# Assessing Systemic Factor Functioning

## Using Data and Evidence

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children & Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

# Contents

# Introduction

After Round 3 of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), states and the Children's Bureau both recognized that states would benefit from having resources specifically developed to help states to describe systemic factor functioning.[1] As a result, and to support states as they transition to CFSR Round 4, the Children's Bureau developed seven briefs, one for each systemic factor. Those briefs have since been compiled together into this resource. This compilation of briefs builds upon information in the *Systemic Factors—Results From the CFSRs: 2015–2018*, which highlighted the importance of collecting and using quality data and information so that child welfare agencies and their partners are able to assess and routinely monitor statewide functioning of systemic factors.[2]

This resource is not prescriptive and does not provide instructions on how to demonstrate conformity with the seven systemic factors within statewide assessments. Rather, this compilation of briefs suggests sources of relevant information and data that child welfare agencies and their partners can investigate to explore the systemic factor federal requirement in their efforts to demonstrate

the statewide functioning of each systemic factor. It also provides states with questions about areas related to a systemic factor that may be worth further consideration but extend beyond what is required under the CFSR regulation. This resource also provides questions to ensure that states consider how to include the voices of parents, children, and youth from all communities.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the CFSRs and information about data collection. Chapters 2 through 8 cover the steps for assessing systemic factor functioning. Chapter 9 includes information and resources that states can review.

This compilation was designed for child welfare agencies. Other child welfare system stakeholders and partners may find it useful as they work with the agency to prepare the statewide assessment; provide, collect, review, and analyze data and information; and help identify contributing factors, underlying causes of performance challenges, and possible solutions.

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1   States can review the *CFSR Procedures Manual* and statewide assessment instructions for a detailed explanation of systemic factors.
2   https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-3-resources/cfsr-round-3-findings

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# Chapter 1: Overview of the CFSRs

## Background

One of the ways in which the Children's Bureau (CB) helps states achieve positive outcomes for children and families is by monitoring state child welfare services through the CFSRs. The CFSR process[3] is designed to meet the statutory requirement to provide federal oversight of states' compliance with title IV-B and IV-E plan requirements, strengthen state child welfare programs, and improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families served. The CFSR process enables the CB to:

1. Monitor conformity with federal child welfare requirements

2. Determine what is happening to children and families receiving child welfare services

3. Assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being

The CFSR is a two-phase process. The first phase is a statewide assessment conducted by staff of the state child welfare agency in partnership with stakeholders with whom the agency is required to consult in the development of the state's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) (45 CFR § 1355.33). In collaboration with the CB, the state

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3  For more information about the CFSRs, see the Child and Family Services Reviews at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews

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agency selects internal and external stakeholders who represent both the demographics of the state and the range of populations the system serves, including family and youth served by the state's welfare system and members of the judicial and legal communities. The second phase of the review process is an onsite review. The onsite review involves case record reviews which include case-related interviews for the purpose of evaluating system performance, case outcomes, and, as necessary, stakeholder interviews to further inform the assessment of systemic factors.

Information from both the statewide assessment and the onsite review is used to determine whether the state is in substantial conformity with seven outcomes and seven systemic factors. States determined not to be in substantial conformity with one or more of the outcomes and systemic factors are required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address all areas of nonconformity.

In their statewide assessments, states are required to complete an assessment of the extent to which their child welfare systemic factors function effectively to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families served by the state's child welfare agency. States should ensure they are using best practices, including engaging stakeholders (e.g., people with lived experience), when collecting their data to adequately assess each systemic factor item.[4] In conducting this assessment, a state:

- Uses both quantitative and qualitative evidence (e.g., state administrative data, information management system reports, administrative data from the courts and agency partners and stakeholders, case record reviews, interviews with case participants and key stakeholders) to assess its performance on the outcomes and systemic factors

- Analyzes and identifies strengths and challenges in performance on CFSR statewide data indicators relative to national performance

- Provides supporting evidence of the state's assessment of its child welfare system, program, practice strengths, opportunities for improvement, and results of data-driven problem exploration

- Provides relevant and quality evidence to determine substantial conformity with CFSR systemic factors

## Measuring and Demonstrating Systemic Factor Functioning in the Statewide Assessment

The CB considers a systemic factor to be "functioning" if it is operating consistently and on an ongoing basis across the state for all relevant populations. The mere description of a law, procedure, or process is not sufficient to demonstrate the level of functioning.

A state should consider how relevant a piece of data or information is to show a systemic factor's functioning. For example, states could consult with people with lived experience to examine the relevancy of data/information. Particularly for systemic factors that have multiple items, the state should consider whether multiple types and sources of data and information are necessary to characterize functioning for the systemic factor. States should follow best practices in measurement when they undertake the data collection and analysis to address each item. Best practices necessitate the consideration of how qualitative data collection is designed and structured to support a claim about statewide functioning.

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4    Children's Bureau. (2022). *Child and Family Services Reviews: Guiding principles, framework, and tools for the statewide assessment process.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-instruments-tools-and-guides

The methods used to generate measurement must be rigorous to be reliable. The measures should be designed to match the questions asked, which could be about specific performance, the scope of performance, and/or the context in which performance is evaluated. Particular attention should be paid to the populations selected for measurement to ensure that they are representative and appropriate for the question. Depending on those questions, measurement methods could include:

- Cross-sectional surveys or case reviews completed at one point in time.

    – For example, cross-sectional surveys could be used to determine whether parents served during a particular period of time felt they were involved in the development of their case plans.

- Retrospective surveys or case reviews that describe changes over time but are completed only once.

    – For example, states could retrospectively examine the administrative data to ascertain the number of children who entered foster care in a fiscal year and/or who were in care at a point in time, and who had been in care for at least 60 days, to ascertain whether they had a written case plan.

- Longitudinal surveys or case reviews that involve taking multiple observations over an extended period of time and describe how people in a specific group or circumstances in specific cases changed over time.

    – For example, states could review the administrative data for the same group of children (e.g., children who entered foster care during a specified period and met the required parameters) to ascertain how many children had a permanency hearing no later than 12 months from the date they entered foster care and, of those, how many had a permanency hearing no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

- Focus groups or interviews where spoken questions are posed to respondents. To ensure that the information collected reflects statewide performance, focus group members should be representative of the state's geographical locations and populations served.[5]

    – For example, states could conduct focus groups or interviews with veteran (i.e., experienced) caseworkers to better understand whether ongoing training is provided for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP. To ensure representativeness the state would include a sample of caseworkers from across the state who had been on the job for a specified period of time and who had participated in ongoing training, as opposed to including caseworkers from just one or two locations.

- Supplemental data reviews:

    – Case and court record reviews: Identify a specific subset or group of cases and look through case documentation for supplementary details that inform an understanding of how and why decisions were made.

    – Reviews and analysis of data from partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, service providers): Review administrative data or activity logs from individuals, institutions, and organizations separate from state agencies.

    – Content reviews of communications (e.g., outreach, email responses from individuals served): Gather and review materials to inform an understanding of activities and decision-making.

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5   For additional support with focus group facilitation, see the following resource:
https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/institute/images/Tip-Sheet---Focus-Groups-An-Effective-Strategy-for-Gathering-Input-from-....pdf

Evidence is information that is used to support an observation, claim, hypothesis, or decision. Evidence may be qualitative or quantitative and can be found in or derived from a number of sources.[6] The CB encourages states to use quantifiable data as evidence, when possible and appropriate, to show how well each systemic factor functions statewide. However, some of the relevant information cannot easily be counted. Information that is more qualitative in nature—such as narratives, explanations, or themes that emerge from interviews and focus groups—may also be useful to assess systemic factor functioning. The CB does not require that systemic factor data or information be in any particular form, although it is important that states consider and enhance the rigor of their information and data collection and analysis when presenting evidence of functioning.

> **States should use recent data (i.e., within the last 3 years) when providing data and evidence for items. When answering the question asked, states should be sure to specify the measurement period and to identify the population selected. For example, if using an entry cohort, specify the period of entry (e.g., fiscal year, calendar year, 6-month period) and specify the period of time during which activity was measured (e.g., 60 days following entry).**

> **States should involve people with lived experience in the collection and analysis of data and evidence.**

**States should also consider how the context and quality of the data inform an assessment of systemic factor functioning. States should provide the following information or analysis along with the data:**



- The data *SOURCE*
- The *METHODOLOGY* for calculating or analyzing the data
- The *SCOPE* of the data (e.g., geographic, population)
- The *TIME PERIOD* applicable to the data
- The *COMPLETENESS, ACCURACY,* and *RELIABILITY* of the data
- Other known *LIMITATIONS* of the data

It is important for measurement to apply to groups of people and timeframes aligning with the systemic factor and item definitions. Some important details also require planning so that the measurement is accurate and complete; the response rate is a way of expressing the completeness of a measure that relies

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6   Source: https://fcda.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014-07-Principles-Language-and-Shared-Meaning_Toward-a-Common-Understanding-of-CQI-in-Child-Welfare.pdf

on participants to provide data (such as surveys). Some important questions to ask are:

1. What group(s) of people (or situations) should the measure cover to fully demonstrate systemic factor functioning as defined in the statewide assessment? Is the state's current measurement approach on target in this way? (Population)

2. Will the planned measurement strategy provide enough data gathered from the appropriate respondents?

   – Does the measurement gather data for all the groups, timeframes, and circumstances covered by the item definitions or implied by the "Getting Curious" question? Ensuring representativeness of the sample is important to a complete assessment.

   – Has the state balanced the rigor, scope, and representation needs of the data with efficiencies for data collection? (Sampling Method)

3. Would it be better to deliberately collect data from a smaller number of people so that the information gathered will be more on target and broaden our understanding more fully? (Purposive Sampling)

4. Or should we cast a wider net to meet a strong need to cover a wide number of people, timeframes, and situations? (Random Sample, including a large number of cases)

   – How can the state meet response rate targets? Are there minimum response rate limits to set? Should we analyze response rates for specific groups in the sampling frame to make sure they are representative? (Response Rate)

## Systemic Factor Chapters Overview

Each chapter begins with an overview of the systemic factor. Then, for each item that comprises the systemic factor, the guidance is organized into a series of sections:

In the "Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements" section, the chapter provides concrete suggestions for how states can generate and present evidence to robustly demonstrate performance on each item with rigor and representativeness. The questions were created to seek information based on how the systemic factors are described in federal regulations. Further, the answers to these questions will illustrate the extent to which a state's systemic factor is functioning.

Quantitative administrative data tell us about scope with an identified population, but then additional data—such as qualitative data—are needed to provide context (e.g., effectiveness, quality) to understand what is occurring in practice.

Quantitative administrative data should be representative, and therefore characterize performance on a process or outcome across the state, but qualitative inquiry is often needed to help us understand the functioning (effectiveness) of the phenomenon. When used together, quantitative and qualitative data provide a more comprehensive assessment of performance and quality, allowing states to answer questions about the "what" and the "how" of systemic factor functioning. Quantitative data results can be disaggregated to show variation in the experiences of sub-populations captured in the representative data.

When quantitative and qualitative data are used together, states can provide a more complete and accurate assessment of functioning.

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

**1**
**OVERVIEW OF THE ITEM**
*(including an item description and review of literature)*

**2**
**QUESTIONS**
for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

**3**
**GETTING CURIOUS:**
Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

In the "Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration" section (hereafter "Getting Curious"), questions are provided to help states consider what else they may want to know about areas related to a systemic factor item that may be worth further consideration but extend beyond what is required under the CFSR regulation. Questions on topics will be raised in the "Getting Curious" section, which can be thought of as what to consider—because learning something about one part of the system might yield benefits in another area. When reading "Getting Curious," the CB encourages states to use this as an opportunity to think about what else they may be able to learn as they collect information that responds to a particular systemic factor. For example, states are encouraged to consider data and evidence from people with lived experience when answering "Getting Curious" questions. While states are not expected to address these questions in their statewide assessments, the "Getting Curious" section can also help to inform Program Improvement Plan (PIP), CFSP, and Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) development.

Understanding the extent to which a state is meeting the federal requirements is not always sufficient to fully understand the strengths, challenges, and conditions that exist in child welfare systems that contribute to those strengths and challenges. In the "Getting Curious" section, questions are provided to encourage states to consider what else they may be able to learn about areas related to a systemic factor item but extend beyond what is required under the CFSR regulation. These questions prompt states to explore in more depth the quality of item functioning because learning something about one part of the system may result in benefits in other areas. States may also find that they have created resources that can easily be deployed to ask and answer other questions that may go beyond the scope of the CFSRs, but relate to system operations in valuable and meaningful ways.

# Chapter 2: Statewide Information System

## Item 19: Statewide Information System

A flexible and functional statewide information system that houses administrative data is foundational to a modern child welfare system. Statewide information systems support the effective collection and maintenance of important information on children served by state agencies (i.e., the child welfare status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement). The system should house valid, accurate data and be easy to use. It should also be a reliable tool to support the agency's efforts to deliver appropriate services, monitor safety, and conduct continuous quality improvement (CQI) activities that support improved outcomes for children and families. States can monitor and validate their data accuracy in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Systematic checks and balances that do not let individuals proceed until certain items are entered

- Mechanisms in place to monitor data entry, including management reports

- Oversight processes to ensure the accuracy of data entered into the system

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the statewide information system functioning statewide to ensure that, at a minimum, the state can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care?*

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The Statewide Information System systemic factor comprises one item. Therefore, substantial conformity requires that Item 19 be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 1**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, 27 states were in substantial conformity with the Statewide Information System systemic factor.

*Figure 1: Statewide Information System—Item and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Statewide Information System** Item 19: Statewide Information System | Substantial conformity requires that Item 19 be rated as a Strength. |

Child welfare administrative data systems collect, store, and track information about children and families receiving services in the child welfare system. Analysts within the child welfare agency can extract data from these systems to conduct analyses that allow them to identify patterns and trends, report on processes and outcomes, target areas for improvement, monitor implementation of programs and practices, and measure change over time. These activities should be part of an agency's CQI efforts. Beyond CQI, administrative data can also be used to yield knowledge that is actionable in practice. Administrative child welfare data can provide a rich source of information that can help inform program development, policy decisions, and program funding.

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by briefly describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state, including the state's process for updating children's information in the statewide information system (e.g., use of date stamps, ticklers, etc.) and identifying who is responsible

for data entry, and the process for making significant changes to the system. States can also describe whether their statewide information system design is a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), non-SACWIS, or a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), and whether the state is under a federal improvement plan or is implementing a new system.[7] For example, a state can provide information about its statewide information system that summarizes the technology, and provides a broad overview of its capacity to collect and analyze administrative data. The state can then consider the following questions and data sources to identify what data and evidence they can provide to answer the questions posed in the statewide assessment template. Note that the following is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

When describing the statewide functioning of the statewide information system, consider whether the system can readily identify, for all children in foster care or who had been in foster care within the immediately preceding 12-month period, the:

- Status (whether the child is in foster care or no longer in foster care);

- Demographic characteristics (date of birth, sex, race, ethnicity, disability, medically diagnosed condition requiring special care);

- Placement location (child's physical location); and

- Goals for placement (i.e., permanency goal[s] reunification, adoption, guardianship, another planned permanent living arrangement, or not yet established).

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7   Child welfare practice and technology has changed considerably since 1993 when the federal government published the existing regulations for states developing and maintaining a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The federal government has developed new guidelines describing Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) requirements. The guidelines will allow states to transition their current systems or develop new systems to become compliant. For more information on the federal guidance for child welfare IT systems, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/state-tribal-info-systems/federal-guidance. For more information on the CCWIS Design Requirements and Self-Assessment Tool, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/ccwis-design-requirements-self-assessment

When considering quantitative data and evidence to provide for these questions, frequency counts that display the extent to which specific elements contain both valid and invalid (including missing) data should be provided. As an example, frequency counts for the number of valid location of the child (addresses) and the number of invalid or missing locations (addresses) should be provided.

## Questions:

1. For all children in foster care during a specific period and all the children who had been in foster care within the immediately preceding 12-month period, does the statewide information system record valid required information? Valid is defined as non-missing and accurate data.

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data from statewide information system; data quality plan; error reports from Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) submissions

   *Parameters:* All children covered in the state's title IV-E plan who are currently in foster care or had been within the immediately preceding 12-month period

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

2. If data are found to be inaccurate or missing, what explains the inaccurate or missing data?

   *Data source(s):* Interviews, surveys, or focus groups with agency staff responsible for data entry and IT quality assurance (QA) staff

   *Parameters:* All children covered in the state's title IV-E plan who are currently in foster care or had been within the immediately preceding 12-month period, for whom the status information was missing or inaccurate

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

3. What is the state's process for ensuring that the data are accurate and entered into the statewide information system in a timely manner? How does that process affect the accuracy and timeliness of the data?

   *Data source(s):* Results or findings from ongoing QA activities; findings from CCWIS data quality plan or AFCARS improvement plan, targeted case review to ensure the status matches what is in the database; data management reports on timeliness of data entry

   *Parameters:* All children covered in the state's title IV-E plan who are currently in foster care or had been within the immediately preceding 12-month period, for whom the status information was not missing or invalid

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

4. For all children who were in foster care during a specific period and who have an exit recorded, is there a valid exit date?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data from statewide information system; data quality plan; error reports from AFCARS submissions

   *Parameters:* All children who entered and exited foster care during a specific period

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

The state's efforts to assess validity could be part of their QA plan and/or could be accomplished through regular targeted case review specifically designed for data quality purposes.

