

Child and Family Services Reviews: **Requirements and Benefits of State-Led Reviews**



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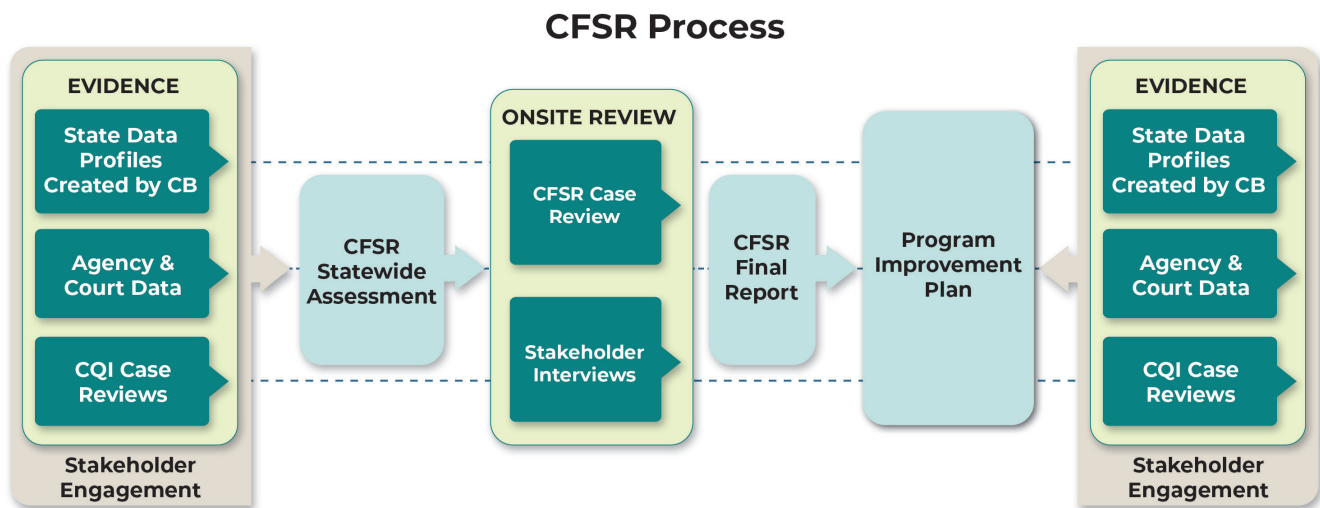


Overview of the CFSR and Program Improvement Plan Processes

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) are a federal-state collaborative effort designed to help ensure that quality services are provided to children and families through state child welfare systems. The review process provides required oversight of states' compliance with titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSR process enables the Children's Bureau (CB) to (1) ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is happening to children and families receiving child welfare services; and (3) assist states in building their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being.

The CFSR has two phases. The statewide assessment (first phase) is completed before a state's onsite review (second phase). The purpose of the statewide assessment is to document the extent to which a state's federally funded child welfare system functions effectively to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and families they serve. The statewide assessment is prepared by staff of the state child welfare agency in partnership with individuals the agency is required to consult in the development of the state's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) (45 CFR § 1355.33).

The second phase of the CFSR, the onsite review, comprises case reviews, which include case-related interviews with key individuals (e.g., children, parents, caregivers, and foster parents) who were involved in the case, and interviews with stakeholders, referred to as "stakeholder interviews." The case reviews and



case-related interviews are an opportunity for the state to determine what occurred, confirm information in the case record, collect information that might be missing from that record, and obtain input about case participants' experiences. The CB conducts stakeholder interviews in partnership with states, during which key stakeholders and others (e.g., parents; children and youth; caregivers; providers; other public entities; community partners; Tribal representatives; judges; attorneys who represent the agency; and individuals within the child welfare agency, including program managers, caseworkers, supervisors, and training staff) are interviewed to further inform the assessment of systemic factor functioning.

Information from both the statewide assessment and the onsite review is used to determine whether the state is in substantial conformity with the CFSR outcomes (safety, permanency, and well-being) and systemic factors. The systemic factors include (1) statewide information system; (2) case review system; (3) quality assurance (QA) system; (4) staff and provider training; (5) service array and resource development; (6) agency responsiveness to the community; and (7) foster and

adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. After the CFSR Final Report is issued, if the state is determined not to be in substantial conformity with one or more of the outcomes and systemic factors, it is required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address areas of nonconformity.

