at least 6 months before the start of the case review period</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Case Elimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review case elimination protocol/criteria • Develop plan for case elimination, to include regular check-in calls 	<p>Begin discussions 8–9 months before the case review period. Criteria approved with Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan at least 6 months before the start of the case review period</p>	<p>[Date]</p>

Appendix G1: Logistics and Planning Materials—State-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for Discussion/Completion	Due Date
State Data Profile Children’s Bureau transmits to the state with the Statewide Assessment instrument	Approximately 6 months before the start of the case review period	[Date]
State Data Profile Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review state performance and data quality issues, as applicable Discuss areas for further data analysis in preparation for the SWA and Program Improvement Plan, including differences across subpopulations, including evidence of disproportionality and disparity Determine data-related TA needs 	6 months before the start of the case review period (and after the State Data Profile is transmitted to state for the SWA)	[Date]
Final Statewide Assessment Submission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Bureau provides the due date based on the start of the state’s case review periods 	4 months after State Data Profile is transmitted to the state (approximately 2 months before the start of the case review period)	[Date]
Stakeholder Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Bureau informs state of needed stakeholder interviews, items requiring interviews, and key questions that may be asked related to the SWA (in addition to basic systemic factor functioning questions) Determine when during the onsite review period interviews will occur and whether they will occur in person or virtually Develop plan for submitting interview schedule to state CFSSR team 	No later than 1 month before the start of the case review period	[Date]
Federal Participation Confirm and finalize the plan for federal participation in onsite review activities and Secondary Oversight	No later than 1 month before the start of the case review period	[Date]
Final Results Session—Planning Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timing, location Participants Agenda 	Begin discussion no later than 1 month before the start of the case review period	[Date]
Stakeholder Interviews Schedule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CB to review and finalize schedule and participants 	Finalize schedule no later than 1–2 weeks before the start of the case review period, depending on when interviews will occur	[Date]

Appendix G1: Logistics and Planning Materials—State-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for Discussion/Completion	Due Date
Case Review Data Finalized	Approve and finalize cases within 45 days of completing data collection for case review	[Date]
Final Report	Children's Bureau sends Final Report to state approximately 30 days after receipt of all finalized case review data	[Date]

Appendix G2: Logistics and Planning Materials—Children’s Bureau-Led Review Planning Timeline

This schedule of activities/tasks is intended to support states and the federal Child and Family Services Review team in preparing for a Children’s Bureau-Led Review after the date of the onsite review has been determined. Based on that date, specific due dates for each task can be identified by the state and the Children’s Bureau, using the timeframes provided below. This timeline may also be used to develop agendas for ongoing planning calls between the Children’s Bureau and states in preparation for the onsite review. Activities may be performed by states, the state Child and Family Services Review team, or together.

Table G–2. CB-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
Identify Key State and Federal Contacts and Roles	Approximately 8–9 months before onsite review	[Date]
Key Dates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Period under review – Sampling frames and sampling periods—in-home services (IHS) and foster care (FC) cases – State Data Profile to be used for SWA and determination of conformity – Statewide assessment due date – Due date for Policy Requirements document submission – Site selection finalization – Site visits prior to onsite review – Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan due date – Call schedule—plan for ongoing communication 	Approximately 8–9 months before onsite review Policy Requirements document due approximately 3 months before scheduled review Sites should be finalized no later than 6 months before scheduled review	[Date]
State Team Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule for approximately 2–3 weeks before onsite review • State and JBS to discuss possible dates and location • Share final date/location with the CB Regional Office (RO) 	Approximately 8–9 months before scheduled review (or within 1–2 months after determining the date of review, as training locations can be difficult to secure)	[Date]
Technical Assistance Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select and schedule from topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online Monitoring System (OMS) overview/training – Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions training (online) – Systemic factors assessment – State Data Profiles, performance on the indicators, and data quality – Case Review Procedures and Sampling Plan and in-home services cases population – Role of JBS in planning, coordination, training, and onsite support 	Approximately 8–9 months before onsite review (may need to revisit again before review and after state team is identified)	[Date]