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other areas they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements to provide context to systemic factor functioning and to inform strategies for improvement. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

*Questions:*

1. How do the caseloads of frontline staff affect timely and accurate data entry into the statewide information system?

2. How do staff vacancies affect timely and accurate data entry into the statewide information system?

3. How does staff turnover affect timely and accurate data entry into the statewide information system?

4. If the state experiences challenges with timely and accurate data entry into the statewide information system, what innovative solutions are being considered?

5. How does the state train and update caseworkers (or the staff responsible for data entry) on accurate, complete, and timely data entry?

6. How does system accessibility (e.g., the system is only accessible Monday through Friday during work hours; whether the system is web based or can only be accessed by users in the office) affect timely data entry into the statewide information system? What is the state's process for communicating system accessibility (e.g., when the system is available) to caseworkers?

7. Are there functional data exchanges and with whom?

    A. If the state hires contracted providers for case management, can they access the system? If not, who is responsible for entering information on status, demographics, location, and goals?

    B. Are their individual systems able to "interface" with the state's system?

    C. What is the state's process for exchanging data with the courts?

8. What is the working relationship between the IT office, the program office, and the CQI/QA office?

    A. If the state is working to upgrade its system, are all offices involved in the process?

    B. If the program office is part of the process, does this include any contracted providers?

The CFSR does not require states to talk about a CCWIS that is in development. Yet, if states are deliberately building a new information system and thus collecting data and information about the child welfare system, it is important that they work with their programming people during that development process. States could refer to the CCWIS Design Requirements and Self-Assessment Tool, which includes a description of the "conformance indicators" and a "scoring methodology" used to assess CCWIS design. For more information, see https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/ccwis-design-requirements-self-assessment

# Chapter 3: Case Review System

The Case Review System is a joint effort between child welfare agencies and legal and judicial communities. If functioning optimally, it provides individualized case planning for children and families, and timely, high-quality administrative reviews, court reviews, and hearings. Child welfare agencies and legal and judicial communities collaborate to promote high-quality practice that allows for thoughtful consideration of each family's strengths, service needs, and supports that promote positive and timely outcomes for children and their families. Authentic partnership with parents, children and youth, foster and adoptive parents, and relative caregivers, which includes hearing their voices, is critical to this factor's functioning.

The Case Review System comprises five items. Substantial conformity requires that four of the five items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength (see Figure 2). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, two states were in substantial conformity with the Case Review System systemic factor. Most states received a Strength rating for Items 21 and 22. However, Items 20, 23, and 24 were challenging for states in Round 3.[8]

*Figure 2: Case Review System—Items and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Case Review System**<br>Item 20: Written Case Plan<br>Item 21: Periodic Reviews<br>Item 22: Permanency Hearings<br>Item 23: Termination of Parental Rights<br>Item 24: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers | Substantial conformity requires that four of the five items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength. |

8   For more information, see Systemic Factors—Results From the CFSRs: 2015–2018. (2020). https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_systemic_factors_report_2020.pdf

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Good collaboration between child welfare agencies and legal and judicial communities can position states to achieve positive outcomes for children and families involved with the child welfare system. In preparing for their statewide assessments, states can engage legal and judicial communities through:

- Notifying the legal and judicial communities of the CFSR timeline, including when the statewide assessment will take place

- Developing and implementing plans for engaging representatives of the legal and judicial communities, and reporting on those during the CFSR planning conference calls

- Including representatives from the legal and judicial communities (e.g., judges, attorneys, Court Improvement Programs [CIPs], and court personnel) on the Statewide Assessment Team

- Conducting surveys, focus groups, and informational meetings with, or in conjunction with, representatives from the legal and judicial communities

- Requesting legal and judicial assistance in identifying practice issues affecting safety, permanency, and well-being

- Developing agency-court data teams to compare state agency and court data regarding procedures for ensuring children's safety and permanency. For example, states can create teams of child welfare agency and court personnel to explore patterns in the data regarding the number of pending TPR petitions

- Requesting assistance from representatives of the legal and judicial communities in preparing the narrative portions of the statewide assessment relative to the work of the court

- Asking the members of the legal and judicial communities to review and comment on statewide assessment drafts

Sources: Children's Bureau in collaboration with the Court Improvement Program and the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for Courts (2018). *Data Sharing: Courts and Child Welfare.* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/data_sharing_toolkit.pdf
CFSR Procedures Manual (2016). https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/round3_procedures_manual.pdf

A well-functioning Case Review System indicates that the structures are in place to support achieving positive permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families and allows agencies, lawyers, and judges to ensure that:

- Reasonable efforts are made to prevent children's entry and re-entry into foster care

- Reasonable efforts are made to achieve permanency in a timely manner

- The needs of children and families are met through thoughtful case planning and service provision that incorporates the voices of families and caregivers

- Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timeframes for periodic reviews, permanency hearings, and timely filing of termination of parental rights (TPR) petitions are followed, and exceptions to filing TPR petitions are fully explored and documented

- Frequent and high-quality hearings are held that protect the rights of parents and promote the best interests of children and youth

# Item 20: Written Case Plan

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that each child has a written case plan that is developed jointly with the child's parent(s) and includes the required provisions?*

All states are required to have a written case plan for children who are placed in foster care. Case plans must be developed within a reasonable period as established by the state, but in no event later than 60 days from the child's removal from the home.[9] Involving parents in case planning can increase engagement by recognizing them as key decision-makers regarding services to address their strengths and needs. When parents are involved in case planning, it increases the chances that they will participate in services and complete their case plans.[10] Research suggests that participation in case plans is positively associated with children's spending less time in foster care.[11]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. For example, states can provide general information about their case planning process, e.g., whether the state uses a family group decision-making process.[12] The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate statewide functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

*Questions:*

1.  Did case plans include the required elements,[13] and how do you know?

    *Data source(s):* Narrative of state procedures; case plan templates in the SACWIS/CCWIS or statewide information systems; Team Decision Making or shared planning meeting report; reports from the state's statewide information system showing required elements; example case plans that include the required provisions as documented in the title IV-E plan preprint[14]

    *Parameters:* Children entering care or in care at a point in time and are covered by the state's title IV-E plan who have been in care for at least 60 days

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative and Quantitative

    Begin by defining a sample (e.g., case plans for children entering care in a specified period who had been in care for at least 60 days, or case plans for children who were in care at the start of a specified period who had been in care for at least 60 days) and use one or more of the recommended data sources to answer question 1.

2.  Among children in foster care in a specific period who have been in care for at least 60 days, how many had a written case plan?

    *Data source(s):* Administrative data

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9   See 45 CFR § 1356.21.

10  Bossard, N., Braxton, A., & Conway, D. (2014). Meaningful family engagement. In G. Mallon & P. Hess (Eds.), *Child welfare for the 21st century: A handbook of practices, policies, and programs* (pp. 70–85). New York: Columbia University Press.

11  Coakley, T. M. (2013). The influence of father involvement on child welfare permanency outcomes: A secondary data analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *35*(1), 174–182.

12  https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/famcentered/decisions/

13  For more information on required case plan elements, see https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/caseplanning/.

14  For more information on the Title IV-E plan template, see Social Security Act 471 (16) and 45 CFR 1356.21(g).

*Parameters:* Children covered by the state's title IV-E plan who are in care during a specific period and who have been in care for at least 60 days and had a written case plan

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

– *Numerator*: Number of children from the denominator who have been in care for at least 60 days and who had a written case plan

– *Denominator:* Number of children entering care during a specified period, or who were in care at a given point in time and who had been in care for at least 60 days

3. Were parents authentically involved in the development of case plans? If so, how?

*Data source(s):* Best available evidence: surveys, interviews, or focus groups with parents; case review data (e.g., CFSR Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI) Item 13); alternative sources of evidence: gathering information from parents, caseworkers and/or parents' attorneys

*Parameters:* Children covered by the state's title IV-E plan with parents whose children entered care within the year and had been in care for at least 60 days

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative and Qualitative

Begin by defining a sample (e.g., cases involving children who entered care in a specified period and were in care for at least 60 days, or cases involving children who were in care at the start of a specified period who had been in care for at least 60 days) and then answer question 3 using one or more of the recommended data sources. Then, select a subset of cases from the sample and devise interview or focus group questions to provide qualitative information.

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

*Questions:*

1. Does practice comply with the elements in the case plan template? If so, how? If not, what are the challenges with compliance?

2. What process does the state have in place to examine case plans to know whether they are of high quality (e.g., permanency goals are appropriate and services match needs)?

3. Who is responsible for ensuring that written case plans are of high quality, and how is this done?

4. What evidence does the state have that youth ages 14 and older were consulted in the development of their case plans?

   – How are youth prepared to participate in case planning?

   – To what extent were youth involved in the development of their case plans (e.g., were youth allowed to make suggestions)?

   – What evidence does the state have that youth were satisfied with their level of involvement?

5. How might this item be related to training (e.g., do caseworkers receive effective training to help them engage parents in case planning)?

Providing caseworkers with training and technology can improve the quality and timeliness of case plans and case documentation. Case plans that are individualized and completed on time can help address child and family safety, permanency, and well-being.

Source: Reilly, S. H., McKelvey-Walsh, N., Freundlich, M., & Brenner, E. (2011). Training and Technology: Improving the Quality and Timeliness of Service Plans and Case Documentation, *Administration in Social Work, 35*: 2, 207–222.

6. What process does the state have in place to examine case plans to know whether they are of high quality (e.g., permanency goals are appropriate and services match needs)? For example, an indicator of limited workforce capacity could include backlogs of overdue case plans or children with missing case plans. Another indicator of limited workforce capacity could include asking children, youth, and parents about delays in case planning. How can supervisors and caseworkers more efficiently manage workloads by tracking/monitoring overdue and upcoming tasks (including case plans), using web-based reporting tools? How can states support supervisors and caseworkers to meet expectations for timely case planning?

7. Are high-quality written case plans that include all of the required elements positively associated with permanency indicators (e.g., time to permanency; time spent in foster care)?

8. What is the state's process for authentically engaging children, youth, and parents in case planning? For example, how often are case plans reviewed with families?

9. To what extent is there variation in the participation of parents in case planning (e.g., lower or higher participation for fathers, mothers, parents whose primary language is not English)?

## Item 21: Periodic Reviews

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that a periodic review for each child occurs no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review?*

Periodic reviews should be conducted at least every 6 months. Periodic reviews help to evaluate whether parents are making progress with the case plan and progress toward permanency, as well as the safety and appropriateness of the placement.[15] These reviews ensure that the states are doing what they can to provide services to parents but also places the responsibility on the state to show why a child cannot safely return home.[16] Reviewing results of multiple periodic reviews helps child welfare staff identify promising practices and areas in need of improvement,[17] which is important for improving child welfare outcomes.

### Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state, e.g., are periodic reviews conducted by administrative bodies or the courts, and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and

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15  Social Security Act (SSA) § 475(5).

16  Huntington, C. (2014). The Child-Welfare System and the Limits of Determinacy. *Law And Contemporary Problems*, *77*, 29.

17  Michael, A., & Carnochan, S. (2020). Using Qualitative Data Mining for Practice Research in Child Welfare. In A. Michael & S. Carnochan, Practice Research in the Human Services (pp. 214–232). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197518335.003.0010

evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

*Questions:*

1.  Of the children who entered care or were in care during a specified period who were supposed to have a periodic review every 6 months, how many had at least one?

    *Data source(s):* Agency administrative data (e.g., AFCARS); court data; administrative review body data (e.g., foster care review boards)

    *Parameters:* Children covered in the state's title IV-E plan who were in care for at least 6 months

    *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

    –   *Numerator:* Number of children from the denominator who had at least one periodic review

    –   *Denominator:* Number of children who entered care during a specified period and who should have had a periodic review; children in care on a specific date who had been in care for at least 6 months and should have had a periodic review

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1.  What evidence does the state have (e.g., information from children, youth, and families) that the periodic review covers all the items outlined in § 475(5)(B) of the Social Security Act?[18] Do periodic reviews examine:

–   The ongoing safety of the child;

–   The continuing necessity for out-of-home placement;

–   The appropriateness of the out-of-home placement;

–   The extent of the agency's and parents' compliance with the case plan;

–   The extent of progress that has been made toward alleviating or mitigating the reasons the child was placed in foster care;

–   The likely date by which the child may be returned home or placed for adoption;

–   The steps the agency is taking to ensure the child's foster family home or child care institution is following the reasonable and prudent parent standard; and

–   Whether the child has regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities (including consulting with the child in an age-appropriate manner about the opportunities of the child to participate in the activities)?

2.  What is the state's process for preparing for and holding periodic reviews? What transpires in the reviews?

–   What are the state's policies/statutes around having children/youth in court for periodic reviews?

–   How are children, youth, and parents prepared and supported to participate? For example, how does the state prepare and assist those whose primary language is not English to participate in periodic reviews? Are children/youth attending periodic reviews? If not, why not? Is it related to distance of placement to the location of the review? If children/youth attend periodic reviews, are they asked for input? How could the periodic review process be more youth and family friendly?

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18  For more information, see SSA § 475(5)(B).

– What is the state's process for ensuring children, youth, and parents understand confidentiality and the potential ramifications of participating in periodic reviews?

– How are Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) goals and requirements addressed in reviews (i.e., its use after child welfare agencies and courts have considered and ruled out other permanency options; whether the youth was consulted, etc.)?

– Are children's safety and well-being adequately addressed with input from all parties?

> Using multiple types of data such as interviews with children and adults, testing (when applicable) and observations of parent-child interactions are suggested when conducting periodic reviews. These kinds of data collection and interpretation allow for more careful and comprehensive evaluations when addressing the safety and well-being of children.
>
> Source: Zilberstein, K. (2016). Parenting in families of low socioeconomic status: review with implications for child welfare practice. *Family Court Review, 54(2),* 221–231.

– How are service delivery challenges addressed in periodic reviews?

– Is there a correlation between timely periodic reviews and positive permanency outcomes?

– What do participants (e.g., caseworkers, service providers, attorneys, parents and children/youth, judges) expect from the reviews?

  • Who do participants think should be there?

  • What is the state's process for including key participants who were not included in previous reviews?

  • How could the state address these issues in relation to permanency goals in the PIP?

  • What is the state's process for informing courts and administrative review boards on engaging children, youth, and parents?

*Data source(s):* Interviews or focus groups with caseworkers, service providers, attorneys, parents and children/youth, judges; surveys of these stakeholders; case reviews focused on quality; CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

*Alternative data source(s):* Case reviews from a random sample of cases; focus groups with those participating in periodic reviews; foster care review boards

3. In what ways are services such as medical care and mental/behavioral health care, services that prepare youth for independence, and school progress discussed in reviews?

*Data source(s):* Interviews, focus groups or surveys with youth and youth advocates; caseworkers; focus groups or surveys of caseworkers; case review (sample of case reviews to examine quality); CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

*Alternative data source(s):* Case reviews from a random sample of cases; focus groups with court participants/periodic participants; foster care review board

4. What is the length of time it takes to conduct a periodic review?

– Is the average time for a review appropriate to ensure that proper discussion is being held on cases?

– Are there variations in the length of time periodic reviews take and if so, what might explain that variation?

– Do certain cases take longer based on attributes of the child, the case, the family, the entity conducting the review?

*Data source(s):* Case review (sample of case reviews to assess quality); CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

5. What is the process for providing information to people in the child welfare system, including members of the legal and judicial communities, about the purpose of periodic reviews and the importance of engaging children, youth, and families in reviews? When the review is conducted by an entity other than a court, what happens with the results/findings?

6. If there were delays in hearings, how many were delayed? Were the delays agency-related or court-related? What follow-up steps were taken to address the delays?

## Item 22: Permanency Hearings

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that, for each child, a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body occurs no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?*

The first permanency hearing must be held within 12 months after a child enters out-of-home care. These hearings are to occur every 12 months thereafter until the child reaches permanency.[19] Court hearings provide judges with a unique opportunity to engage families in the process to help ensure that families are receiving quality hearings. Judges who engage parents in the process are more likely to order relative or in-home placements instead of general foster care during early case hearings.[20] Research suggests that having quality hearings is associated with better permanency outcomes for children,[21] and that hearings can decrease the use of long-term foster care.[22]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. **A.** Of the children in foster care during a specified period, how many had a permanency hearing[23] no later than 12 months from the date they entered foster care?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; court data

   *Parameters:* Children in foster care who should have had an initial permanency hearing no later than 12 months from the date they entered foster care

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

   – *Numerator:* Number of children from the denominator who had a permanency hearing within 12 months of entering care

   – *Denominator:* Number of all the children who entered care in a specific period, were in care on a specified date, and had been in care for at least 12 months

   **B.** Of these children, how many had a permanency hearing no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; court data

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19  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *Court hearings for the permanent placement of children*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

20  Summers, A., & Darnell, A. (2015). What Does Court Observation Tell Us About Judicial Practice and the Courts in Child Welfare? *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 9*(4), 341–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2015.1061467

21  Summers & Darnell, *What does court observation tell us*, 341–361.

22  Ramsey, S. H. (2007). Child Well-Being: A Beneficial Advocacy Framework for Improving the Child Welfare System? *Journal of Law Reform, 41*, 9–27.