State-Led Reviews in CFSR Round 4

State-Led Reviews (previously referred to as State Conducted Case Reviews in Round 3) offer states the opportunity to conduct their own case reviews and case-related interviews using the Round 4 federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI) and submit the results to the CB. State-Led Reviews conform to the same regulations and requirements as federally led CFSRs.¹ States wanting to conduct State-Led Reviews must demonstrate that they meet all specified requirements to qualify for the state-conducted review process (see State-Led Case Review Criteria, below, and in the appendix).

¹ For example, states must use the federal case review instrument (the OSRI) regardless of whether they do a State-Led or CB-Led Review. States must review a minimum of 65 cases in at least 3 review sites over the designated review period and must participate in stakeholder interviews, as needed, to inform the assessment of systemic factor functioning.

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The state is responsible for demonstrating, in the year before its review, that CB criteria² are in place for Round 4. Some but not all of these criteria have changed since Round 3. Round 4 criteria include but are not limited to:

- The state operates an internal case review process at least annually that assesses state child welfare system performance in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being.
- The state uses a uniform sampling process and methodology.

The CB reviews the required information submitted by the state and determines whether the state meets the criteria for using a State-Led Review process for CFSR purposes.

Meeting Federal Requirements for the State-Led Review

States that wish to conduct a State-Led Review should consider the case review requirements outlined in the Round 4 CFSR Procedures Manual. The state must submit the specific documents as required and must demonstrate that the necessary processes are in place and functioning no later than 6 months before the scheduled CFSR.

CB Support for Conducting State-Led Reviews

The CB established processes, materials, and instruments to carry out the CFSRs regardless of whether the review is CB-Led or State-Led. For example, to determine compliance with federal requirements, the CB developed the OSRI. The OSRI enables states to systematically and consistently examine practices that are subject to federal monitoring and that support



positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families.

The CB has consistently encouraged states to self-evaluate and proactively analyze and apply data and evidence to support program implementation and monitoring. The CB continuously assists states in developing and institutionalizing ongoing case review processes within overarching statewide continuous quality improvement (CQI) systems. If a state's case review system meets the federal requirements and is fully functioning, the CB encourages the state to participate in a State-Led rather than CB-Led Review.

The CB provides significant support for State-Led Reviews in four important ways:

1. To support consistent application of the OSRI and provide states with robust reporting capabilities, the CB developed, maintains, and continuously enhances the Online Monitoring System (OMS), a secure web-based application made available to states at no cost.
2. To provide states with training and resources, the CB provides states with access to the CFSR Information Portal, which includes the E-Learning Academy.

² Children's Bureau. (2021). State-led CFSR case review criteria. 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-process/state-led-cfsr-case-review-criteria>

3. To support the case review process, the CB provides technical assistance, including consultation with states regarding case ratings, sampling, and the application of the OSRI.
4. To determine substantial conformity with systemic factors and inform decisions, CB uses information from jointly-conducted stakeholder interviews and the statewide assessment.

Twenty-eight states conducted their own reviews in Round 3. Each state examined a minimum of 65 cases across at least 3 sites (with a minimum of 40 cases for children in foster care and 25 cases of families receiving in-home services).

CB Support for QA and Case Reviewer Training

States can receive CB support for reviewer training via the E-Learning Academy on the CFSR Information Portal, which includes an OSRI QA course, OSRI courses, and mock cases. For Round 4, the CB will also update courses and provide OSRI virtual trainings delivered via webinars scheduled at regular intervals.

The Federal Role in State-Led Reviews

The CB CFSR team provides consultation and technical assistance to support State-Led Reviews. For example, the CB CFSR team acts as a partner in identifying review sites, developing case review schedules, and supporting states' efforts to prepare and train state reviewers and QA staff. The state identifies a senior state staff person to serve as the State Team Leader and main point of contact with the CB CFSR team and to provide oversight to the state onsite review team. The CB CFSR team also works with the state to develop and approve the case sampling plan, review and approve case eliminations, and as noted above, conduct stakeholder interviews.