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
<p>Statewide Assessment Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who from the state will participate in developing the Statewide Assessment—helpful to have overlapping membership among the Statewide Assessment, onsite review, and Program Improvement Plan development teams to facilitate cross-review-phase experiences and information-sharing • Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involvement of Tribes, legal and judicial communities, youth and persons with lived experience in the child welfare system, and other system partners – Statewide Assessment instrument and related resources; go over expectations for data in systemic factors assessment – Joint planning activities – Process and timeframes (Children’s Bureau will send Statewide Assessment instrument to state with State Data Profile approximately 6 months before onsite review; final Statewide Assessment due back to Children’s Bureau within 4 months of date state received the Statewide Assessment instrument with the State Data Profile) – Plan for development, submission of drafts to Children’s Bureau – Additional call schedule to discuss Statewide Assessment, if needed • Note that stakeholder interviews cannot be determined and scheduled until final SWA is submitted 	<p>Approximately 8–9 months before scheduled review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Sampling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule MASC call • Discuss IHS and FC sampling frames with MASC • Note date state will submit sampling frames and date Children’s Bureau will send random sample per site to state 	<p>Begin MASC discussions 8–9 months before onsite review</p> <p>Children’s Bureau sends random sample per site to state no later than 60 days before onsite review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>Site Selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use information in CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals for discussion • Schedule Measurement and Sampling Committee (MASC) call • Send proposal with relevant data to MASC before call • Select Metro site 1A, 1B, site 2, and site 3; Children’s Bureau RO sends location info to JBS 	<p>Begin discussions 6–8 months before onsite review. Sites selected 6 months before onsite review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>State IT Contacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify state and local IT contacts and provide to JBS for follow-up 	<p>After sites have been finalized, no later than 6 months before onsite review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>
<p>State Data Profiles</p> <p>Children’s Bureau transmits to the state with the Statewide Assessment instrument</p>	<p>Approximately 6 months before onsite review</p>	<p>[Date]</p>

Appendix G2: Logistics and Planning Materials—Children’s Bureau-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
State Data Profile Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review state performance and data quality issues, as applicable Discuss areas for further data analysis in preparation for the SWA and Program Improvement Plan, including differences across subpopulations, including evidence of disproportionality and disparity Determine data-related TA needs 	Approximately 6 months before onsite review (and after State Data Profile is sent to state)	[Date]
Case Sample—Universe Send sampling universe for IHS and FC to MASC	No later than 4 months before onsite review	[Date]
Onsite Review Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reference (State) Team Pairings Chart [see Appendix G3] in identifying number of reviewers and additional state staff needed for team (including state leaders and Local Site Coordinators) Discuss plan for federal/state leaders to finalize federal/state reviewer pairs Determine date for finalizing state team members and discuss recommendation that reviewers reflect the diversity of the populations served by the agency and include system partners and youth and families with lived experience Discuss roles of Local/State Site Leaders, Local Site Coordinators, state QA team members (including their role in debriefings) Discuss conflicts of interest for state/federal participants Encourage involvement of state CQI staff Discuss utilizing staff who will be involved in the Program Improvement Plan measurement review process as reviewers and QA staff Complete and submit to JBS State Contact Information Form (after team is determined) 	Begin discussions 5–6 months before onsite review (preferably after sites are selected) Finalize State Review Team no later than 3 months before onsite review	[Date]
Onsite Review Logistics Planning To include JBS; may require ongoing calls) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location of state-level interviews Location of reviews at each site (ensure locations meet reviewer needs for case record review, interviews, telephone calls) Transportation to/from case interviews, if needed Transportation and hotel for review team Supplies needed Daily schedules (arrival and departure times), office hours Role of JBS staff on site Location for local debriefings Confirm that IT needs have been handled by IT contacts, including internet access, MiFi needs, cellular accessibility concerns 	3–4 months before onsite review	[Date]