23  See 42 U.S.C. §§ 675(5)(C) and 671(a)(15) for more information.

*Parameters:* Children in foster care who should have had a permanency hearing no less frequently than every 12 months after their first permanency hearing

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

– *Numerator:* Number of children from the denominator who had a second permanency hearing

– *Denominator*: Number of children who had an initial permanency hearing during a specified period and who were still in care 12 months following their first permanency hearing

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

*Questions:*

1. What is the state's process for preparing for and holding permanency hearings? What is transpiring in the permanency hearings?

   – What are the state's policies/statutes around having children/youth in court for permanency hearings?

   – How are children, youth, and parents prepared for participating in permanency hearings (e.g., how are those whose primary language is not English prepared to participate)? Are children/youth attending permanency hearings? If not, why? What is the state's process for determining how children, youth, and parents feel about the permanency hearings (e.g., do they want to be more or less involved)?

   – If a written report or update is required to be provided in advance of the hearing, is it being provided as required? What is the quality of those reports/updates?

– Are reasonable efforts to finalize the permanency goal sufficiently discussed and findings made on the record?

– How are caseworkers prepared to participate in permanency hearings?

Having children attend permanency hearings brings a unique opportunity for judges to engage with the children and solicit their feedback on how things are going. These interactions help lead to making necessary adjustments that are in the best interests of the child in out-of-home care.

Source: Summers & Darnell, *What does court observation tell us*, 341-361.

– How are permanency goals (reunification, guardianship, adoptions, and APPLA) and requirements addressed in permanency hearings?

– How are concurrent goals discussed in permanency hearings? Are agencies and courts addressing both goals?

– Are children's safety and well-being adequately discussed and addressed with input from all parties?

– How are service delivery challenges addressed in permanency hearings?

– Is there a correlation between timely permanency hearings and positive permanency outcomes?

– How are caseworkers prepared to participate in permanency hearings?

2. What do participants (e.g., parents, children/youth, caseworkers, attorneys, placement providers, service providers, and judges) expect from the permanency hearings?

   – Who do they think should be there?

   – What have their experiences been?

- What is the state's process for determining whether participants feel their voices have been adequately heard in court? Do all participants feel their voices have been adequately heard in court, and if not, in what ways do they want to see this improved?

  *Data source(s):* Interviews or focus groups with caseworkers, service providers, attorneys, parents and children/youth, judges; surveys of these stakeholders; case reviews focused on quality; CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

  *Alternative data source(s):* Case reviews from a random sample of cases; focus groups with court participants/periodic participants; foster care review boards

3. In what ways are services such as medical care and mental/behavioral health care, preparing youth for independence, and school progress discussed in permanency hearings?

   *Data source(s):* Interviews, surveys or focus groups with youth and youth advocates; surveys or focus groups of caseworkers; case review (sample of case reviews to dig into quality); CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

States can develop tools to help young people and their caseworkers address important topical areas. For example, Kansas created forms for young people to fill out that address topics such as safety, relationships in the home, social support, transportation, educational concerns, physical and mental health, court involvement, case plans, and communication with caseworkers.

For more information, see http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/3000Forms.aspx

*Alternative data source(s):* Case reviews from a random sample of cases; focus groups with court participants

4. What is the length of time it takes to conduct a permanency hearing?

   - Is the average time for a permanency hearing appropriate to ensure that proper discussion is being held on cases?

   - Is the quality of hearings more, or less, robust for youth of certain ages or populations or with certain permanency goals?[24]

   - *Data sources:* Case review (sample of case reviews to assess quality); CIP quality hearing project data; case reviews of court files

5. If there were delays in hearings, how many were delayed? Were the delays agency-related, attorney-related, or court-related? What follow-up steps were taken to address the delays?

6. What efforts are states making to ensure permanency hearings are happening within the recommended timeframe?

## Item 23: Termination of Parental Rights

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that the filing of TPR proceedings occurs in accordance with required provisions?*

Parental rights may be voluntarily relinquished or terminated through a TPR proceeding. Birth parents may voluntarily relinquish their rights to place their child for adoption. In cases of involuntary TPR, termination must be sought in accordance with ASFA requirements.

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24  For example, a youth aged 17 with a goal of adoption and no adoptive resource may have a shorter conversation during a permanency hearing than a 3-year-old with the same goal (consider whether it should be this way, or whether it means that there's a lack of effort for older youth).

Specifically, ASFA requires states to initiate TPR proceedings in any case where the court has found that a parent has lost parental rights to that child's sibling; killed another of his or her children or committed felony assault against the child or a sibling or subjected the child to aggravated circumstances; or for infants determined under state law to be abandoned. In addition, the law requires states to initiate TPR proceedings for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. States can opt not to initiate such proceedings if the child is in a relative's care, or if the state agency has documented in the child's case plan a compelling reason to determine that TPR would not be in the child's best interest, or if the state has not provided necessary services to the family.

Source: https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL30759.html#_Toc337126773

In their statewide assessments, states could generate the frequency/percentage of how many children:

1. Within a recent specified period, of those children who were in foster care, how many children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months?

2. Within that same recent specified period, how many children met other ASFA criteria?

3. Of the two populations described above, what percentage has a documented compelling reason or exception?

4. For the remaining children in those two populations (those that did not have a documented compelling reason or exception), what percentage had a TPR filed timely?

One of the primary goals of ASFA was to expedite legal proceedings so that children who cannot safely return to their families can more quickly move to adoption or another permanent placement. Several ASFA provisions were intended to expedite the process for obtaining TPR in the hope that this would, in turn, shorten the length of time a child who could not be returned home would remain in foster care. In CFSR Round 3, seven states received a Strength rating for this item, which assesses how well the system is functioning to ensure that the filing of TPR petitions occurs in accordance with required provisions statewide.

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state, e.g., what are the state's policies and practices on filing petitions for TPR; how does the state identify and track children who have been in care 15 of the most recent 22 months and children who meet other ASFA requirements; what are the state's policies and practices on the use

of compelling reasons, and exceptions to the AFSA requirement to file or join a TPR petition? Then states can provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### *Question:*

1. Of the children who have been in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months or who meet the other ASFA provisions (aggravated circumstance) and are not subject to an exception for filing for TPR, or have a compelling reason[25] not to file; for how many of them did the state file or join a TPR petition timely?

   *Data source(s):* state agency administrative data; court data; case review data (e.g., ongoing CQI or targeted case review)

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25  For more information on compelling reasons, see https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/groundtermin.pdf

*Parameters:* Children who have been in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months[26] and children who meet other ASFA criteria for TPR and do not have a compelling reason not to file TPR and no exception exists[27]

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

- *Numerator:* Number of children from the denominator who do not have compelling reasons or an exception where a TPR petition was filed or joined timely

- *Denominator:* Number of children from a specified period of time who had been in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months or meet other ASFA criteria for TPR

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. Were compelling reasons or exceptions appropriate to case circumstances?

   - Are all staff knowledgeable on the use of exceptions and compelling reasons?

   - States could examine the categories of compelling reasons and exceptions and ensure certain categories are being used appropriately.

   - States could examine the experiences of youth who come into foster care for reasons other than abuse and neglect (e.g., juvenile justice or behavioral/mental health issues).

- States could examine whether the patterns of compelling reasons or exceptions used differ by demographic or case characteristics (e.g., child's age or race/ethnicity; county of origin).

2. What are the factors that affect timely filing and the processes that need to happen for TPR petitions to be filed timely?

   - States could examine whether caseworker or attorney caseloads affect timely filing.

> When caseworkers make positive efforts to encourage and support the families with whom they work, there are more chances for timely reunification and a lower risk of TPR.
>
> Source: Yampolskaya, S., Armstrong, M. I., Strozier, A., & Swanke, J. (2017). Can the actions of child welfare case managers predict case outcomes? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *64*, 61–70.

   - States could examine if/how the filing process affects timely filing (e.g., how/when a TPR becomes a separate case versus a motion in a case; what happens during the process of an affidavit going from caseworkers to supervisors; are there court processes that affect timely filing).

3. States could examine the relationship between when a TPR issue can be heard and how it is affected by court dockets

   - How many cases are appealed and how does that affect timely TPRs?

   - How many courts have delays in TPR hearings because of crowded dockets?

   - Are there practices within the court that affect TPR not being granted (e.g., not granting TPR until an adoptive resource is identified; not granting TPR for older youth)?

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26 Begin by determining the child's most recent date of entry into foster care, defined as either the date of a judicial finding that the child had been subjected to child abuse or neglect (often the adjudicatory hearing), or 60 days after the date on which the child was removed from the home, whichever is earlier.

27 Including cases where aggravated circumstances are present.

- How long is it between the filing to TPR being granted in the court (see court data)?

- Are there continuances granted frequently and, if so, are there areas granting more continuance than others? For example, are there areas/counties with higher continuance rates?

4. States could examine a sample of cases to see whether time to permanency differs for cases:

    - Where TPR was filed timely versus when it was not filed timely.

    - Depending on the grounds for termination or the nature of the child maltreatment.

5. Are courts granting the motion/petition for TPR when the agency believes it's appropriate?

    - If not, why?

6. How long does it take from the time of filing the TPR petition to have the matter be heard?

    - Are agency staff, contractors, and court personnel clear on which party is responsible to initial the TPR petition within federal timeframes?

7. States could examine other court data points, such as:

    - How long did it take to file motions/petitions for TPR? And under what grounds was the TPR filed on (e.g., Alleged abandonment, permanent neglect, parental mental illness, or mental incapacity, or severe or repeated abuse)?

    - How long did it take from filing to scheduling/hearing the merits?

    - How long did it take between the date of filing the petition to the court decision?

8. States could examine differences in case characteristics (e.g., age or race) of those children/young people whose parents have had TPR to understand if/how case characteristics affect the TPR process.

9. How many TPRs are appealed in a specific time period (e.g., one year)?

    - How long, on average, does it take for an appeal to be resolved?

    - Does the state have an expedited process to resolve TPR appeals?

    - Are there differences across jurisdictions?

10. What are the state's practices and processes regarding relinquishment?

    - Under what circumstances may a parent voluntarily relinquish their rights?

    - On average, how long is a child in care when parents relinquish their rights?

    - Is there a difference in timely achievement of permanency between cases where a parent voluntarily relinquishes their rights versus cases where a TPR is filed?

11. What is the state's process for contacting providers to gather information on grounds for TPR?

The Capacity Building Center for Courts, through a project funded by the Children's Bureau, is working to create national Judicial, Court, and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP). The measures are currently funded for development through September 2022. The purpose of the project is to create a set of court, judicial, and attorney performance measures for the field (including all IV-E jurisdictions) to understand and improve practice.

# Item 24: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care (1) are receiving notification of any review or hearing held with respect to the child and (2) have a right to be heard in any review or hearing held with respect to the child?*

It is important to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care receive appropriate notifications that include their right to be heard for any reviews and hearings being held on behalf of the child(ren). When caregivers are provided with support to remain informed and involved (e.g., notifications for appointments/court dates), permanency outcomes can be positively influenced.[28]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. When describing the statewide functioning Item 24: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers, the state should provide data and evidence for all types of caregivers, i.e., foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers. Note, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### Questions:

1. **A.** What is the state's process for ensuring that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?

   *Data source(s):* Narrative of state procedures to describe process



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28 Katz, C. C., Lalayants, M., & Phillips, J. D. (2018). The role of out-of-home caregivers in the achievement of child welfare permanency. *Children and Youth Services Review, 94*, 65–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.09.016

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**B.** What data do the states have to demonstrate that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?

*Data source(s):* Administrative data (e.g., notices sent); court data including data from court observations; stakeholder interviews, focus groups, or surveys of foster parents

*Parameters:* Foster parents who had a qualifying experience (e.g., recently cared for, or currently caring for, children)

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

*Questions:*

1. How is information shared among agencies, courts, and relatives caring for children (who are not kinship providers) to ensure that all parties know what is transpiring with children who are not in foster care?

   – For children in foster care, who is responsible for ensuring that the caregivers have the hearing information?

   – Were families provided with notice in an accessible way (e.g., language barriers, visual or hearing impairment)?

2. How frequently did caregivers attend reviews/hearings in a specified period?

   – States could explore whether outcomes differ based on attendance and/or participation in hearings.

   – States could examine factors that might be associated with caregivers coming and participating in hearings.

3. Beyond being given notice that caregivers have the right to be heard, are they given the opportunity to be heard when they appear in court, and if so, how?

   – Are caregivers able to come into the courtroom?

   – Are they allowed to speak and give testimony (e.g., "Do you have anything to say or add")?

   – Do they write letters or reports and submit those if they are not allowed into the courtroom?

   – Does the state have any challenges (policy or legal barriers) that make it difficult for these caregivers to become a party to the process/court hearing?

   – If, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, states moved to virtual hearings/reviews, how did this affect how caregivers attended hearings, how often they participated, and how much they participated?

4. How are caregivers prepared to participate in a court hearing (to give information to the court)?

   – What is the state's process for acclimating caregivers to the court/courtroom?

   – How do caregivers participate in hearings and reviews (e.g., in-person, write letters or reports)?

   – How do caregivers participate if English is not their primary language or they have hearing/vision impairments?

5. Are caregivers receiving the information provided to the court before the hearing (when they are not prohibited from receiving it), e.g., modified case plans?

6. How are children and youth prepared to participate in a court hearing (to give information to the court)?

   – What is the state's process for acclimating children and youth to the court/courtroom?

   – How do children and youth participate if English is not their primary language or they have hearing/visual impairments?

# Chapter 4: Quality Assurance System

Child welfare systems are increasingly expected to deploy their CQI/QA systems, which rely on data and evidence, to be more responsive to the needs of the families they serve, and to link strategies to results in order to meet specific goals.[29] CQI/QA systems are responsible for producing knowledge; this is foundational to understanding the functioning of the child welfare system, or processes within the system, and to generating meaningful observations about performance that can be the basis for improvement efforts that are then monitored over time.

A well-functioning CQI/QA system is characterized by structures, processes, and behaviors that are grounded in sound and appropriate measurement principles. It includes processes that support data collection and analysis, and the delivery of timely information to child welfare professionals and leadership, stakeholders, community partners, and the larger community about how the child welfare system is meeting the needs of parents, families, children, and youth. Additionally, a CQI/QA system provides a consistent way to process data and evidence, problem-solve, support the implementation of short- and long-term goals, and measure progress and change over time. It includes a mechanism for the child welfare system to provide feedback to all stakeholders engaged in systemic change and improvement efforts, including parents, families, children, and youth.

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29  Lery, B., Wiegmann, W., & Berrick, J. D. (2015). Building an evidence-driven child welfare workforce: A university-agency partnership. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *51*(Suppl 2), S283–S298.

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States can maintain and enhance their CQI/QA systems through an approach that measures both the quantity and quality of services provided. Structures, processes, and behaviors grounded in sound data and evidence support continuous learning. States can support and strengthen the functioning of their CQI/QA systems in many ways, including but not limited to:

- Actively seeking the inclusion and participation of staff in every region of the state and at all levels of the agency

- Providing a sound process for sharing results, tracking, analyzing, and addressing results of QA reviews

- Implementing continuous processes for sharing examples of strengths and areas needing improvement identified from QA systems

- Providing examples of continuous monitoring, and addressing findings from program implementation and evaluation data

- Supporting evaluation of implemented strategies/interventions, and using the results to further system improvements

Quality Assurance System comprises one item. Substantial conformity requires that Item 25 be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 3**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, 26 states were in substantial conformity with the Quality Assurance System.

*Figure 3: Quality Assurance System—Item and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Quality Assurance System** Item 25: Quality Assurance System | Substantial conformity requires that Item 25 be rated as a Strength. |

## Item 25: Quality Assurance System

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the quality assurance system functioning statewide to ensure that it (1) is operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, (2) has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety), (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates implemented program improvement measures?*

Ensuring that services are beneficial and promote children's safety, permanency, and well-being is the goal of implementing an efficient quality assurance (QA) system.[30] QA systems allow child welfare agencies to examine the effectiveness of their services for children and families served by the child welfare system.[31] QA and continuous quality improvement (CQI) also help to create engaged organized "climates," which contribute to better outcomes for children and youth.[32] QA/CQI data can be used so child welfare staff and their partners, and children and families, can see the impact services are having on those served by the child welfare system. Further, engaging in QA/CQI can help agencies track the improvements made to their systems in response to the CFSR PIP.[33]

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30  Ahn, H., Carter, L. M., Reiman, S., & Hartzel, S. (2017). Development of a quality assurance and continuous quality improvement (CQI) model in public child welfare systems. Journal of Public Child Welfare, 11(2), 166–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2016.1255698

31  Koster, A., & Damiani-Taraba, G. (2015). Principled quality assurance in child welfare: A new perspective. *Child Welfare*, *94*(6), 89–104.

32  Glisson, C., & Green, P. (2011). Organizational climate, services, and outcomes in child welfare systems. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *35*(8), 582–591.

33  For more information and resources, see Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.). Continuous quality improvement. https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/practice-improvement/cqi

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor operates within the state. When describing the statewide functioning of the QA system, states should provide data and evidence that shows whether the system is:

- Operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided;

- Has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that; children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety);

- Identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system;

- Provides relevant reports; and

- Evaluates implemented program improvement measures.