Throughout State-Led Reviews, the CB CFSR team conducts Secondary Oversight to ensure that QA staff and reviewers understand key practice concerns to be reported in the OSRI and ensure the accurate rating and applicability of OSRI items. The CB also provides oversight and consultation on issues relevant to ensuring that the review process is occurring per Round 4 procedures (e.g., case elimination decisions and ad hoc sampling/measurement concerns).





Benefits of Participating in a State-Led Review in Round 4

States that qualify for and elect to have State-Led Reviews can benefit in ways worthy of serious consideration. These include:

Enhanced Organizational Capacity

- State-Led Reviews build on the state's effort to create and maintain evaluative structures and CQI processes.
- State-Led Reviews enable more seamless transition from CFSR data collection to PIP development, implementation, and monitoring.

Flexibility

- State-Led Reviews provide states the opportunity to use a period of up to 6 months to complete case reviews (as opposed to 1 week for a CB-Led Review) and take into account the state's capacity and workforce resources.
- State-Led Reviews provide more flexibility in sampling methodologies and frameworks.
- State-Led Reviews provide additional flexibility in scheduling stakeholder interviews related to substantial conformity determinations for the systemic factors.

Comments from “The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States” Webinar:

“We decided to do a State-Led Review to reinforce our value of and commitment to self-monitoring, evaluation, and ongoing CQI in a way that also allowed us to build internal capacity and really own the process and make it work for us.”

—Treena Mazzotta, Bureau Chief of Strategic Planning,
Connecticut Department of Children and Families

“When you are doing a State-Led Review and it is something you’re doing consistently, it feels less like somebody’s coming in and doing this big federal review, and it’s less scary and becoming more and more your normal work process and nomenclature.... You [can get to] how can we learn from it and keep moving this work forward to improve programs and practices.”

—Sherril Kuhns, Federal Policies and Resources
Manager, Oregon Department of Human Services

“The ability to go from a State-Led CFSR to then transition into the PIP monitoring reviews was really a seamless transition.”

—Treena Mazzotta, Bureau Chief of Strategic Planning,
Connecticut Department of Children and Families



Comments From “The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States” Webinar:

“The traditional review is very disruptive of the work that happens within the department, at least [in] Massachusetts traditionally it has been. But the process that [we’re] engaged in now is not disruptive at all, in fact, it’s welcomed.”

—Ruben Ferreira, Assistant Commissioner for CQI and Professional Development, Massachusetts

Expanded Data Collection to Better Inform the State’s Understanding of Practice

- States conducting State-Led Reviews have the opportunity to conduct case reviews in more jurisdictions. CB-Led Reviews are limited to just 3 sites.
- States conducting State-Led Reviews can review more than 65 cases. They can also adjust the

proportion of foster care and in-home services cases reviewed to better reflect the state’s case population, as long as they meet the minimum federal requirements for the number of foster care and in-home services cases.

Comments From “The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States” Webinar:

“The biggest reason we wanted to do a State-Led Review was to really give a better picture of child welfare in Ohio. Adding additional cases, being able to do 15 counties instead of 3 counties, we really felt it was going to give us a better picture of where we were at.”

—Kristine Monroe, Program Administrator and CFSR Co-Coordinator, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

“Throughout the PIP and ... to the present day, the [MA] CQI system continues to provide our field with direct feedback linking practice with local and federal outcomes. [We] have just recently this year moved to 100 reviews every 6 months. We are crediting that with what we see as observable improvements in child safety, timely permanency, and overall enhanced well-being.”

—Ruben Ferreira, Assistant Commissioner for CQI and Professional Development, Massachusetts Department of Children and Families

Long-Term Benefits

- Conducting a State-Led Review supports a fully functioning state case review process that can continually inform state leadership on frontline practices, including strengths and areas needing improvement; identify needs of families and frontline staff; and inform and monitor program improvement efforts.