Appendix G2: Logistics and Planning Materials—Children’s Bureau-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
Onsite Review Team—Federal Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFSR Leader and RO Leader identify federal/consultant team members (including Secondary Oversight) and state review consultants to ensure no conflicts of interest • Finalize federal team with consideration of the need for linguistic and cultural competence 	Finalize Federal Review Team no later than 3 months before onsite review	[Date]
Site Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tour of review space at each review site - Meeting with CFSR Leadership at each review site 	2–3 months before onsite review	[Date]
Policy Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State’s use of contracted case management (specifically discuss requirements for face-to-face contact between the child/family and the agency caseworker) - Permanency goals - Unique case practices such as use of safety resources (non-FC placement of children outside of their homes) - Item 1 relevant policies - Placement types - Medication monitoring policies/protocol - Well-child and dental exam policies - Case closure policy - Use of concurrent planning 	2–3 months before onsite review	[Date]
Case Elimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review case elimination protocol/criteria • Develop plan for case elimination, to include regular check-in calls 	Begin discussions 2–3 months before onsite review (preferably right before state anticipates receiving sample from CB)	[Date]
Final Statewide Assessment Submission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children’s Bureau will provide due date based on the start of the state’s case reviews. 	4 months after data profile transmitted to state (approximately 2 months before onsite review)	[Date]
Case Sample <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Bureau to send random sample per site to state 	No later than 60 days before onsite review	[Date]
Finalizing Case Sample for Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize IHS and FC case samples 	1–2 months before the review	[Date]
Case Review Schedule Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss steps in scheduling process (reviewing case to identify key interviews needed, scheduling interviews, scheduling case record review, call/mail reminders for interviewees a week before review) 	Begin discussion after case sample is finalized (1–2 months before onsite review) so the state is prepared to begin developing schedules	[Date]

Appendix G2: Logistics and Planning Materials—Children’s Bureau-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss ongoing case elimination that may occur during scheduling or during the review week (and back-up case preparation). Determine date for submitting final schedules (no later than 2 weeks before onsite review) 		
State Team Training Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm participants Plan/schedule debrief session for after training is complete 	1–2 months before onsite review (check in 1 month before scheduled training) Training occurs 2–4 weeks before onsite review Debrief occurs soon after training is complete	[Date]
Stakeholder Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children’s Bureau informs state of needed stakeholder interviews and items requiring interviews, and key questions that may be asked related to the SWA (in addition to basic functioning questions) Determine if interviews will occur only during the review week or if additional virtual interviews will occur the week prior Develop plan with state for submitting interview schedule to state CFSR team 	No later than 1 month before onsite review	[Date]
Review Week Management—Communication plans and quality assurance process) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss roles of state and site leaders in communication during review (OSRI rating issues, progress updates) Discuss case elimination process Discuss process to identify and address safety concerns by reviewers Discuss plan for reviewer emergencies Ensure team has shared relevant contact info (cell, email) Discuss QA process, role of federal QA staff, and Secondary Oversight process Discuss process and timing for resolving rating disagreements Discuss debriefing process 	No later than 1 month before onsite review	[Date]
Final Results Session—Planning Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timing, location Participants Agenda 	Begin discussion no later than 1 month before onsite review	[Date]
Case Review Schedules Finalize case review schedules	Schedules finalized no later than 2 weeks before onsite review	[Date]
Stakeholder Interviews Schedule Children’s Bureau to review and finalize schedule and participants	Schedule finalized no later than 1–2 weeks before onsite review, depending on when interviews will occur	[Date]

Appendix G2: Logistics and Planning Materials—Children’s Bureau-Led Review Planning Timeline

Task/Activity	Timeframe for discussion/completion	Due Date
Final Report	Sent to state approximately 30 days after onsite review	[Date]