The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### Questions:

1. **A.** How many jurisdictions provide the services included in the CFSP?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; CFSP; surveys to assess the number of jurisdictions where services were provided

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

   - *Numerator:* Number of jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided

   - *Denominator:* Number of jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP should be provided

**B.** What evidence do you have that the QA system is functioning statewide to ensure that it is operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided and has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety)?

*Data source(s):* Case record review and other CQI/QA activities conducted in every jurisdiction where the services included in the CFSP are provided; management information reports; program improvement processes; interviews or focus groups with individuals applying the standards and conducting case record reviews

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

2. **A.** What is the state's process to ensure that the QA system identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and that it evaluates implemented program improvement measures?

*Data source(s):* Management information system reports providing information on performance and outcomes for children and families in every jurisdiction where services included in the CFSP are provided; interviews or focus groups with CQI/QA staff; reports from performance-based contractors

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

**B.** What evidence do you have that the QA system is functioning statewide to ensure it identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and that it evaluates implemented program improvement measures?

*Data source(s):* CQI/QA reviews and activities; management information reports; case reviews/targeted reviews process; program improvement processes/plans; interviews or focus groups

with stakeholders to inform the entire process; website where reports are published; surveys; interviews or focus groups with those implementing improvement efforts and those affected by improvement efforts

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

**C.** To what extent is information from CQI/QA processes (or other data, evidence, and reports) sound and relevant; how can staff using it support good decisions with it; and in what ways are relevant reports used by the intended audience?

*Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with those involved in data and evidence collection processes; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with intended users or CQI/QA data and information (e.g., program managers, supervisors, caseworkers)

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

3. What is the state's process for using evidence collected through its QA activities to select or design program improvement measures?

*Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with agency staff and stakeholders involved in program improvement efforts; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with those involved in data and evidence collection and analysis processes

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

This section is intended to encourage states to think more broadly about their CQI/QA systems, processes, and behaviors and to consider whether those systems, processes, and behaviors are producing evidence that can be used to support continuous improvement throughout the child welfare system. Woven throughout this section is the principle that perpetuating a culture that supports evidence-based decision-making will yield continuous system improvements.

For example, over the last several years, the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) relied on their CQI system to shape and support their transformation from a system focused on foster care to one that focused on implementing family support and strengthening interventions that prevent entry into out-of-home care. The development of a robust CQI system means they can track outcome targets against quarterly scorecards. A key component of CFSA's progress in CQI has been building agency culture to support growth, innovation, learning, and improvement. For more information, see https://www.casey.org/dc-cqi/

*Questions:*

1. When building capacity for staff at all levels and across all programs (including contract providers), to what extent does the state generate/acquire, process, and apply data and evidence to help them improve their decisions, support better outcomes, and operate their CQI systems?

   – How are staff trained, coached, and supervised to use data, evidence, and reports? How does the state know that the training is effective?

- Relevant reports should generate information effectively and the staff using the reports should be trained to use the information to support decision-making.

2. For states that rely heavily on contracted services, what is the deliberate approach to assess the quality of those services and what is the mechanism that facilitates feedback between procurement and QA?

**States could consider surveying staff and asking their level of agreement with statements such as:**

- **My supervisor uses data and evidence during supervision.**

- **I believe data helps to inform decision-making.**

- **My workgroup uses performance data to improve quality of work.**

- **Feedback from those we serve is used to improve our practices.**

3. In what ways does your state invest in the capacity of its workforce to use the information generated through the CQI system to support system improvements?

   - How does the state know whether the workforce finds CQI useful/effective?

   - How are state agency staff, partners, and stakeholders prepared to work collaboratively on CQI efforts?

4. What types of tools, trainings, or programs is your state investing in that improve access to information and decision-making?

The William T. Grant foundation supports research to identify, build, and test strategies to ensure that research evidence is used in ways that benefit youth. They are particularly interested in research on improving the use of research evidence by state and local decision-makers, mid-level managers, and intermediaries. For more information in this area, see http://wtgrantfoundation.org/focus-areas/improving-use-research-evidence

5. What relationships has your state invested in to improve access to information and decision-making?

   - What is the state's process for providing data and information to children, youth, and families in accessible formats?

6. What challenges exist surrounding aspects of the QA system and CQI process?

7. To what extent does the system include processes that look for variation in outcomes over time, by sub-population, or by geography?

   - How does the state ensure that all populations are given opportunities to provide feedback on services?

One state developed and revised its QA and CQI model for its child welfare system and found that the revised model was able to identify the factors that contributed to improving outcomes for children and families and to develop a greater understanding of the aggregate data across the state. The study provides a useful description of the state's model and key implications that other states can use as they develop their QA and CQI systems. For more information, see https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2016.1255698

Source: Ahn, H., Carter, L. M., Reiman, S., & Hartzel, S. (2017). Development of a quality assurance and continuous quality improvement (CQI) model in public child welfare systems. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *11*(2), 166–189.

8. If a state is participating in the Family First Prevention Services Act, how can state staff evaluate their implementation and outcomes using their CQI/QA system?

Using QA/CQI data provides states with the opportunity to promote "best practices" and associated positive outcomes for families involved with the child welfare system. Most child welfare agencies gather QA data, which can be used to examine a number of questions. For example, one state used QA data to inform supervision and adherence to a practice model (Solution Based Casework). The study found that using Solution Based Casework improved safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for families.

Source: Antle, B. F., Christensen, D. N., Van Zyl, M. A., & Barbee, A. P. (2012). The impact of the Solution Based Casework (SBC) practice model on federal outcomes in public child welfare. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *36*(4), 342–353.

9. What is the state's process for engaging stakeholders (e.g., caregivers, children, youth, and families) to understand whether their needs are being met through the services being provided?

   – What is the state's process for ensuring that services provided are accessible?

10. What is the state's process for explaining to children, youth, and parents why they are being engaged in the CFSR case review process? How are they informed of the expectations and prepared for their involvement? What is the state's process for explaining how their input and feedback will be used?

# Chapter 5: Staff and Provider Training

A strong, supported, healthy, and diverse workforce, including foster and adoptive parents, is foundational to a state's child welfare system. Supporting that workforce is a CB priority. Training is a key component to ensuring that agency staff, staff of state licensed or approved facilities, and foster and adoptive parents, are knowledgeable about the expected approach to casework practice, about how to care for children who experienced maltreatment, and about relevant legal procedures that are consistent with the state's vision of child welfare. A lack of training, resources, and support, coupled with high staff caseloads, can trigger the departure of many staff, and even foster and adoptive parents.[34] High turnover may reduce the extent to which families, children, and youth receive critical services. Turnover can also limit the ability of families,

children, and youth to build trusting relationships. Providing proper training for the child welfare workforce can reduce burnout and improve retention[35] and will also enable front line staff to be attentive to the quality of their decisions, and to be sensitive and aware of the possibility of bias both in system structures and in case practice.

A well-functioning Staff and Provider Training program plays a crucial part in ensuring that basic skills and knowledge that promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children are provided to all foster and adoptive parents and staff. Initial and ongoing staff training and foster and adoptive parent training provides an opportunity for skill development that can build capacity and improve performance and the experiences of those interacting with and receiving services from

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34  Madden, E. E., Scannapieco, M., & Painter, K. (2014). An examination of retention and length of employment among public child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *41*, 37–44.

35 Payne, C. (2015). Literature review: Recruitment and retention in health and human services. *Southern Area Consortium of Human Services*, 1–43.

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**33**

the agency. States can support their staff and provider training programs and bolster functioning in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Providing evidence-based, outcome-focused training(s)

- Providing resources to develop the skills necessary to deliver services to children and families

- Implementing a statewide system to track adherence to training requirements

- Offering quality trainings with sufficient frequency and convenience as to time and location to facilitate timely completion

- Using data to enhance service delivery and improve outcomes for children and families

- Implementing continuous processes for evaluating and employing improvement strategies for staff and provider training

- Offering trainings that reflect current practice requirements (e.g., how case practices were adapted to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic)

Staff and Provider Training comprises three items. Substantial conformity requires that two of the three items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 4**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, 13 states were in substantial conformity with Staff and Provider Training.

*Figure 4: Staff and Provider Training—Items and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Staff and Provider Training** <br> Item 26: Initial Staff Training <br> Item 27: Ongoing Staff Training <br> Item 28: Foster and Adoptive Parent Training | Substantial conformity requires that two of the three items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength. |

## Item 26: Initial Staff Training

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that initial training is provided to all staff who deliver services pursuant to the CFSP so that:*

- *Staff receive training in accordance with the established curriculum and timeframes for the provision of initial training; and*

- *The system demonstrates how well the initial training addresses the basic skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties?*

*"Staff," for purposes of assessing this item, includes all contracted and non-contracted staff who have case management responsibilities in the areas of child protection services, family preservation and support services, foster care services, adoption services, and independent living services pursuant to the state's CFSP.*

Participating in initial training is important for staff addressing complex issues faced by children and families. Initial training that educates child welfare staff about the stages of service—investigations, family preservation, foster care, adoption, and working with youth leaving foster care—is important. Having this exposure to the stages of service allows staff to identify which stage is best suited for them. Honoring staff preferences for their stage of service leads to better chances of retention.[36] Providing initial training builds the capacity of staff and providers to effectively support children and youth, and their foster, adoptive, and guardianship families.

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36  Madden, E. E., Scannapieco, M., & Painter, K. (2014). An examination of retention and length of employment among public child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 41*, 37–44.

Being able to respond to different populations is a key component of any caseworker's training, and caseworkers should engage in ongoing self-assessment, expand their knowledge of differences, and adapt service models to fit the unique needs and strengths of the families they serve.[37]

Caseworkers should also receive trauma training at the beginning of employment. It is essential that child welfare professionals recognize trauma and provide early and appropriate interventions for children and families.[38]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state, e.g., who provides the initial training, how often and when is it provided, when are new staff assigned cases, and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### Questions:

1.  **A.** What are the state's requirements for initial training (i.e., number of hours, brief description of course content/modules and learning objectives, and who is required to attend)?

    *Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; narrative description of training program; contract with agency partner that provides training

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

    **B.** What is the state's process for ensuring that the state's requirements for initial training are met?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; narrative description of state's process; contract with agency partner that provides training; interview or focus group with persons responsible for monitoring

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**C.** How does the state ensure that initial training is aligned with specific job descriptions? How often is training reviewed for alignment with specific job descriptions or new initiatives?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; contract with agency partner that provides training; interview or focus group with persons responsible for training content

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

2.  What is the state's process for collecting and updating training-related data (e.g., courses, hours, number of staff who were required to attend and the number who completed) to ensure that requirements for initial staff training are met for caseworkers including contract caseworkers? How does the system allow for statewide tracking of the training program (including training at the state level along with training that may be contracted out or at the county level)?

    *Data source(s):* Description of process for tracking training; administrative data from the state, county, or agency partner(s); contract with agency partner(s) that provide training; if applicable, data from state social worker licensing authority

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

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37  DePanfilis, D. (2018). *Child protective services: A guide for caseworkers*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. Available upon request.

38  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). The importance of a trauma-informed child welfare system. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/trauma-informed/

**3. A.** Among all staff newly hired within a specified period, what percentage completed initial training in the required time period that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions?

*Data source(s):* Administrative data from the state or the agency partner

*Numerator:* Newly hired staff in the denominator who completed the required training within the required time period

*Denominator:* Staff within a specified period of time who were required to complete the initial staff training

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

**B.** What is the state's process for assigning cases to new staff?

*Data source(s):* Narrative of state procedures; interviews or focus groups with supervisors or new staff

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

**C.** What is the state requirement regarding whether staff must complete training before being assigned cases? To what extent is the state meeting its requirement?

*Data source(s):* Narrative of state procedures; interviews, or focus groups with supervisors of newly hired staff; administrative data from the state or county

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

**D.** To what extent were staff who completed initial training in a specified period prepared to deliver services pursuant to the CFSP?

*Data source(s):* Surveys with staff completing initial training (e.g., surveys before and after training); course evaluations; focus groups or interviews with those who completed initial training;

focus groups or interviews with supervisors of new staff or the training field mentors for new staff; court staff; foster parents and caregivers; parents and youth

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

Training evaluation is the systematic process of collecting information related to the training program that can be used to improve the training program. Evaluation provides feedback to help identify whether training achieved the intended outcomes and helps make decisions about future trainings.

**4. A.** To what extent does the state know that the initial training addresses basic skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state procedures; surveys, focus groups or interviews with newly hired staff who completed initial training; focus groups or interviews with supervisors or training field managers of newly hired staff; focus groups or interviews with parents, youth, judges; evaluation results; training exams/tests; administrative data from agency or training partner

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

**B.** What mechanisms and methods are used to obtain employee and consumer feedback; how often, and for which trainings (e.g., all trainings)?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state procedures; contract with agency partner that provides training

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

Training for new staff is critical to developing a workforce that effectively improves the safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families. The COVID-19 pandemic required a temporary shift to virtual training to maintain staff safety. One study found that the shift to a virtual learning environment had little impact on learner knowledge and satisfaction.

Source: Schwab-Reese, L. M., Drury, I., Allan, H., & Matz, K. (2020). "Oh, this is actually okay": Understanding how one state child welfare training system adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 110*, 104697.

**C.** What is the state's process for addressing employee and consumer feedback to improve training curricula?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state procedures

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

## Item 27: Ongoing Staff Training

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that ongoing training is provided for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP so that:*

- *Staff receive ongoing training pursuant to the established curriculum and timeframes for the provision of ongoing training; and*

- *The system demonstrates how well the ongoing training addresses the skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties?*

*"Staff," for purposes of assessing this item, include all contracted and non-contracted staff who have case management responsibilities in the areas of child protection services, family preservation and support services, foster care services, adoption services, and independent living services pursuant to the state's CFSP, and the direct supervisors of those contracted and non-contracted staff.*

It is important that ongoing training remain a priority for child welfare staff. Receiving ongoing training can help caseworkers stay up to date on the latest research as well as refresh their skills over time.[39] Ongoing training can also help caseworkers remain engaged in self-assessment, expand their cultural diversity knowledge, and adapt service models that fit the unique needs and strengths of the families they serve.[40] Trauma training is most effective when child welfare staff participate in ongoing training.[41]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions.

*Questions:*

1. **A.** What is the state's requirement for ongoing training (i.e., number of hours, brief description of course content/modules and learning objectives, and who is required to attend)?

   *Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; narrative description of training program; contract with agency partner that provides training

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

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39  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). *Acts of omission: An overview of child neglect.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/acts/

40  DePanfilis, D. (2018). Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers 2018.

41  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *The importance of a trauma-informed child welfare system.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. Available upon request.

**B.** How does the state ensure that ongoing training addresses skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP? If the state requires licensure for staff, what is the state's process for working with the licensing authority to ensure that ongoing training requirements are aligned?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; contract with agency partner that provides training; memorandum of understanding/agreement or other documents between the social work licensing authorities and the state agency outlining the process for aligning training with continuing education requirements

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**C.** How often is ongoing training reviewed for alignment with specific job descriptions or updated for new initiatives?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; contract with agency partner that provides training

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

2. What is the state's process for collecting and updating training-related data (e.g., courses, hours, number of staff who were required to attend and percentage who completed) to ensure that ongoing training requirements are met for caseworkers and supervisors, including contracted caseworkers/ supervisors? How does the system allow for statewide tracking of the training program (including training at the state level along with training that may be contracted out or provided at the county level)?

*Data source(s):* Description of process for tracking training; administrative data from the state, county, or agency partner(s); contract with agency partner(s) that provide training; if applicable, data from state social worker licensing authority

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

3. **A.** Among all staff who required ongoing training in a specified period, what percentage completed ongoing training that addressed skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP?

*Data source(s):* Administrative data from the state or the agency partner

*Numerator:* All staff from the denominator who completed the required ongoing training within the required time period

*Denominator:* Veteran (i.e., experienced) staff who were on the job as of a specific date, who were required to complete the ongoing staff training within a specified time period

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

**B.** To what extent were staff who completed ongoing training in a specified period prepared to deliver services pursuant to the CFSP?

*Data source(s):* Surveys with staff completing ongoing training (e.g., pre-post); course evaluations; focus groups or interviews with those who completed ongoing training; focus groups or interviews with supervisors; court staff; foster parents and caregivers; parents and youth

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

4. **A.** How does the state know that the ongoing training addresses basic skills and knowledge needed by staff to carry out their duties?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/ narrative of state procedures; surveys, focus groups, or interviews with staff who completed ongoing training; focus groups or interviews with supervisors, caseworkers, foster parents and caregivers, parents and youth; and/or judges; administrative data from agency or training partner (e.g., evaluation results; training exams/tests)

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

**B.** What mechanisms and methods are used to obtain staff and consumer feedback, how often, and for which ongoing trainings (e.g., all trainings)?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/ narrative of state procedures; contract with agency partner that provides training

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**C.** What is the state's process for addressing feedback to improve training curricula?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/ narrative of state procedures

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

## Item 28: Foster and Adoptive Parent Training

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the staff and provider training system functioning to ensure that training is occurring statewide for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities (who receive title IV-E funds to care for children) so that:*

- *Current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff receive training pursuant to the established annual/biannual hourly/continuing education requirement and timeframes for the provision of initial and ongoing training; and*

- *The system demonstrates how well the initial and ongoing training addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?*

Providing training to current or prospective foster parents including kinship and relative caregivers, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities is critical. Training provides them with the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to caring for children. For example, training provides foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities with an understanding of the impact trauma has on children, the significance of trauma triggers, how to recognize and respond appropriately to trauma-related behaviors, how to work effectively with parents, and the importance of self-care.[42] Agencies can also provide trainings for adoptive parents, such as adoption through the perspective of young children or teens, or parenting children with attachment disorders.[43] Providing foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed and approved facilities with training can provide them with an increased awareness and understanding of parenting issues, higher satisfaction with their experiences, and an increased likelihood of retention.[44]

Birth and Foster Parent Partnership is a program that promotes strong relationships between birth parents, foster parents, and kinship caregivers. This initiative helps child welfare agencies prioritize these important relationships through culture, practice, and policy. Research shows that when staff, birth parents, and foster parents work in a collaborative partnership, the chances of better outcomes increase.