Below are examples of challenges for which states sought federal consultation and assistance during the Round 3 State-Led Reviews, and lessons learned:

- **Maintaining QA and oversight to ensure consistent application of the OSRI**
 - ◆ For Round 4, states must demonstrate that they have a case review process in place and are meeting federal requirements before being approved for a State-Led Review.
 - ◆ The CB and states recognized the importance of maintaining ongoing conversations between the CB CFSR team and the states to troubleshoot challenges as they arise.
 - One Region used an existing consortium to enable CQI managers to meet on a quarterly basis to solve problems.
 - The CB met with the states' review teams and QA staff regularly to discuss team questions and work toward resolution.
- **Training for reviewers and QA staff**
 - ◆ The CB adjusted the approach to Secondary Oversight to better integrate QA observations into ongoing support, consultation, training, and monitoring that enhances case review staff capacity.
 - Some states developed new mock cases to address training/QA needs.
- **Case sampling**
 - ◆ The CB Measurement and Sampling Committee engaged in consultation with states on case sampling plans.
 - States proposed revising case review sample size, methodology, and schedules to better fit state needs.
- **Securing staffing resources (e.g., retaining a sufficient pool of reviewers)**
 - ◆ Reviewer teams helped supplement review staffing:
 - Some states have designated staff that complete the reviews.
 - Some states supplement their team with field staff and agency partners/stakeholders who serve as guest reviewers.
 - ◆ Some states overcome staffing resource challenges by not using reviewer pairs.
- **Ensuring participation by parents and other family members**
 - ◆ At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, states began conducting remote/virtual CQI case reviews. It was easier to do this if states had comprehensive case information systems that could be accessed online. It was important to distribute computers/tablets to staff quickly. Offices in several states found that remote reviews increased participation and did not require coordination of office space. Remote case-related interviews reduced travel time and costs.
- **Securing agency (leadership, county, and/or regional) investment of time and resources, managing conflicting priorities, and ensuring the sustainability of efforts**
 - ◆ Some states used available resources from Round 3 (e.g., CFSR Fact Sheets) to communicate the importance of the CFSRs to stakeholders. The CB is updating these resources and will make them available to states in Round 4.¹
 - ◆ Some states brought in federal staff to help leadership understand the benefits of State-Led Reviews.
 - ◆ Some states used peer-to-peer calls to share tips with each other on getting buy-in, managing priorities, and ensuring sustainability (e.g., the Capacity-Building Center for States' CQI Managers network).

To hear more stories from states about State-Led Review benefits, challenges, and solutions and receive tips for conducting them, listen to the webinar, "The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States," available at <https://vimeo.com/665742185/b10fb3ec7c>

¹ As resources become available, they are posted on the CFSR Information Portal: Children's Bureau. (n.d.) *CFSR Information Portal*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/>

Comments From “The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States” Webinar:

“[H]aving that well-structured CFSR team that are real experts in QA can help guide that discussion in case review. But in addition to that, my one tip is to really lean into your community partners, your Tribal partners, your court partners, your service array partners, to be a part of that robust reviewer pool, because what we have found is those additional perspectives really add a richness and depth to our CFSR reviews and give us an outside perspective on our child welfare system.”

—Jennifer Ricks, Quality Control Manager,
Oregon Department of Human Services

Factors for States to Consider When Planning for a State-Led Review in Round 4

States interested in conducting a State-Led Review will want to consider the factors below. These factors are not necessarily exclusive to State-Led Reviews and may also be important considerations for CB-Led Reviews.

Sampling Approach

- States will want to consider the number of cases to review (sample size). State-Led Reviews enable states to use a larger sample size.
- ♦ The state case review sample must include a minimum of 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home services cases).

State-Led Reviews enable states to use a larger sample size, and the CB encourages states to do so. In Round 3, many states that conducted their own reviews reviewed more than the required number of cases, enabling them to broaden their view of their state’s performance.

- States will want to consider case review site selection proposals because State-Led Reviews enable states to include a mix of sites.³
- ♦ States will want to consider a broad range of data and information to determine prospective sites and the child welfare system and practice dynamics that will be examined during the onsite review. For State-Led Reviews in Round 4, the CB and states will negotiate the number of review sites when a statewide random sample is not used.

States will want to select case review sites that reflect a cross-section or range of environments in the state, including rural and urban areas. States are required to conduct reviews of at least three sites, including the largest metropolitan area. Case reviews provide evidence of state child welfare practice and system performance, as well as opportunities to further analyze system strengths and areas needing improvement.

Timeframe for Completing Case Reviews

- States conducting State-Led Reviews will want to consider the length of time needed to complete case reviews for the CFSR.
- ♦ States are provided up to 6 months to complete case reviews. While developing a review schedule for a proposed specific timeframe, states will want to carefully determine their capacity for completing reviews and performing QA within the proposed 6-month period. This determination should include careful consideration of review locations and requisite travel time.