**Appendix G3:
Logistics and Planning Materials—Team Pairings Charts**

**[State] Team Pairings Chart
Children's Bureau FY 20XX
Child and Family Services Reviews: CB-Led Review**

State Level Team Names

Role	Name
CFSR Unit Lead	
Regional Child Welfare Specialist	
Legal-Judicial Child Welfare Specialist	
State Review Team Leader	
SIG Note-Taking Specialist	
SIG Note-Taking Specialist	

Metro Site: [City] Team 1A

Role	Name	Agency
CB Site Lead		CB RO
CB Site Lead		CB CFSR
Local Site Coordinator		State
QA Staff–State		State
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
Secondary Oversight		Federal
JBS TA		CWRP
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal

Appendix G3: Logistics and Planning Materials—Team Pairings Charts

Role	Name	Agency
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal

Metro Site: [City] Team 1B

Role	Name	Agency
CB Site Lead		CB RO
CB Site Lead		CB CFSR
Local Site Coordinator		State
QA Staff–State		State
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
Secondary Oversight		Federal
JBS TA		CWRP
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal

Team Pairings Chart Site 1A: [City]

State Reviewer	CFSR Reviewer

Team Pairings Chart Site 1B: [City]

State Reviewer	CFSR Reviewer

Appendix G3: Logistics and Planning Materials—Team Pairings Charts

Site 2: [City]

Role	Name	Agency
CB Site Lead		CB RO
CB Site Lead		CB CFSR
Local Site Coordinator		State
QA Staff–State		State
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
Secondary Oversight		Federal
JBS TA		CWRP
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal

Team Pairings Chart Site 2: [City]

State Reviewer	CFSR Reviewer

Appendix G3: Logistics and Planning Materials—Team Pairings Charts

Site 3: [City]

Role	Name	Agency
CB Site Lead		CB RO
CB Site Lead		CB CFSR
Local Site Coordinator		State
QA Staff–State		State
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
QA Specialist–Federal		CWRP
Secondary Oversight		Federal
JBS TA		CWRP
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
State Reviewer		State
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal
CFSR Reviewer		CWRP or Federal

Team Pairings Chart Site 3: [City]

State Reviewer	CFSR Reviewer

Appendix G3: Logistics and Planning Materials—Team Pairings Charts

Alternates

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators and AFCARS Data Quality Checks

Table H-1. Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Risk Adjustment	Exclusions	Notes
Maltreatment in foster care	Of all children in foster care during a 12-month period, what was the rate of victimization, per 100,000 days of care?	Of children in care during a 12-month period, total number of days these children were in care as of the end of the 12-month period	Of children in care during a 12-month period, total number of substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment (by any perpetrator) during a foster care episode within the 12-month period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State • Age at entry (for children entering) or age on first day of the 12-month period (for children already in care) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete foster care episodes lasting < 8 days are not counted in the number of days in foster care, and maltreatment that occurs within those episodes are not counted in the number of substantiated or indicated reports • Maltreatment reports that occur within the first 7 days of removal are not counted in the number of substantiated or indicated reports • Records with a victimization incident date outside the foster care episode, even if the report date falls within the episode (used when incident date exists) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases are matched across AFCARS and NCANDS using AFCARS ID • Report date is used to determine if the victimization occurred in the applicable 12-month period regardless of disposition date. A record is included if the report date falls in the 12-month period, but the disposition date does not • Incident dates⁴ are used (when reported) to help determine whether the victimization occurred outside the dates of the child's foster care episode • Date of prior discharge in the second 6-month file is used to calculate length of stay when: (a) the date of discharge is not reported in first 6-month AFCARS file,

⁴ Victimization incident dates are not used to determine the occurrence or recurrence of child maltreatment for safety indicators.