For more information, see https://cblcc.acf.hhs.gov/topic-areas/engaging-communities/building-birth-and-foster-parent-relationships-to-promote-reunification/

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42  Child Welfare Information Gateway, *The importance of a trauma-informed system.* Available upon request.
43  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Adopting as a single parent.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/single-parent/
44  Rork, K. E., & McNeil, C. B. (2011). Evaluation of foster parent training programs: A critical review. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy, 33*(2), 139–170.

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state. This should include which entity in the state is responsible for providing initial and ongoing training to all current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents and staff of state licensed or approved facilities. The state then provides data and evidence to demonstrate functioning noting that some of the data and evidence may need to come from sources outside of the child welfare agency. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### Questions:

1.  **A.** What are the state's requirements for providing initial and ongoing training to all current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities?

    *Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; narrative description of training program; narrative description of training requirements in state regulations governing foster and adoptive parents; contract with agency partner that provides training; contract with state licensed or approved facilities that address training requirements or narrative description of training requirements in state regulations governing state licensed or approved facilities

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

    **B.** How does the state ensure that initial and ongoing training addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

    *Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; contract with agency partner that provides training; contract with state licensed or approved facilities that addresses

training content or narrative description of content of training requirements in state regulations governing state licensed or approved facilities

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

2.  What is the state's process for collecting and updating training-related data (e.g., courses, hours, number who were required to attend and who completed) to ensure that the training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities is current and complete? How does the system allow for statewide tracking of the training program (includes training that is at the state level, training that may be contracted out or provided at the county level, or training provided by state licensed or approved facilities)?

    *Data source(s):* Description of process for tracking training; administrative data from the state, county, or from the agency partner(s)/facility; contract with agency partner(s) that provide training

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

3.  **A.** Among all current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities who required initial training in a specified period, how many completed initial training that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

    *Data source(s):* Administrative data from the state, provider (e.g., private child placement agencies, facility, or agency partner responsible for oversight of state licensed and approved facilities)

    *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

    *Numerator:* Number of current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities from the denominator who completed the initial training

**Denominator:** Number of current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents and staff of state licensed or approved facilities, new to the agency, within a specified period who were required to complete the initial training

**B.** Among all current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities who required ongoing training in a specified period, what percentage completed ongoing training in a specified period?

**Data source(s):** Administrative data from the state provider (e.g., private child placement agencies, facility, or agency partner responsible for oversight of state licensed and approved facilities)

**Measurement approach:** Quantitative

**Numerator:** Number of current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved from the denominator who completed the ongoing training

**Denominator:** Number of current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents and staff of state licensed or approved facilities already known to the agency, within a specified period who were required to complete the ongoing staff training

**C.** What is the state's process for addressing circumstances where foster parents, adoptive parents, or staff in state licensed or approved facilities do not complete training requirements within the time period required?

**Data source(s):** CFSP; APSR; agency policies/regulations; contract with agency partner that provides training; contract with state licensed or approved facilities that addresses training content or narrative description of content of training requirements in state regulations governing state licensed or approved facilities

**D.** How does the state know that it is complying with regulations and its own policies/ regarding what happens when foster parents, adoptive

parents, or staff at state licensed or approved facilities do not complete training requirements within the time period required?

**Data source(s):** Case review of foster and adoptive parents' records; review of licensing files for state licensed and approved facilities; focus groups with staff responsible for licensing/monitoring foster and adoptive parents and state licensed and approved facilities

**E.** To what extent were foster or adoptive parents and staff who completed initial or ongoing training in a specified period prepared to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

**Data source(s):** Surveys with foster and adoptive parents and staff of state licensed/approved facilities completing initial or ongoing training; course evaluations (e.g., pre-post); focus groups or interviews with those who completed initial or ongoing training; focus groups or interviews with supervisors/caseworkers; parents/caregivers and youth; court staff

**Measurement approach:** Quantitative or qualitative

4. **A.** How does the state know that the initial and ongoing training addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

    **Data source(s):** CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state procedures; surveys, focus groups or interviews with foster and adoptive parents and staff who completed initial or ongoing training; focus groups or interviews with agency licensing staff or supervisors of facility staff who completed initial or ongoing training, parents and youth; evaluation results; training exams/tests; administrative data from agency/facility or training partner

    **Measurement approach:** Quantitative or qualitative

**B.** What mechanisms and methods are used to obtain feedback, how often, and for which trainings (e.g., all trainings)?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state procedures; contract with agency partner that provides training

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**C.** What is the state's process for addressing feedback from foster and adoptive parents, facility staff, and consumers to improve training curricula?

*Data source(s):* CFSP; APSR; description/narrative of state/facility procedures

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

> In the effort to demonstrate systemic factor functioning, states could generate administrative or survey data that addresses item functioning while also considering questions related to recruitment and retention of staff or foster and adoptive parents.

> For the purposes of this section, the term "foster parents" includes relative caregivers licensed or approved by the state to care for children in foster care.

*Questions:*

**Training and Curriculum**

1. How are the basic learning objectives developed, and how frequently are they reviewed and updated? For example, if agency policy changes or a new practice model is introduced, how is initial or ongoing training for staff or foster and adoptive parents revised to reflect the change?

2. What is the state's process for ensuring that curricula for initial or ongoing training align with best practices?

3. To what extent do the training curricula incorporate the experiences and perspectives of persons with lived experience in foster care systems?

4. What is the state's process for ensuring that the curricula for initial or ongoing training provide an understanding of their work in the context of the CFSR regulations to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families with whom they have contact?

5. To what extent are providers of Family First prevention services given initial and ongoing training?

6. To what extent was the training curriculum modified to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on case practice?

> Using training approaches that include diverse learning experiences such as role-playing, problem-solving case studies, and peer collaboration, result in better learning outcomes, benefiting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.
>
> Source: Choi, M. J., Stover, C. S., & Aeppel, P. E. (2019). Training strategies in child welfare and their association with certification outcomes. *Child Welfare*, *97*(4), 23–44.

> The voices of children, youth, and families should be incorporated in all trainings to ensure that state staff and foster parents are prepared to work with and care for all families with equal dignity and respect.

Simulation training is an additional learning experience used to support skills practice in environments that workers encounter in their practice. Simulation training in child welfare has been shown to improve techniques to facilitate family engagement, enhance worker's skills in conducting investigations and safety assessments, prepare workers to participate in court proceedings, improve child welfare worker safety, and train workers to be more culturally responsive. There is also evidence from Illinois suggesting that simulation training may improve child welfare worker retention.

7. What is the state's process for ensuring that training matches the needs of staff or foster parents and adoptive parents (e.g., caring for sibling groups; caring for children with special needs)?

   – To what extent are staff and/or stakeholders able to suggest topics for trainings?

8. To what extent is a statewide initial or ongoing curriculum used, or does it vary by county or region?

9. What is the state's process for training staff who were found to be in noncompliance with training requirements?

To strengthen the child welfare workforce and ensure that it can provide high-quality services to families, it is critical that supervisors receive training. As an example, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services developed the Safety Through Supervision Framework as a detailed guide and supportive approach to supervision throughout the life of a case. For more information on supervision for quality child welfare practice, see https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/effective_supervision.pdf

Initial and ongoing training should adequately prepare agency staff, facility staff, and foster and adoptive parents to work with individuals from differing backgrounds and to serve every person with equal dignity and respect.

10. How does the state ensure that the learning objectives and curricula are consistent across initial or ongoing trainings?

11. To what extent does the curriculum address differing perspectives in child welfare decision-making?

12. To what extent does the state provide training on working with children, youth, and families from differing backgrounds and with unique needs?

**Workforce Dynamics**

13. How is initial or ongoing training linked to staff workforce health? For example, how does training affect workforce recruitment, retention, and turnover? How does the state track workforce dynamics—including workforce recruitment, retention, and turnover—and in what ways does training address workforce strengths or challenges? To what extent are supervisors trained to support retention and, if so, how?

14. What support is provided to the workforce to offset their workload while completing training?

15. How is training linked to facility workforce health and the pool of foster and adoptive parents? For example, how does training affect recruitment, retention, and turnover? How does the state track these dynamics—including recruitment, retention, and turnover—and in what ways does training address facility workforce and foster and adoptive parent strengths or challenges? To what extent are facility supervisors trained to support retention and, if so, how?

Title IV-E training funds promote recruitment and retention of professional child welfare workers when used in collaborations between child welfare agencies and social work education programs (BSW and MSW programs).

Source: Zlotnik, J. L., & Pryce, J. A. (2013). Status of the use of Title IV-E funding in BSW and MSW programs. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *7*(4), 430–446.

16. What processes and supports are operating within the state to support staff in applying what they learned in initial or ongoing staff training in their work with children, youth, and families?

17. What processes and supports are operating within the state to support facility staff and foster and adoptive parents in applying what they learned in training in their work with children, youth, and families?

18. How do states track the recruitment of new staff or the retention of ongoing staff? For example, how do states determine which staff left, which staff stayed, and why?

    *Data source(s):* Administrative or survey data

19. What is the state's process for ensuring that training programs for the child welfare workforce are sensitive to the experiences of children, youth, and parents from differing backgrounds?

    – What is the state's process for ensuring that the child welfare workforce is receiving ongoing training so that they serve every person with equal dignity and respect?

## Training Evaluation

20. What is the state's process for evaluating training? For example, what do staff, or facility staff and foster and adoptive parents, say regarding whether training is considered sufficient when looking back after a year? What do children and youth say regarding whether staff/facility staff and foster and adoptive parents are prepared to care for them? To what extent does the state invest in formal evaluation of their training program? This could include a process evaluation or an outcome evaluation.

21. How are evaluation results shared, and with whom?

22. What is the state's process for ensuring fidelity to the initial or ongoing training curriculum?

## Workforce Climate

23. How is the climate and culture of the agency inclusive of staff from varying backgrounds?

24. In what ways does the agency ensure that all staff feel supported and welcomed in the work environment?

25. How do staff feel regarding whether the agency will support them in applying the content learned in trainings on the job?

26. How do facility staff and foster and adoptive parents feel regarding whether the agency will support them in applying the content learned in trainings on the job?

**Training as a component of PIP Implementation**

27. If states identified initial or ongoing training for staff as something to work on in their PIPs, to what extent has it been addressed (how; who tracks; has it been implemented effectively; were the changes made to initial training for the PIP integrated fully)?

28. If states identified initial or ongoing training for facility staff or foster and adoptive parents as something to work on in their PIPs, to what extent were PIP strategies implemented (how; who tracks; do they get implemented effectively; is training integrated fully)?

States could use surveys to address questions related to workforce climate and culture. For example, states could collect demographic data on staff to better understand retention and turnover. One study found that self-efficacy, peer support, supervision, and organizational supports were key predictors of retention. States could review studies such as this for examples of how to collect and analyze their own similar data. For more information, see https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2019.1683121

Source: de Guzman, A., Carver-Roberts, T., Leake, R., & Rienks, S. (2020). Retention of child welfare workers: Staying strategies and supports. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *14*(1), 60–79.

Staff and providers are foundational partners in service delivery and can be champions in the development of strategies to support and improve a training system. PIPs that include enhancement of the staff and provider training system can build a continuous process for evaluating and improving skill development for staff and providers. When developing and implementing PIPs, states should consider:

- How will the state engage staff and provider partners in a way that includes a feedback loop that supports the continuous improvement of the training system?

- How will the state sustain and build upon improvement efforts after the completion of the PIP to achieve ongoing improvement?

# Chapter 6: Service Array and Resource Development

Child welfare systems are responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring a service array system that meets the needs of children and families requiring services across the state in all jurisdictions covered by the CFSP. A robust array of available and accessible services within urban and rural communities can make families stronger by helping to meet the needs of children, parents, and caregivers. Specialized services that meet the unique needs of children and families can help to ensure positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes and enhance families' ability to care for their children. A well-functioning system will include an accessible, diverse array of services that: (1) meets the individual needs of children and families, and (2) is able to identify, assess, and continually respond effectively to emerging service needs within communities.

States can enhance their service array and resource development in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Engaging internal and external partners in a data-driven service array assessment, making specific use of information stored in state information systems as well as that collected by service providers

- Developing and implementing surveys of internal and external partners to determine the range of services needed to support and assist children, youth, and families

- Employing focus groups to find out more about improving the service array

Prepared on behalf of the Children's Bureau by JBS International, Inc.

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- Developing working protocols with internal and external partners to increase the accessibility and effectiveness of service delivery

- Engaging in ongoing collaborative work with existing partner organizations, such as youth advisory councils and family groups, to further develop the service array

- Working collaboratively with service providers in the use of a public data-sharing platform to explore community variables that will assist in the creation and refinement of services in areas of need

- Working with partner organizations to braid and blend funding to expand the service array and increase the ability to individualize services

Service Array and Resource Development comprises two items. Substantial conformity requires that at least one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 5**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, three states were in substantial conformity with Service Array and Resource Development.

### Figure 5: Service Array and Resource Development—Items and Substantial Conformity Determination

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Service Array and Resource Development** Item 29: Array of Services Item 30: Individualizing Services | Substantial conformity requires that one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength. |

## Item 29: Array of Services

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the service array and resource development system functioning to ensure that the following array of services is available and accessible in all political jurisdictions covered by the CFSP?*

- *Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs;*

- *Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment;*

- *Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable; and*

- *Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.*

Providing children and families with tailored services is essential to their safety, permanency, and well-being. When agencies provide ineffective services due to limitations and/or inflexibility, the probability of positive outcomes diminishes considerably.[45] Locating appropriate services for children and families leads to higher client engagement. Client engagement is a factor in better case outcomes for children and families.[46]

### Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The Children's Bureau encourages states to consider the experiences of different populations within the state

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45  The Child Welfare Policy & Practice Group. (2012, August). Matching services to child and family needs. *Improving Outcomes by Improving Practice*, *2*(2). Retrieved from Internet Archive (2021, September 30). https://web.archive.org/web/20140803042530/http://www.childwelfaregroup.org/documents/Vol2_Issue2.pdf

46  Damiani-Taraba, G., Dumbrill, G., Gladstone, J., Koster, A., Leslie, B., & Charles, M. (2017). The evolving relationship between casework skills, engagement, and positive case outcomes in child protection: A structural equation model. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 456–462.

When considering quantitative evidence to provide for Items 29 or 30, states could examine administrative data by looking at referrals, service utilization rates as evidenced by payment claims, types of care, levels of care, and performance measures for contracted services.

and the extent to which a lack of appropriate services, tailored to the culture, needs and experiences of children and families or a lack of access to appropriate services can lead to poorer outcomes. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### *Questions:*

1. What services does the state provide to assess the strengths and needs of children and families?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with parents and/or youth; administrative data (e.g., data from cases open for services across all jurisdictions in state); administrative data from agency stakeholders/partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers)

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

2. What services does the state provide to address the needs of families—in addition to individual children—to create a safe home environment?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with parents and/or youth; administrative data (e.g., data from cases open for services across all jurisdictions in state); administrative data from agency

stakeholders/partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers)

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

3. What services does the state provide to enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with parents and/or youth; administrative data (e.g., cases open for services across jurisdictions in state); administrative data from agency stakeholders/ partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers)

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

4. What services does the state provide to help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with parents and/or youth; administrative data (e.g., cases open for services across jurisdictions in state); administrative data from agency stakeholders/ partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers)

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

5. What are the differences in service availability and accessibility for populations, particularly those within the state that experience poorer outcomes?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data (utilization data); administrative data from agency stakeholders/partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers); interviews or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors;

interviews with parents and/or youth; interviews or focus groups with attorneys representing parents and/or children/youth; interviews or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents or kinship caregivers; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with service providers

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative and qualitative

6. To what extent were there waitlists for services? Which services had waitlists, if any? How long were/are the waiting times for services? How do waitlists vary by jurisdiction?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data (utilization data); administrative data from agency stakeholders/partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers); surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with youth and/or parents; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with service providers; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents or kinship caregivers

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

7. To what extent are there gaps in the service array that: assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs; address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment; enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable; and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency? How do gaps vary by jurisdiction?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data (utilization data); administrative data from agency stakeholders/partners (e.g., Medicaid agency, courts, contractors, providers); surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers and/or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with youth and/or parents; surveys, interviews,

> Florida developed and sent a survey to agencies to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of identified interventions and resources throughout the state. The measurement of effectiveness was based on the outcomes of children and families.

or focus groups with service providers; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents or kinship caregivers

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. What is the state's process for determining needs in these areas:

   - Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs;

   - Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment;

   - Services that accommodate language barriers for children, youth, and parents;

   - Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable; and

   - Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

*Data source(s):* Case review findings; focus groups with parents/youth; focus groups with caseworkers and supervisors, foster/adoptive parents, and judges; contracts for child/family assessments; administrative data on assessments (e.g., CAN referral rates and substantiation rates, rates of entry into foster care, length of stay in care, exit rates with re-entry rates); the statewide data indicators and context data

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare is an online, searchable database of programs designed to serve children and families involved in child welfare systems. Child welfare agencies can use this resource as they search for services to implement. For more information, see https://www.cebc4cw.org

2. How are families using the services provided by the state? To what extent are services underutilized in locations across the state?