³ For guidance on site selection proposals, see CFSR Round 4 Site Selection Proposals, Children’s Bureau. https://public.huddle.com/b/opGadP/0/CFSR_R4_Site_Selection_Proposals.pdf

Reviewer Access to Complete Case Records

- When conducting a State-Led Review, states must ensure reliable access to complete case records. This involves assessing access capabilities across the state and overcoming any challenges to reliable access.
 - ♦ At a minimum, technological capabilities must include Wi-Fi/cellphone coverage and secure reviewer access to the state system and sample case records.
 - ♦ Although some states have electronic records that can be accessed from any office in the state, others may have more limited access.
 - ♦ In some areas, records may be electronic, on paper, or both.
 - ♦ In some states, parts of a record may be housed elsewhere. For example, portions of records may be in another electronic filing system or, if a state contracts out services, the contract provider may have the case record.
 - ♦ States must ensure that all court and legal documents are available.

Location and Ensuring Confidentiality

- For reviews conducted in person, identify where reviewers will work. If in the office, the space must offer sufficient privacy to ensure confidentiality when discussing cases or interviewing case-related participants. For reviews conducted remotely, proper security procedures must be in place to protect confidential data and information. For example, encrypted emails and password-protected equipment are helpful tools for protecting information.

Case Review Management and QA

- Developing a documented plan that outlines the state's process for conducting the review is key for ensuring a successful State-Led Review.
 - ♦ A plan that identifies activities, responsible parties, and timeframes ensures that

expectations are clear and deadlines are met. It also supports states when there are transitions in key positions.

- Case review management and QA are important components to consider when conducting a State-Led Review.
 - ♦ Case review management requires that states set and monitor timeframes for reviews and interviews. Staffing needs may differ at various points during the review. States may also want to consider using co-reviewers, reviewer teams, or guest reviewers. For example, sometimes states have a team to review cases. At other times, the team members are paired with another reviewer (e.g., another staff member or a caseworker from another office who is learning about the reviews and how cases are assessed).
 - ♦ QA requires that states plan oversight and supervision of the review and the reviewers. It is important that all reviewers receive training to ensure inter-rater reliability that includes practicing reviews and ratings of mock cases on the CFSR Information Portal's E-Learning Academy. Also, states must develop a process for determining what level of QA to use (beyond what's required), including how they will handle cases that need to be flagged for additional review.

Coordination/Logistics

- States will want to consider the support they can provide for scheduling interviews, which involves locating families, staff, foster parents, and other care providers to secure their willingness and availability to participate. It may also be important to consider providing incentives for participation.

Interview Procedures

- Respondents' needs and concerns should be addressed carefully. For example, parents may feel more comfortable providing information in a virtual case-related interview instead of in person.

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If interviews are in person, how can they be done safely (e.g., if there are pandemic-related concerns, natural disasters, or other risks)? If interviews are conducted remotely by phone or virtually, do case participants have access to the equipment they need? Is there a secure internet connection at their end capable of supporting a virtual interview?

Conclusion

The CB strongly encourages states to continue their case reviews as a key element of the state's overall CQI system. When states have the capacity to do so, the CB also encourages them to opt for a State-Led Review. States should carefully review the benefits and factors to consider and refer to the federal criteria for State-Led Reviews in the appendix.

As noted above, State-Led Reviews can be an integral part of states' efforts to build CQI capacity and improve CQI processes and feedback. They can also provide more time and flexibility, if needed, for conducting CFSR case reviews and can help states better integrate CFSR data collection and analysis with PIP development, implementation, and monitoring.

State-Led Reviews can also better enable states to focus on far more than merely meeting federal regulations and requirements. They enable a state to more deeply explore and understand child welfare practices within a broader number of geographical, demographic, and jurisdictional contexts and the perspectives of people with lived experience. They also provide a foundation within the state for an improved ongoing case review process.

For more information on conducting a State-Led Review, contact your CB Regional Office.



Comments From “The State-Led CFSR Experience: Perspectives From States” Webinar:

“As a bonus tip, I would say, reach out right now to your Children’s Bureau partners, they are waiting to engage in this discussion with you about how it’s going to work, how it’s worked for other places and just starts that partnership off right on the right foot.”