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Risk Adjustment	Exclusions	Notes
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Records with a maltreatment report date outside the 12-month period Subsequent maltreatment reports that occur within 1 day of the initial maltreatment report Child foster care episodes where we cannot calculate the length of the episodes 	<p>(b) the date of prior discharge is reported in second 6-month file, <i>and</i> (c) the number of removals goes up by exactly one between the first and second 6-month file</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two years of NCANDS data are used to determine if a report of maltreatment occurred during the 12-month period as maltreatment reports are only included in the NCANDS Child File after the corresponding disposition is documented
Recurrence of maltreatment	Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during a 12-month period, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within 12 months of the initial victimization?	Number of children with at least one substantiated or indicated maltreatment report in a 12-month period	Number of children in the denominator that had another substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within 12 months of their initial report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Age at initial victimization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subsequent victimizations with a report date that occurs within 14 days of the initial report Subsequent reports in which the incident date matches the incident date in the initial report as they are treated as re-reports of same incident Unborn children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report date is used to determine if the initial victimization occurred during the 12-month period regardless of disposition date Use of incident dates is limited to determining whether maltreatment reports refer to same incident, in which case the duplicate record is excluded. The comparison of incident dates is a secondary check done only when incident dates are reported in the

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Risk Adjustment	Exclusions	Notes
						NCANDS file for each substantiated or indicated maltreatment report being compared
Permanency in 12 months for children entering care	Of all children who entered care in a 12-month period, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering care?	Number of children who entered care in a 12-month period	Number of children in the denominator who discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State • Age at entry • State's foster care entry rate⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in foster care < 8 days • Children who do not have a discharge reason • Children who re-enter foster care in the same reporting period due to AFCARS reporting structure not including discharge reason for first episode 	Trial home visit adjustment is applied ⁶
Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12–23 months	Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously between 12 and 23 months, what percent discharged to permanency within 12	Number of children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously between 12 and 23 months	Number of children in the denominator who discharged to permanency within 12 months of the 1st day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State • Age on first day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who do not have a discharge reason • Children who re-enter foster care in the same reporting period due to AFCARS reporting structure not including discharge reason for first episode 	

⁵ State's foster care entry rate is the number of children who entered care (the denominator for the indicator taking into account any exclusions) in a 12-month period divided by the State's Census child population estimates as of July 1st of each year.

⁶ Trial home visit adjustment: If a child discharges from foster care to reunification with parents or other caregivers after a placement setting of a trial home visit during any of the five data periods used for the indicator calculation, any time in that trial home visit setting that exceeds 30 days is discounted from the length of stay in foster care.

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Risk Adjustment	Exclusions	Notes
	months of the first day?					
Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more	Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously for 24 months or more, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?	Number of children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously for 24 months or more	Number of children in the denominator who discharged to permanency within 12 months of the 1st day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State • Age on first day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who do not have a discharge reason • Children who re-enter foster care in the same reporting period due to AFCARS reporting structure not including discharge reason for first episode 	
Re-entry to foster care in 12 months	Of all children who exit foster care in a 12-month period to reunification, live with relative, or guardianship, what percent re-entered care within 12 months of their discharge?	Number of children in a 12-month period who discharged to reunification, live with relative, or guardianship	Number of children in the denominator who re-entered foster care within 12 months of their discharge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State • Age at exit • State's foster care entry rate⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in care whose initial foster care entry episode lasted < 8 days • Children whose discharge from first episode did not have a discharge reason • Children whose date of latest removal for the re-entry episode is reported as being before the date of discharge for the prior episode 	If a child has multiple reentries within 12 months of their discharge, only the first re-entry is selected

⁷ State's foster care entry rate is the number of children who enter foster care (the denominator for the indicator taking into account any exclusions) in a 12-month period divided by the State's Census child population estimates as of July 1st of each year.