   – What is the state's process for examining whether there are differences in services provided for families of diverse backgrounds (e.g., race, language, and disabilities)? How does the state use those data to improve services for families of diverse backgrounds?

3. What challenges or facilitators were there regarding the availability or accessibility of services?

   – What is the state's process for gathering feedback on which services are unavailable and inaccessible?

4. How were services coordinated cross-jurisdictionally?

   – To what extent were there payment issues across jurisdictions and how were they handled?

5. How have specific services demonstrated linkages to improvement in outcomes, e.g., reduction in maltreatment in foster care, reduction in re-entry into foster care, increased placement stability, or reductions in time to permanency?

The Georgetown University National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health designed a toolkit for states, Tribes, territories, and communities to expand the systems-of-care approach. Systems of care are designed to ensure services and supports for children and their families that address their unique physical, emotional, social, and educational needs. The toolkit includes a technical assistance assessment for states to identify areas of strength and potential opportunities when expanding such an approach. This resource is not specific to the child welfare system but overlaps the larger goal of providing an array of services. For more information, see the toolkit and the self-assessment of strategies (https://gucchd.georgetown.edu/products/Toolkit_SOC.pdf).

When providing data and evidence to answer questions for Items 29 or 30, states should use recent data (i.e., within the last 12 to 18 months, if possible, but at least within 3 years).

Home Visiting is an example of a service that is linked to decreased child maltreatment. For more information, including examples of how to assess effectiveness (e.g., randomized controlled trials), see https://www.casey.org/home-visiting-programs/

There is also evidence to support a finding that communities with family resource centers have positive outcomes, such as reductions in cases of child abuse and lower rates of child maltreatment investigations. For sample program evaluations, see https://www.casey.org/family-resource-centers-appendix/

Examples of how to individualize services are provided below. States will need to consider the unique needs of the populations they serve when providing evidence that demonstrates services being individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families.

needs and goals. Providing services that meet unique needs improves parent engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes.[48]

## Item 30: Individualizing Services

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the service array and resource development system functioning statewide to ensure that the services in Item 29 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?*

• *Services that are responsive to disabilities and unique needs, or accessed through flexible funding, are examples of how the individual needs of children and families are met by the agency.*

Individualized services help to meet the needs of each unique family. Access to services is a challenge many child welfare agencies face. In a national sample, agencies reported having inadequate access to child and adult mental health services as well as child and adult substance abuse services.[47] Child welfare agencies should demonstrate flexibility and creativity in their delivery of services as they respond to family

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. As states address these questions, they should give consideration to the variations in the populations they serve and consider how they ensure that all families and children are served with equal dignity and respect by the service array. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. To what extent are services individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, case record review data, or focus groups with youth/families; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

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47 Casanueva, C., Horne, B., Smith, K., Dolan, M., & Ringeisen, H. (2011). NSCAW II baseline report: Local agency (OPRE Report #2011-27g). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/nscaw-ii-baseline-report-childrens-services

48 Lietz, C. A. (2011). Theoretical adherence to family centered practice: Are strengths-based principles illustrated in families' descriptions of child welfare services? *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(6), 888–893.

2. To what extent are the services in Item 29 responsive to disabilities and other unique needs?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, budgeting process (e.g., flex funding), or focus groups with youth/families; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

3. **A.** What are the disability and special needs characteristics of the children and families served by the state?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data (utilization data); administrative data from agency partners

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

   **B.** To what extent are the services in Item 29 responsive to the disability and special needs of the children and families served?

   *Data source(s):* Surveys, interviews, or focus groups with youth/families; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with caseworkers or supervisors; surveys, interviews, or focus groups with foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

4. If the state serves children and families using flexible funding, what types of individualized services are provided through the funding?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data (utilization data); administrative data from agency partners; surveys, interviews, flex funding, or focus groups with caseworkers or supervisors

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

1. How does the state collect data on demographics and disability status to identify variations and to develop or provide resources?

2. What specialized or unique services are provided to families?

   – What have been the experiences of populations within the state in their communities or in the systems seeking to serve them?

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Child welfare agencies could develop policies that instill the necessity of providing services that meet the unique needs of children and families they serve. The following are examples of policy provisions adopted in California:

- Auxiliary aides and services

- Mandate to offer language services, identify language preferences of families, notify all clients of their right to language services, and document clients' need for language services

- Obtaining interpreters when applicable at no cost to the client

- Language line/telephonic services

- Staff training and ongoing service procedures in place for clients

Dettlaff, A. & O'Grady, C. (2015, March). *Language access.* The Center for Immigration and Child Welfare. https://cimmcw.org/wp-content/uploads/CICW-Language-Access.pdf

- What are the variations in outcomes for members of those populations?

- How do the child welfare system processes, practices, and procedures seek to ameliorate any variations in service accessibility?

- What data are available that help us understand the needs and strengths of diverse families?

- What innovative strategies have been employed to provide greater access to services?

- To what extent does contact include performance requirements that address variations in service delivery?

3. How were trauma-informed care principles infused into services provided to children and families?

4. What is the state's process for soliciting feedback from children, youth, and parents about the accessibility and quality of services?

- To what extent are there differences in responses from children, youth, and parents of diverse backgrounds?

# Chapter 7: Agency Responsiveness to the Community

The child welfare system is most effective when it includes consistent representation, engagement, and integration of the voices of those with a vested interest in the child welfare system. This includes families, youth, and other partners such as the legal and judicial communities, Tribes, caseworkers and supervisors, public and private service providers, and representatives from other federal programs. It is especially important to integrate family and youth voice into all aspects of child welfare decision-making. This recognizes that families and youth are the experts on their circumstances and are the individuals most knowledgeable about the solutions that will benefit them. Engaged stakeholders and system partners collaborate with the child welfare agency to identify and work toward shared goals and activities, assess outcomes, and develop strategic plans that help children safely remain with their families, whenever possible, and that improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children served by the child welfare system.

Ongoing effective collaboration between state agencies and their internal and external partners can result in higher quality decision-making, innovation, and service delivery that is more responsive to the needs of children and families and benefits the entire child welfare system.

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State agencies that are responsive to the community by engaging stakeholders and coordinating services so they complement or reinforce each other can improve outcomes for children and families. States can support the Agency Responsiveness to the Community systemic factor in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Actively engaging the ongoing participation of a large and diverse assortment of internal and external partners in developing, implementing, and evaluating the progress, strengths, and needs of the child welfare system

- Engaging and supporting stakeholders and those with a vested interest in the system to gain their ongoing input as part of developing and implementing provisions of the CFSP and developing APSRs

- Supporting local youth and/or parent advisory councils to seek continuous collaboration and consultation from youth and parent partners

- Employing surveys and focus groups to gain internal and external partner input and feedback

- Developing protocols for working with internal and external partners to increase the effectiveness of service delivery

- Developing intergovernmental agreements with Tribal partners to improve the coordination of services

- Developing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with other service providers (e.g., housing authorities, schools, Head Start) to improve services to children and families

- Establishing councils and workgroups with internal and external partners to gain regular and ongoing input and feedback

- Sharing data with internal and external partners to keep them informed of emerging issues and progress via presentations, reports, websites, data infrastructures that are designed to support data-sharing across systems, and publicly available performance dashboards

Agency Responsiveness to the Community comprises two items. Substantial conformity requires that one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 6**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, 47 states were in substantial conformity with the Agency Responsiveness to the Community systemic factor.

*Figure 6: Agency Responsiveness to the Community—Items and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Agency Responsiveness to the Community**<br>Item 31: State Engagement and Consultation With Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP and APSR<br><br>Item 32: Coordination of CFSP Services With Other Federal Programs | Substantial conformity requires that one of the two items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength. |

## Item 31: State Engagement and Consultation With Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP and APSR

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that, in implementing the provisions of the CFSP and developing related APSRs, the state engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?*

Consultation and collaboration between child welfare agencies and stakeholders can support the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families involved in the child welfare system. When child welfare

agencies collaborate and consult with community providers, access to appropriate resources and the outcomes of children and families improve.[49] For example, when child welfare staff and behavioral health providers work together collaboratively on things such as referral procedures, sharing information, alignment of treatments, and case plans, it improves the coordination of appropriate and effective services and resources for children and families.[50] Effective consultation and collaboration involves dialogue and discussion. When effective collaboration between child welfare agencies and community providers exists, both systems benefit, as do outcomes for families, including:[51]

- A better knowledge of, and access to, available services

- Providing timely responses to needs based on changes in the community environment

- The use of integrated approaches to services that meet individualized needs

- Less duplication of services

- An increased rate of family success and progression toward child welfare goals

- A decrease in safety and risk factors in homes

- Fewer children entering foster care

> The state's CFSP must describe the internal and external consultation process used to obtain broad and active involvement of major actors across the entire spectrum of the child and family service delivery system in the development of the plan.

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. How does the agency engage in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies?

   *Data source(s):* CFSP/APSR; description of consultation mechanisms to include purpose, participants, frequency, etc.; agency policies or written guidelines (e.g., memorandum of agreement or memorandum of understanding); state-level collaborating councils; CIP advisory committees; task forces

> In answering question 1, agencies should consider the processes and mechanisms that they have established that support ongoing consultation, including but not limited to recruiting from the communities of interest for membership on statewide committees or taskforces, membership on coordinating councils, participation in webinars, community-based listening sessions, the CIP, advisory boards, surveys, focus groups, or postings for public comment.

49  Gopalan, G., Kerns, S. E. U., Horen, M. J., & Lowe, J. (2021). Partnering for success: Factors impacting implementation of a cross-systems collaborative model between behavioral health and child welfare. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *48*(5), 839. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-021-01135-5

50  Lang, J. M., Campbell, K., Shanley, P., Crusto, C. A., & Connell, C. M. (2016). Building Capacity for Trauma-Informed Care in the Child Welfare System: Initial Results of a Statewide Implementation. *Child Maltreatment*, *21*(2), 113–124. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559516635273

51  Capacity Building Center for States. (2017). *Building and sustaining collaborative community relationships.* https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/building-sustaining-collaborative-relationships

2. What gaps exist in consultation?

   **A.** To what extent are there other groups or entities with which the state consults that are not represented here?

   **B.** What is the impact on potential gaps in knowledge needed for a comprehensive CFSP?

   **C.** What are the barriers or challenges, if any, to engaging with particular stakeholder groups?

   *Date source(s):* CFSP/APSR, list of program/practice modifications or enhancements that have occurred as a result of ongoing consultations; agency policies or regulations; press releases; joint statements

   Consultation with these groups should be representative and should include the range of people covered in the CFSP, including but not limited to:

   - All appropriate offices and agencies within the state agency (e.g., child protective services (CPS), foster care and adoption, social services block grants, reunification services, independent living, and other services to youth)

   - A wide array of state, local, Tribal, and community-based agencies and organizations, both public and private nonprofit, with experience in administering programs that provide services for infants, children, youth, adolescents, and families, including family preservation and family support services

   - Parents, including birth, adoptive, and foster parents; families that have a child or family member with a disability; children both in and outside the child welfare system; and service users from diverse groups

   For more information, see 45 CFR § 1357.15(l)(3)—Comprehensive child and family services plan requirements.

3. **A.** With which stakeholder groups did the agency consult? Did the stakeholder groups include all appropriate offices and agencies within the state agency; a wide array of state, local, Tribal, and community-based agencies and organizations across the state; parents, including birth, adoptive, and foster parents; and children both in and outside the child welfare system?

   *Data source(s):* CFSP/APSR; CIP reports; meeting calendars; meeting minutes; administrative data from IT systems (e.g., to see which stakeholder groups provided feedback on a state's website); interviews or focus groups with representatives of stakeholder groups

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

   When answering question 3A, it is also important to consider how many stakeholder groups the agency consulted with. As an example, consulting with only one youth or only one judge, or with only stakeholders representing one region of the state would not sufficiently capture the intention of the item to be representative.

   **B.** What was the agency's process for understanding and documenting the major concerns and/or interests of these representatives?

   *Data source(s):* CFSP/APSR; interviews or focus groups with agency staff and representatives from various stakeholder groups

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**C.** What evidence does the state have to show that it addresses the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?

*Data source(s):* CFSP/APSR; surveys, interviews or focus groups with representatives

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

**D.** What were representatives' perceptions of how the agency addressed their concerns (i.e., were their concerns heard? Could they see their concerns and recommendations reflected in the agency's CFSP/ASPR or program improvement efforts?) and how often the agency has engaged with them?

*Data source(s):* Results from surveys and focus groups with representatives

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

When providing results from surveys (for any question), the agency should briefly describe the survey design, implementation, and results, including both the response rate and the analyses of the responses. When providing results from focus groups, the agency should provide similar information about the design and execution of the focus groups, including where they were held, how participants were recruited, the relevant characteristics of the participants, and what the agency learned.

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.



*Questions:*

1.  How does the agency collaborate with stakeholders to ensure that the agency's policies and practices are positioned to support agency involvement in the community it serves? Does the agency have an intentional or specific approach to collaboration? What is the state's process for soliciting input from stakeholders on what they want collaboration with the agency to look like?

2.  To what extent does agency collaboration with stakeholders address individual and systemic/structural bias in child welfare decision-making?

    –   What is the state's process for gathering feedback from stakeholders, including children, youth, and families, about which community providers the agency should collaborate with?

    –   What is the state's process for ensuring that they collaborate with community partners who serve populations that are vulnerable or at risk?

The Capacity Building Center for States developed a resource that states can use to help overcome common challenges in collaboration efforts with community providers. This resource provides possible strategies states can consider when facing barriers in their efforts to sustain collaborative community relationships. For more information, see Building and Sustaining Collaborative Community Relationships.

Source: Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.) *Building and sustaining collaborative community relationships.* Available upon request.

3. To what extent does the state serve communities beyond those covered in the CFSP and, if so, how are they served?

4. What have been the identifiable outcomes or results of the agency's ongoing consultation efforts?

5. What is the state's process for recruiting parents and youth who have been (or still are) service recipients to become consultants?

   – How were the participants prepared?

   – How did the agency prepare to engage with these consultants?

   – To what extent did they understand why they were participating?

   – How does the state adjust their scheduling process to accommodate parents and youth?

   – How are persons with lived experience involved in assessing the quality and efficacy of services?

   – What is the state's process for examining long-term opportunities for engagement with parents and youth?

   – How has the state involved parents and youth in an oversight role (e.g., engage parents/youth as consultants)?

## Item 32: Coordination of CFSP Services With Other Federal Programs

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that the state's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?*

Children and families involved in the child welfare system often have complex needs and therefore require access to a multitude of services and benefits. Coordination between child welfare agencies and relevant federal programs is essential for ensuring that families have their needs met. For example, children who are in out-of-home placements are more likely to need physical and behavioral health care services, so timely initial health assessments are important for connecting them to services that meet their unique needs.[52] Consequently, it is important that these children be enrolled in Medicaid to ensure that they receive physical, behavioral, and dental health care services. In Round 3, services most often needed but insufficiently available, included substance abuse treatment, behavioral/mental health treatment, housing, childcare, and employment assistance indicating that coordinating with the state offices responsible for

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52  Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2016). Mental and physical health of children in foster care. *Pediatrics, 138*(5), e20161118. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1118

administering federally supported substance abuse programs, state housing authorities, and state agencies administering federal childcare and employment support programs are also important. Coordinating services across systems is also key for young people aging out of the foster care system. Coordinating services and benefits for children and families helps states meet federally mandated goals for safety, permanency, and well-being.[53]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

> Examples of federal or federally assisted programs include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, Child Care, Head Start, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Housing and Urban Development programs, Social Security, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, quality improvement centers, federal demonstration grants, and community-based child abuse prevention programs.

### Questions:

1. **A.** What federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population does the state partner with to provide services, and what services are provided?

   *Data source(s):* Description/narrative; CFSP

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

> For examples of Medicaid-funded services that support children, youth, and families involved with the child welfare system, see https://www.casey.org/medicaid-funded-services/

**B.** What is the state's process for partnering with these programs (e.g., shared funding streams or shared data or metrics; prioritization of access for families served by the child welfare agency, use of the same providers)?