—Vincent Ciola, Bureau Chief for Systems and Practice Advancement, Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services

“The most important thing to do is to reach out to the Children’s Bureau, your Regional Office. A steady partnership all along is essential, I can’t overstate that. For Massachusetts that was our ticket to success in getting our CQI unit fully up to speed, fully trained on the CFSR, CFSR processes, the OSRI, the OMS, etc. But I will add this, it’s also I think very important to keep open communication with your executive team and your senior leadership in the agency and beyond because everyone needs to be on board. Otherwise it becomes an uphill battle.”

—Ruben Ferreira, Assistant Commissioner for CQI and Professional Development, Massachusetts

Information and Resources

CFSR Round 4 Resources:

<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources>

Child and Family Services Reviews Aggregate Report Round 3: FYs 2015–18:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_aggregate_report_2020.pdf

Child and Family Services Review Technical Bulletin #12:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_technical_bulletin_12.pdf

Child and Family Services Review Technical Bulletin #13:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr-technical-bulletin-13.pdf>

Children's Bureau Regional Program Managers:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/childrens-bureau-regional-program-managers>

Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions:

<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-instruments-tools-and-guides>

Stakeholder Interview Guide (SIG):

<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-instruments-tools-and-guides>

State-Led CFSR Case Review Criteria:

[https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-process/
state-led-cfsr-case-review-criteria](https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-process/state-led-cfsr-case-review-criteria)

Statewide Assessment:

<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/round-4-resources/cfsr-round-4-instruments-tools-and-guides>

Appendix

State-Led Case Review Criteria: Quick Reference List

States must document that federal case review criteria are in place and functioning no later than 6 months before a scheduled State-Led Review. These criteria include:

Criterion 1—The state operates an internal case review process at least annually that assesses state child welfare system performance in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being.

- 1A. The state must provide training on a regular basis for all reviewers (including individuals completing third-party quality assurance of cases) participating in the case review process.
- 1B. The state must adhere to instructions contained in the federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions (OSRI) for rating cases.
- 1C. The state must have a process in place to address safety concerns identified in a case under review.
- 1D. The state must ensure that individuals who had direct contact, supervision, oversight, or consultation for the case being reviewed do not complete the case review or conduct quality assurance on the case.
- 1E. The state must use the federal OSRI to collect information on all CFSR items, and implement and adhere to guidance the CB provides to accompany the instrument.
- 1F. The state must include case-related interviews of key informants on every case to inform the ratings—including all of the following individuals: child (if age and developmentally appropriate), parents, caregiver/foster care provider, and caseworker or supervisor—and follow a written protocol for making case-specific exceptions to conducting an interview with a key case participant.

Criterion 2—A state uses a uniform sampling process and methodology.

- 2A. The state's sampling methodology must coincide with the case review schedule and agreed-upon sites and consist of the state's case population subject to review. Sites should consist of the largest metropolitan area, key program areas operating in the state, Tribes with significant case populations served by the child welfare system, and a geographical cross-section of the state.
- 2B. States use a simple random sample design for the sample of foster care and in-home services cases. Sampling frames may be statewide or stratified to achieve an adequate number of cases to review from each site. Sampling periods must begin at least 12 months prior to the start of the CFSR and may be renewed monthly or quarterly. Case review sampling plans must specify the sampling approach that will be used (i.e., rolling monthly/quarterly, fixed).
- 2C. The sample must consist of a minimum of 65 cases served during the sampling period(s) with a minimum of 40 foster care cases and 25 in-home services cases. States that review more than 65 cases should consider using the state ratio of foster care and in-home services cases as long as the minimum number of cases is met for both case types.
- 2D. The sampling frame for the foster care population must consist of the listing of children served statewide or by jurisdiction strata according to the state's AFCARS-defined reportable case population for the defined 6-month sampling period(s).
- 2E. The sampling frame for the in-home services case population must consist of the listing of family cases opened for 45 or more consecutive days to provide services and/or case management, directly by the child welfare agency or through federally funded contract(s), during the sampling period and in which no children in the family were in foster care for 24 hours or longer during any portion of the sampling period.
- 2F. The state must have a process in place to consistently address and document CB-required and state-specific case elimination requirements.