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Risk Adjustment	Exclusions	Notes
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children who re-entered foster care in the same reporting period due to AFCARS reporting structure not including discharge reason 	
Placement stability	Of all children who entered care in a 12-month period, what was the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days of foster care?	Of all children who entered care in a 12-month period, number of days ⁸ these children were in care as of the end of the 12-month period	Of all children who entered care during the 12-month period, number of placement moves during the 12-month period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Age at entry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in foster care < 8 days The initial removal from home (and into foster care) is not counted as a placement move Days in foster care for which the AFCARS file does not have placement information⁹ 	When a child experiences multiple episodes in the same year and: (a) the date of discharge is missing in the first 6-month AFCARS file and (b) the date of prior discharge in the second 6-month file is during the first 6-month file, then the date of prior discharge is used to calculate length of stay

Data Quality Checks: General Data Notes

- With few exceptions, individual records flagged by a data quality check are excluded from relevant indicator calculations; exceptions are included in the Notes column.
- Data quality checks are only calculated on records with all the relevant values. In situations in which one of the relevant values is missing, the DQ check is not calculated. The exception to this is DQ checks designed to explicitly look for missing values.
- Data quality checks are performed on records for the specified AFCARS submission period.

⁸ Days in care are counted in full day increments; thus children who enter foster care on one day and exit the next day are counted as being in foster care for 1 day.

⁹ Since placement information is required to determine placement moves, days in foster care in which placement information cannot be determined are excluded from the count of total days in foster care.

Table H-2. AFCARS Data Quality Checks

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Limits	Notes
AFCARS IDs don't match from one period to next	Percent of records that do not match for a given record number in the next 6-month period	Number of children reported in first 6-month file	Number of children that do not match in the next 6-month file	> 40%	Individual records with this condition are not excluded from indicator calculations unless the overall percentage of non-matches for a state exceeds the DQ limit
Date of birth after date of entry	Percent of records where the date of birth is after the date of latest removal	Number of children reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where date of birth is after the date of latest removal	> 5%	
Date of birth after date of exit	Percent of records where the date of birth is after the date of discharge from most recent foster care episode	Number of children with a discharge reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where date of birth is after the date of discharge from most recent foster care episode	> 5%	
Dropped records	Record is missing a date of discharge, suggesting the child is still in care, but a record for this same child in the next 6-month period does not exist	Number of children reported in first 6-month file	Number of children reported without discharge dates in first 6-month file that do not appear in the subsequent 6-month file	> 10%	Records that fail this DQ check are excluded from indicator calculations unless the failure only occurs in the last 6-month period of the data periods ¹⁰ used in indicator calculations
Enters and exits foster care the same day	Percent of records where date of latest removal from home is the same day as the date of discharge from most recent foster care episode	Number of children with a discharge reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where date of latest removal from home is the same day as the date of discharge from most recent foster care episode	> 5%	

¹⁰ See State data profile for details on which data periods are used in performance calculations for each indicator.

Appendix H: Statewide Data Indicators

Title	Description	Denominator	Numerator	Limits	Notes
Exit date is prior to removal date	Percent of records where date of discharge from most recent foster care episode is before the date of latest removal from home	Number of children with a discharge reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where date of discharge from most recent foster care episode is before the date of latest removal from home	> 5%	
Missing date of birth	Percent of records with a missing date of birth	Number of children reported in a 6-month file	Number of children missing date of birth ¹¹	> 5%	
Missing date of latest removal	Percent of records with a missing date of latest removal	Number of children reported in a 6-month file	Number of children missing date of latest removal	> 5%	
Missing discharge reason (exit date exists)	Percent of records where date of discharge from most recent foster care episode exists but the reason for discharge is missing	Number of children with a discharge reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where date of discharge exists but discharge reason is missing	> 10%	
Missing number of placement settings	Percent of records with a missing number of placement settings	Number of children reported in a 6-month file	Number of children missing number of placement settings	> 5%	
Percentage of children on first removal episode ¹²	Percent of children where the total number of removals from home to date equals one	Number of children reported in a 6-month file	Number of records where total number of removals from home to date = 1	> 95%	Individual records with this condition are not excluded from indicator calculations unless the overall percentage of children on their first removal for a given state exceeds the DQ limit

¹¹ Date of birth is used to generate age in months for risk adjustment when calculating a state's Risk-Standardized Performance.

¹² This data quality check helps to control for a state's ability to link historical experiences of children using the same AFCARS ID.