*Data source(s):* Description/narrative; CFSP; CCWIS Advance Planning Documents and other CCWIS-related documents; agency partners' federal plans; data-sharing agreements for service coordination; descriptions of MOUs with state agencies administering federal programs

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

> This resource provides a comparison of three selected sites that use cross-system collaboration in their work with youth. The keys to success and sustainability when using cross-system collaboration are provided for each site. http://www.ncjj.org/pdf/Juvenile%20Justice%20Geography,%20Policy,%20Practice%20and%20Statistics%202015/WhenSystemsCollaborateJJGPSCaseStudyFinal042015.pdf

2. **A.** How does the state ensure that services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?

   *Data source(s):* Descriptions of MOUs with state agencies administering federal programs and multidisciplinary teams; CFSP; data-sharing agreements for service coordination; protocols for referrals or joint staffing; focus groups or interviews

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53  Center for Health Care Strategies. (2017). *How can Medicaid-funded services support children, youth, and families involved with child protection?* Casey Family Programs. https://www.casey.org/medicaid-funded-services/

with representatives from federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population including front line caseworkers

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

The National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare has a web-based resource page that provides practice and policy publications that can help communities build cross-system partnerships to help support the needs of their families in child welfare. For more information, see https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/collaborative/default.aspx

**B.** What evidence does the state have that the services are coordinated?

*Data source(s):* Utilization data; MOUs; reports/descriptions of multidisciplinary teams; agency partners' federal plans; surveys, focus groups or interviews with representatives from federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population; data-sharing agreements for service coordination; focus groups with parents, youth, and/or caseworkers

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

**C.** To what extent does the state experience challenges, i.e., geographic, economic or others, in trying to coordinate services across systems?

*Data source(s):* Utilization data; MOUs; reports/descriptions of multidisciplinary teams; agency partners' federal plans; surveys, focus groups or interviews with representatives from federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population; data-sharing agreements for service coordination; focus groups with parents, youth, and/or caseworkers

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative or qualitative

The ability to track children and families through various service systems is one indicator of a functional program. When answering question 2, states should consider what efforts they have undertaken to be able to identify children and families who are served by multiple systems. States could provide information on the number of children/families who are represented and overlap in service systems over time (e.g., over the last 3 fiscal years).

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1.  Does the state currently have or is it planning to have some innovation that will support service coordination across entities? This could range from local or regional partnerships, new or ongoing demonstration grant programs, other partnerships.

2.  What is the state's process for sharing or exchanging information between agencies to ensure children, youth, and families receive the services they need? What challenges exist?

3.  How are service recipients made aware of available services that could be coordinated across systems?

Title IV-E prevention services programs allow states to receive federal reimbursement for some mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and in-home parent skill-based programs that help prevent the need for out-of-home placements. Title IV-E prevention services assist states in their ability to provide an array of services through community coordination and agency collaboration.

The CB keeps an updated status of states with submitted and approved Title IV-E Prevention Program Five Year Plans at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data/status-submitted-title-iv-e-prevention-program-five-year-plans

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. *Planning title IV-E prevention services: A toolkit for states.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/policy-regulation/planning-title-iv-e-prevention-services-toolkit-states

Human-Centered Design can create more efficient and effective social service programs. Human-centered design helps to ensure that stakeholder engagement creates innovations and solutions that are focused on co-creation, inclusion, transparency, and the breakdown of hierarchies. Human-centered design guarantees that agencies and programs will think about the culture, context, and constraints of the families they serve.

Source: Shaw, S., & Supplee, L. (2018, July 16). *Human-Centered Design can create more efficient and effective social service programs.* Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/blog/human-centered-design-can-create-more-efficient-and-effective-social-service-programs

4. The state could further examine with whom they did or did not coordinate:

   – With which federal or federally assisted programs with which the agency may have an overlapping population has the agency not coordinated? What service gaps or inefficiencies (e.g., overspending; overlapping services) does the lack of coordination create in the functioning of the statewide system?

   – To what extent did the state learn about other programs with which they may want to coordinate to strengthen their service provision?

   – What challenges are there to coordinating with entities responsible for administering federal or federally assisted programs?

5. How are agencies designing efforts to improve outcomes by engaging those with lived experience?

6. How are agencies working with programs that are explicitly designed to help agencies engage with the community (e.g., Thriving Families, Safer Children, or programs for young adults)?

7. States could use their administrative data to identify future needs and opportunities for coordination:

   – How has the agency examined whether existing collaborative efforts (e.g., initiatives put in place years ago) are still effective at meeting the needs of the served population? To what extent is the agency exploring the development of CCWIS data exchanges to support collaboration?

8. What is the state's process for gathering feedback from stakeholders, including children, youth, and families, regarding federal or federally assisted programs with which agencies can coordinate?

# Chapter 8: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

A well-functioning child welfare system relies on foster parents, including relative caregivers, to provide a temporary home for children and youth who cannot be safely supported in their family homes. Foster families should be empowered to provide support to families in a time of need or crisis and to be a resource to allow families to remain actively involved in the lives of their children while out of their homes. When children are not able to safely return to their families, adoptive families provide a secure living environment and can help children maintain relationships with important people in their lives. It is a fundamental responsibility of child welfare systems to maintain a pool of out-of-home caregivers and adoptive families who can provide safe environments that meet children's unique and diverse needs and reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in care.

States can enhance their foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system in several ways, including but not limited to:

- Developing and implementing diligent recruitment and retention plans that provide a pool of foster and adoptive parents that reflect the diversity of the children in care

- Generating quantitative data that demonstrate compliance with required background checks

- Using their administrative database to generate more evidence about the caregiver network, which can be used to support a range of programs, practices, and policies

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- Providing descriptions of relevant policies, standards, and methods that ensure the safety of foster and adoptive placements, and operating mechanisms to ensure those policies, standards, and methods are followed

- Engaging effective cross-jurisdictional resources (e.g., local, state, and national adoption exchanges) to facilitate timely permanency

Foster and Adoptive Parenting Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention comprises four items. Substantial conformity requires that three of the four items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength (see **Figure 7**). In Round 3 of the CFSRs, 14 states were in substantial conformity with this systemic factor.

*Figure 7: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention—Items and Substantial Conformity Determination*

| Systemic Factor/Item | Substantial Conformity Determination |
|---|---|
| **Systemic Factor: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention**<br>Item 33: Standards Applied Equally<br>Item 34: Requirements for Criminal Background Checks<br>Item 35: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes<br>Item 36: State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Placement | Substantial conformity requires that three of the four items for this systemic factor be rated as a Strength. |

## Item 33: Standards Applied Equally

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that state standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?*

Having state standards in place is essential for ensuring that children's environments are healthy, stable, and safe when they are in out-of-home care. In 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) became law.[54] The FFPSA included a major effort to standardize requirements across states and directed the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to identify model licensing standards to increase uniformity. Therefore, states must develop standards reasonably in accord with national standards, including the final National Model Foster Family Home Licensing Standards. Some examples of safety standards include having carbon monoxide detectors, safe heating, safe drinking water, up-to-date immunizations for all household members, recent physical exams, disclosures of substance use disorders and mental illnesses, and criminal background checks.[55] Licensing standards are necessary to promote consistency and child safety.[56] Monitoring standards against measurable performance indicators is a useful means for promoting and evaluating the care children receive in out-of-home placements and informing a process of continuous quality improvement (CQI).[57]

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54  The FFPSA was included in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Public Law 115–123.

55  Children's Bureau. (2019, February 4). *ACYF-CB-IM-19-01*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im1901.pdf

56  National Association for Regulatory Administration. (2018). *Model family foster home licensing standards*. https://nara.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/SharedResources/Model%20Licensing%20Standards%202018%20update.pdf

57  Boel-Studt, S., Huefner, J. C., Bender, K., Huang, H., & Abell, N. (2019). Developing quality standards and performance measures for residential group care: Translating theory to practice. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth*, *36*(4), 260–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2018.1536494

Title IV-E agencies must develop plans that provide for the establishment and maintenance of standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions. These standards must be reasonably in accord with related standards developed by national organizations, including standards related to admission policies, safety, sanitation, and protection of civil rights, and that permit the use of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard.

For more information, see § 471(a)(10) in title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state, including information as to whether and how the state's standards differ from the Model Licensing Standards. The state then provides data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### *Questions:*

1. **A.** What are the state's standards that are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?

   *Data source(s):* The state regulation/policy for each caregiver category (e.g., foster parents, licensed kinship parents, pre-adoptive parents, treatment/therapeutic foster parents, congregate care settings). Note that in some states responsibility for licensing or approving homes or child care institutions rests outside the child welfare agency

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**B.** How do the state's standards vary by caregiver type (e.g., foster parent vs. adoptive parent vs. licensed kinship provider) or institution type (e.g., group home vs. other types of childcare institutions, including private child placement agencies)?

*Data source(s):* Description/narrative of state standards for each caregiver category (e.g., foster parents, adoptive parents, treatment/therapeutic foster parents, congregate care settings)

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

2. **A.** How does the state monitor the licensing and relicensing processes?

   *Data source(s):* Description/narrative of who monitors the standards and how often; administrative data (e.g., use of "ticklers"); contracts

   *Parameters:* State child welfare agencies should answer this question for both licensees they are responsible for licensing and monitoring and for licensees that other state entities are responsible for licensing and monitoring (e.g., private agencies, congregate care settings)

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**B.** If the state has a waiver process (e.g., for relative caregivers, or to allow large sibling groups to be placed together), what is the state's process for granting waivers? Who grants waivers? What are the reasons for granting waivers, and are waivers specific to the child or to the home? How are waivers tracked? How often is the process for granting waivers reviewed? How many waivers were granted in the past 3 years and for what reasons (e.g., how many were for safety-related reasons)?

*Data source(s):* Administrative data; contracts; licensing reports; description of waiver process and how waivers are tracked; description of what standards may be waived; number of waivers

granted in a specified period and reasons for granting the waiver; percentage of homes where waivers have been granted

*Parameters:* The child welfare agency should answer this question for both homes or facilities they are responsible for licensing and those that other state agencies are responsible for licensing (e.g., private agencies), within a specified period of time

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

> The FFPSA established a set of common standards for the licensing of foster homes and the process for obtaining waivers of those licensing standards.

3. What is the state's QA process to monitor the application of the standards?

   *Data source(s):* Description of QA process; administrative data; administrative data from agency partner that manages licensing, recruitment, and retention; QA report, e.g., results of a review of a sample of licensing files; interviews or focus groups with parties responsible for licensing; QA/CQI; CFSP

   *Parameters:* The child welfare agency should answer this question for both those homes or facilities they are responsible for licensing and those that other state agencies are responsible for licensing (e.g., private agencies) within a specified period of time

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. What process does the state use to review and update its licensing standards?

2. To what extent is the state evaluating its recruitment, training, support, and oversight of kinship caregivers? If the state does not license or approve kinship caregiver homes, how are kinship caregivers assessed?

3. States can use administrative data to examine the following questions by jurisdiction, beginning by defining caregivers who provided services during a specified time period and asking:

   – To what extent were corrective action plans required for foster family homes or licensed kinship caregiver homes for failure to meet licensing standards, if any?

   – What relationships exist, if any, between waivers or corrective action and maltreatment in care and/or placement stability?

   – Of the childcare institutions that were licensed, how many were re-licensed? What were the types of standard violations for which corrective action plans were required?

4. What supports does the state have in place to bring caregivers into compliance with standards?

Florida is one example of a state that has been taking steps to establish a set of quality standards for residential group care providers. For more information, including lessons learned and recommendations for the child welfare field, see resources from the Florida Institute for Child Welfare.

Source: Florida Institute for Child Welfare. (n.d.). *Quality standards for residential group care.* https://ficw.fsu.edu/GCQSA

Also see: Boel-Studt, S., Huefner, J. C., Bender, K., Huang, H., & Abell, N. (2019). Developing quality standards and performance measures for residential group care: Translating theory to practice. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth*, *36*(4), 260–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2018.1536494

## Item 34: Requirements for Criminal Background Checks

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that the state complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?*

Criminal background checks are required for all applicants who seek to become foster or adoptive parents. The completion of criminal background checks is a standard put in place to protect the safety and well-being of children in out-of-home placements. State statutes requiring background checks are supported by federal law in title IV-E of the Social Security Act.[58] Under

federal law, states must include in their title IV-E state plans provisions for completing all of the following:[59]

- Criminal record checks, including fingerprint-based checks of national crime information databases, for any prospective foster or adoptive parent prior to approving the placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child

- Checks of any child abuse and neglect registry maintained by the state for information on any prospective foster or adoptive parent and on any other adult living in the home

- Checks of the child abuse and neglect registry of any other state in which a prospective parent or other adult has resided in the preceding 5 years

- Criminal record checks, including fingerprint-based checks of national crime information databases, on any relative guardian and any other adult living in the home of a relative guardian before the relative guardian may receive kinship guardianship assistance payments on behalf of the child

### Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

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58  See 42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(20) (2018). https://tinyurl.com/kchxwdvx

59  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Background checks for prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/background/

*Questions:*

1.  **A.** What is the state's process for ensuring that the state complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, including placements in childcare institutions managed by private child placement agencies licensed by the state?

    *Data source(s):* Description/narrative of state policy and/or regulation for conducting fingerprint-based criminal background checks and child abuse and neglect registry maintained by the state for information on any prospective foster or adoptive parent and any other adult living in the home; description of process for implementing the state policy/regulation

    *Parameters:* Foster care and adoptive placements during a specified period of time (including placement types licensed by an agency partner or private child placement agency, and childcare institutions, e.g., congregate care)

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

    **B.** What is the state's process for ensuring that foster care and adoptive placements remain in compliance with required criminal background clearances (including changes in family circumstances, such as a new adult family member entering the household, children reaching the age of 18, or new staff at a childcare institution)?

    *Data source(s):* Description/narrative of state policy and/or regulation; case review; administrative data;
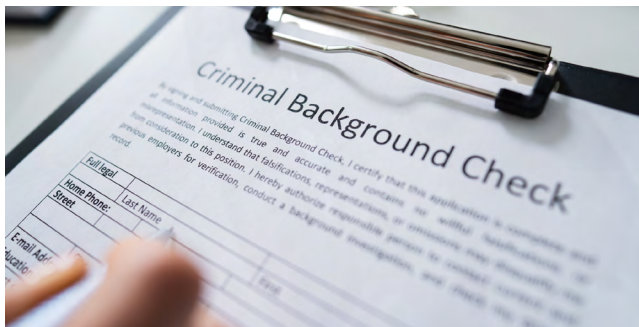


surveys, focus groups or interviews with parties responsible for conducting criminal background clearances

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

2.  **A.** What evidence does the state have to demonstrate that licensed foster care and approved adoptive placements, including those placements managed by childcare institutions or private child placement agencies licensed by the state, have met the requirements?

    *Data source(s):* Administrative data; case review; Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review findings; contract monitoring reports

    *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

    **B.** If the requirements were not applied to foster care and adoptive placements, what is the process for addressing noncompliance?

    *Data source(s):* Description/narrative of state process and system for tracking requirements; focus groups with licensing workers/managers and those responsible for monitoring childcare institutions

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

3.  Does the state have a process for identifying instances when a child was placed in a foster care or adoptive placement, including at childcare institutions, before the required background check was completed and, if so, how often does that happen?

    *Data source(s):* Description/narrative of state process; administrative data; case review; review of childcare institution licensing records; IV-E Review; licensing/monitoring reports from those entities responsible for monitoring and licensing childcare institutions

    *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

4. **A.** What is the state's process for monitoring the ongoing safety of foster care placements for children (e.g., re-running criminal background checks, assessing child safety while in placement or while on trial home visits, responding to allegations of child maltreatment in out-of-home placements, responding to allegations of policy violations in out-of-home placements; response to children on runaway status)?

   *Data source(s):* State policy including childcare institution licensing and regulations; administrative data; case review; IV-E Review; worker-child visitation data

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

   **B.** How often did safety concerns surface for children placed in licensed foster homes, pre-adoptive homes, or childcare institutions?

   *Data source(s):* Case review; administrative data; surveys, focus groups, or interviews with parties responsible for conducting criminal background clearances, licensing/approving families or institutions; caseworkers and supervisors; parents and youth served by the agency; judges; administrative data (e.g., reports of child maltreatment in foster care and investigative findings; critical incident reports); contract monitoring reports

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

5. What is the state's process for ensuring safety when children are placed in non-licensed/approved placements (e.g., hotel rooms or agency offices) overnight until a placement is secured, and how often does this happen?

   *Data source(s):* Description of state policy/ protocol; administrative data

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

> When answering question 5, states can produce data on the number of children who were placed in licensed or non-licensed homes during a given period of time.

6. What is the state's process for ensuring that it has a case planning process in place that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children? Are there differences between monitoring contracted providers who recruit and manage homes or operate facilities versus those that are recruited and managed by the child welfare agency?

   *Data source(s):* Statewide data indicators data (e.g., maltreatment in care); CPS reports of alleged child maltreatment for children in foster care/adoptive placements; case reviews (CFSR Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions, Item 3, questions E, F, and F1; Item 14); administrative data or case reviews on caseworker visits with children (including what was addressed and where the visits occurred); interviews or focus groups with caseworkers/supervisors; interviews or focus groups with children/youth; interviews or focus groups with judges and attorneys; contract monitoring reports

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

> When answering question 6, states should consider what can be done as part of the case planning process to address the safety of children (e.g., ensure regular quality worker-child visits).

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

### Questions:

1. If safety concerns surfaced during the licensing or relicensing process, what were the patterns in the type of home, childcare facility/institution, family visitation, or trial home visit? Are there differences between monitoring contracted providers who recruit and manage homes or operate facilities versus those that are recruited and managed by the child welfare agency?

2. What services or supports are provided to caregivers to ensure that they can safely care for children in their homes? Are there differences between monitoring contracted providers who recruit and manage homes or operate facilities versus those that are recruited and managed by the child welfare agency?

> The safety of children can be promoted by developing effective, easy-to-use fingerprint-based criminal history background check systems that identify ineligible applicants and monitor current employees.

3. What is the relationship between safety-related concerns and placement stability in the state?

4. What are the reasons for failing to pass criminal background checks? Does the state have criteria for disqualifying offenses that exceed federal criteria?

5. What is the state's process for handling instances where people did not pass criminal background checks (i.e., disqualifying offenses)? What is the process for filing an appeal, if any?

6. How accessible is it for prospective foster and adoptive parents and caregivers to obtain the appropriate criminal background checks? Does accessibility differ across the state?

7. What is the state's process for monitoring and addressing unnecessary or over-placements of children in foster and adoptive homes as a safety issue? What are the reasons for over-placements and how do they vary by location across the state?

   – States could examine whether there is a statistical relationship between over-placement and placement stability and/or over-placement and maltreatment in foster care.

8. How often does the state monitor homes without placements?

9. What are the requirements for criminal background checks and processes for ensuring child safety in Qualified Residential Treatment Program child care institutions? How are they monitored?

10. What is the state's process for conducting non-federally required background checks?

## Item 35: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide?*

Diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families can support children's connections and help to ensure that children develop permanent relationships with supportive and caring adults. These long-term committed relationships help to support positive

Diligent recruitment plans may include:

- Descriptions of characteristics of the children who need homes

- Strategies to reach individuals and communities that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in care who need homes

  a. Training staff to work with diverse communities

  b. Disseminating general and specific child information

  c. Ensuring that all prospective parents have access to the home study process

  d. Developing strategies to handle linguistic barriers

See announcement of funding opportunity: Administration for Children and Families. (2022). Child Welfare Policy Manual. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public_html/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp_pf.jsp?id=4

permanency outcomes for children.[60] Federal policy[61] requires states to recruit a pool of foster and adoptive families that reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in their care, although research suggests that there is a discrepancy between the percentages of foster parents and children in foster care who reflect that diversity, indicating a need to understand best practices for targeted recruitment.[62] Effective diligent recruitment efforts improve permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care, recognize that permanency efforts should begin when a child first enters care, provide searches for family members on both sides of a child's birth family, and provide

information on natural relationships such as teachers, mentors, coaches, and parents of children's friends.[63]

## Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

### *Questions:*

1. What is the state's process for recruiting foster and adoptive parents (e.g., what data and information are used to develop the plan and determine whether the plan addresses statewide needs; how the plan is monitored, including whether recruitment targets are met; and how often the plan is reviewed and revised to reflect needs statewide)?

   *Data source(s):* Description of process to include what data is used to inform the plan and how it is monitored/revised to reflect needs statewide; CFSP; APSR

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

When answering these questions, states should also consider homes licensed by private child placement agencies that accept children in the custody of the state.

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60  Feldman, S. W., Price, K. M., & Ruppel, J. (2016). Not too late: Effects of a diligent recruitment program for hard to place youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 65*, 26–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.008

61  See the Multiethnic Placement Act and Interethnic Adoption Provisions.

62  Hanlon, R., Feltner, A., Day, A., Vanderwill, L., Kim, J., & Dallimore, E. J. (2021). Systematic Review of Foster Parent Recruitment. *Child Welfare, 99*(1) 117–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389420970034

63  Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018, May). *Diligent recruitment of families for children in the foster care system*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/diligentrecruitment2018.pdf

2. **A.** How does the state ensure that the pool of available foster and adoptive families meets the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed?

*Data source(s):* Description of the state's process

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

**B.** What evidence does the state have to demonstrate that the diversity of the current pool of available foster and adoptive homes meets the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed?

*Data source(s):* Administrative data (e.g., SACWIS/CCWIS systems)

*Measurement approach:* Quantitative

As states consider whether the ethnic and racial diversity of the current pool of available foster and adoptive homes matches the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in the state for whom homes are needed, they might wish to consider examining the following questions for important context information:

- How many children and youth typically enter care each year, and what are their ethnic/racial characteristics?

- How many foster and adoptive caregivers are typically newly licensed each year, and what are their ethnic/racial characteristics?

- How many children and youth are currently being served by the agency, and what are their ethnic/racial characteristics?

- How many foster and adoptive homes are serving children and youth, and what are the ethnic/racial characteristics of the foster and adoptive parents?

States can use administrative data to answer the following questions:

- How many children and youth were without placement resources, and for how long?

- Of those who were referred to a national organization to recruit for a foster/adoptive placement, what were the results?

- How many youth whose permanency goal was adoption and/or who had parents whose parental rights had been terminated, exited via emancipation? How many of those youth exited to emancipation without a permanent resource?

**C.** If potential foster and adoptive families do not reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed, what is the state's process for addressing the gaps?

*Data source(s):* Description of state's process; interviews and focus groups with program managers and supervisors

*Measurement approach:* Qualitative

The FFPSA sets new model licensing standards for family foster homes (including kinship homes) and incentivizes recruitment and retention efforts towards high-quality foster families. For a collection of critical information that can be used to identify key qualities of highly successful resource (foster) families (e.g., access to support systems, attentiveness to the caregiver-child relationship, sufficient economic resources, value connection to the child's birth family and healthy family functioning), which may help with efforts to target recruitment of these families, see Vanderwill et al. (2021).

Sources: National Conference of State Legislatures. (2020). *Family First Prevention Services Act.*

Vanderwill, L. A., Salazar, A. M., Jenkins, G., Larwelle, J., McMahon, A. K., Day, A., & Haggerty, K. (2021). Systematic literature review of foster and adoptive caregiver factors for increasing placement stability and permanency. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *15*(4), 487–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2020.1760176

States can use administrative data to examine the following questions by jurisdiction, beginning by defining a specified time period:

- How well did the agency meet goals set for recruiting a diverse group of foster and adoptive homes?

- What were the challenges in meeting those goals for approving families?

Communication between foster parents and their caseworkers helps to ensure that foster parents feel supported and engaged and improves the chances of retainment.

Sources: Leffler, K., & Ahn, H. (2021). Foster parent perspectives and experiences with public child welfare. *Journal of Public Child Welfare.* https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2021.1874592

Wulczyn, F., Orlebeke, B., Hislop, K., Schmits, F., McClanahan, J., & Huang, L. (2018). *The Dynamics of Foster Home Recruitment and Retention.* 1–19.

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider.

### *Question:*

1. How does the state recruit foster and adoptive parents for children with special needs or for children for whom the state sometimes finds it challenging to locate foster or adoptive placements? What is the state's method for collecting information on the nature and needs of its foster care population?

2. States could use administrative data to ask about things like:

   – How many families were recruited?

   – What are the attributes of recruited families?

   – How long have the recruited families stayed active?

   – How many placements do recruited families have?

   – When placements leave, what are the reasons?[64]

3. What is the state doing to encourage the recruitment of kinship caregivers? What are the challenges to that recruitment, and how to they address them? How often does the state gather feedback from kinship caregivers regarding strengths, areas needing improvement, and the need for support? What is the state's process for supporting kinship caregivers during recruitment and throughout the time they care for children?

4. What is the state's process for retaining foster and adoptive parents? What evidence does the state have that these efforts are effective? For example, how often does the state gather feedback from foster and adoptive parents regarding strengths, areas needing improvement, and the need for support?

5. What are the reasons foster and adoptive parents surrender their license/approval or choose not to renew?

States can gather youth perspectives through interviews or focus groups on what foster and adoptive parents need to be successful in caring for them.

6. If contract agencies individually recruit foster homes, how does the state monitor the use of those homes for children who move from one service area to another?

7. What services are in place across the state for foster parents licensed to care for children with high needs?

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64  More information about foster parent dynamics of retention and recruitment can be found here: https://fcda.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Foster-Home-Report-Final_FCDA_October2018.pdf

8. Does the state have a foster/adoptive parent advocate or agency to serve foster and adoptive parents? If so, how has this affected the retention of foster and adoptive families?

9. What is the state's process for involving youth and parents in evaluating the state's diligent recruitment plan, including identifying gaps and where to recruit foster and adoptive parents?

10. How does the state assess the current needs of children and youth in care to inform the recruitment plan for foster and adoptive families needed to care for them?

11. How are foster and adoptive parents, caregivers, parents, and youth involved in the development of the state's recruitment and retention plans and assessment of their effectiveness?

The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids provides tools and resources to help child welfare systems develop strategic, data-driven recruitment plans to build and sustain a pool of foster families that can meet the needs of children in foster care. The resource describes ideas and strategies to consider, examples of ways to develop recruitment plans, tools that can be used in the planning processes and adapted to meet specific needs, and key considerations to explore. https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/developing-recruitment-plans-toolkit.pdf

New York's Office of Children and Family Services published a blueprint for targeted recruitment and retention of kinship, foster, and adoptive parents. It is a hands-on, step-by-step guide for putting diligent recruitment into action, with tools and tips you can use along the way. https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/fostercare/recruitment/

## Item 36: State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements

In the statewide assessment, states are asked to provide relevant data and information to answer this question:

*How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide?*

A key strategy that helps children in foster care achieve permanency is the use of cross-jurisdictional resources. When caseworkers seek prospective foster and adoptive families for children in care, having the ability to widen the scope to include other jurisdictions may offer the best opportunity for finding a suitable home. The Keeping Children and Families Safe Act and ASFA both focus on timely permanency for children in foster care and support the need for interjurisdictional placements when it is in the best interests of the child.[65] ASFA recognizes the importance of going beyond a state's geographical boundary to find safe, nurturing, and permanent homes.[66]

### Questions for Exploring the Systemic Factor Federal Requirements

States can begin by describing how the systemic factor item operates within the state and then provide data and evidence to demonstrate functioning. The following questions are intended to help states begin to think about what data and evidence they can provide in their statewide assessments to demonstrate functioning. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of questions or data sources.

65  Children's Bureau. (2012). *A report to Congress on interjurisdictional adoption of children in foster care.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/report-congress-interjurisdictional-adoption-children-foster-care
66  Cowan, A. B. (2004). New strategies to promote the adoption of older children out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*(11), 1007–1020. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2004.08.002

### Questions:

1. **A.** What is the state's process for using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements within the state for waiting children? What tools and resources do they use? How does the state know whether its tools and resources are effective?

   *Data source(s):* Description of state procedures and protocols for in-state cross-jurisdictional placements; memoranda of understanding; CFSP (tools and resources); administrative data

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

   **B.** What is the state's process for using cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements outside of the state for waiting children? What tools and resources do they use, such as exchanges, national recruitment, or agreements with border states? How does the state know whether its tools and resources are effective?

   *Data source(s):* Description of state procedures and protocols for cross-jurisdictional placements; memoranda of understanding; CFSP (tools and resources); administrative data; Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) requests

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative or quantitative

   **C.** What evidence does the state have to show that cross-jurisdictional resources are effective in the facilitation of timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children statewide?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; ICPC requests

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

2. **A.** What is the state's process for sending ICPC home study requests to other states?

   *Data source(s):* Description of state procedures and protocols for ICPC requests

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

   **B.** What has been the state's experience with ICPC home study requests to other states? How many requests have been responded to within the 60-day federal requirement? How many requests have resulted in a placement for a child?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; ICPC requests

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

3. **A.** What is the state's process for responding to ICPC home study requests from other states?

   *Data source(s):* Description of state procedures and protocols for ICPC requests

   *Measurement approach:* Qualitative

   **B.** For what percentage of cases did the state complete ICPC requests for home studies within the 60-day federal requirement? How many requests have resulted in a placement for a child?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; ICPC requests

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative

ICPC requests facilitate the interstate placement of children in four main ways:

- They increase permanent placement options for children in foster care;

- They protect children's safety through services offered by receiving states;

- They ensure compliance with important child welfare laws before a placement is made; and

- They help create a network of cooperation and information exchange between states making interstate placements.

Source: Children's Bureau. (2012). *A report to Congress on interjurisdictional adoption of children in foster care*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/report-congress-interjurisdictional-adoption-children-foster-care

4. What are the challenges to effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources for permanent placements?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; ICPC requests; survey, interview, or focus group with ICPC Administrator; survey, interview, or focus group with caseworkers and supervisors

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative and qualitative

5. How does the state work with other governments, e.g., other countries and Tribes, to facilitate the placement of children?

   *Data source(s):* Administrative data; memoranda of agreement/ understanding with other countries and Tribes; survey, interview, or focus group with program managers; survey, interview, or focus group with caseworkers and supervisors

   *Measurement approach:* Quantitative and qualitative

## Getting Curious: Moving Beyond Federal Requirements, and Areas for Future Consideration

These questions are intended to help states consider what other questions they might want to explore beyond the federal requirements. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of things to consider or data sources.

*Questions:*

1. What is the state's process for identifying children who need adoptive or permanent placements? How long are those children waiting? Are there sub-populations among these children and youth who have particular characteristics? How does the state monitor that list? Have cross-jurisdictional resources been made available to these children?

2. What is the relationship between well-being (e.g., maintaining children's connections) and the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for permanent placements? How does well-being differ for children who have to wait a long time for placement?

   – States can gather this information from focus groups with caseworkers/supervisors or youth

3.  What is the relationship between the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for permanent placements and placement stability?

    –   States can gather this information from focus groups with caseworkers/supervisors or youth

    –   States can also gather this information through administrative data

4.  What is the state's process for monitoring child safety and case progress for cases that cross jurisdictions?

The COVID-19 pandemic required healthcare systems and child welfare agencies to adopt new protocols and procedures to help ensure the safety and well-being of children in care. Strategies for cross-jurisdictional communication promote effective collaboration as well as the safety of children. The following are a few key strategies to consider:

•   Create a centralized location to communicate the most current guidance on protocols and procedures for the delivery of care to children in the child welfare system.

•   Use technology to promote virtual communication among stakeholders involved in the care of a child in the child welfare system.

•   Incorporate positions within child-serving organizations that foster collaboration across systems and enhance trauma-informed care (e.g., placing a CPS liaison within a health care setting).

Source: Loria, H., McLeigh, J., Wolfe, K., Conner, E., Smith, V., Greeley, C. S., & Keefe, R. J. (2021). Caring for children in foster and kinship care during a pandemic: Lessons learned and recommendations. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 1–24. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15548732.2021.1965065?journalCode=wpcw2

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) establishes the rules and regulations governing interstate placements. To promote timely placements, the ICPC sets target timeframes for various stages of the placement process. The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) collaborated with the Association of Administrators of the ICPC to develop the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE). The NEICE was launched in November 2013 with funding from the Office of Management and Budget through the Partnership Fund for Program Integrity Innovation. In June 2015, the Children's Bureau awarded a cooperative agreement to APHSA to implement NEICE in every state and jurisdiction. APHSA has MOUs with 45 states to implement and use the NEICE.

The NEICE is a software application that enables the electronic exchange of information required for interstate placements of children in foster care or adoptive settings. A multi-year evaluation of its expansion demonstrated that it contributes to shorter ICPC case processing times and lower copying and mailing expenses, facilitates communication and tracking of cases within and between states, improves data integrity and accuracy, and improves the ability of states to comply with ICPC requirements.

Source: Rosinsky, K., Hanson, C., & Vandivere, S. (2018). *National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE) evaluation final report.* https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NEICEEvaluation_ChildTrends_May2018.pdf

# Chapter 9: Information and Resources

Information Memorandum on Continuous Quality Improvement in Title IV-B and IV-E Programs. Administration for Children and Families. (ACYF-CB-IM-12-07): https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/im1207.pdf

Child and Family Services Review Procedures Manual: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/cfsr-procedures-manual

Resources on Continuous Quality Improvement and Implementation: https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/

Child and Family Services Reviews Technical Bulletins: https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/index.php/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-technical-bulletins

Guidance and Tools to Support Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement: https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/strategic-planning/

Supplemental for the Child and Family Services Reviews Stakeholder Interview Guide: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/cfsr-stakeholder-interview-guide-supplemental

Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan; Annual Progress and Services Report; Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act State Plan; Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood; Education and Training Vouchers Program https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/pi-20-13

Title IV-B and IV-E plan requirements (in the Child Welfare Policy Manual): https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public_html/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=122

Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan (ACYF-CB-PI-20-14), December 12, 2020: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/policy-guidance/pi-20-14

Prepared on behalf of the Children's Bureau by JBS International, Inc.

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# References

45 CFR § 1356.21.

42 U.S.C. §§ 675(5)(C)

42 U.S.C §§ 671(a)(15)

42 U.S.C. § 671(a)(20) (2018). https://tinyurl.com/kchxwdvx

Administration for Children and Families. (2022). Child Welfare Policy Manual. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public_html/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp_pf.jsp?id=4

Ahn, H., Carter, L. M., Reiman, S., & Hartzel, S. (2017). Development of a quality assurance and continuous quality improvement (CQI) model in public child welfare systems. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *11*(2), 166–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2016.1255698

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