

Request for Public Comment

1. How could ACF best promote and measure continuous quality improvement in child welfare outcomes and the effective functioning of systems that promote positive outcomes for children and families?
 - A universal family assessment-training curriculum should be a required course for social workers who have family assessment as a job responsibility. The curriculum should include effective assessments of drug and alcohol addiction, the stages of child development and what to expect during each stage, recognizing and responding to child sexual abuse, the affect of domestic violence on children and families and the recognition of mental health disorders that indicates a mental health referral. An inefficient family assessment affects services throughout the life of a child welfare case. This training should also include a self-assessment measurement that will assist an individual in deciding if social work is the best career choice. Should this training tool be developed, all social workers could be measured from the same starting point and at intervals throughout their social work career. This action has the potential of improving outcomes because agencies would know skills of social workers and how to effectively monitor the services provided by the social worker.
2. To what extent should data or measures from national child welfare databases (e.g., the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System) be used in a Federal monitoring process and what measures are important for State/Tribal/local accountability?
3. What role should the child welfare case management information system or systems that States/Tribes/local agencies use for case management or quality assurance purposes play in a Federal monitoring process?
4. What roles should State/Tribal/ local child welfare agencies play in establishing targets for improvement and monitoring performance towards those targets? What role should other stakeholders, such as courts, clients and other child-serving agencies play?
 - All community systems play a role in outcomes for children and families. To insure that the responsibilities of outcomes is not placed totally on child welfare, performance targets should be calculated based on a formula that includes availability of resources, accessibility of resources, effort of child welfare agencies and outcome for children. For example - C currently, a child who has disrupted five foster placements is rated an area needing improvement. However, consideration should be given to the effectiveness of the agency's initial assessment, what services did the child receive, what services did the child need but did not receive, how did the child respond to the services, etc.
5. In what ways should targets and performance goals be informed by and integrated with other Federal child welfare oversight efforts?
 - When federally funded programs are not housed within a child welfare agency, concerted efforts must be made to insure that the federally funded services are readily available and accessible to children and families receiving in-home

services as well as foster and adoptive services. During some reviews it was noted that there are serious disconnects between child welfare agencies and community-based programs, especially federally funded programs. A federal database capturing the connection may facilitate the connection. For example: Data would be collected to show the number of foster children who participate in TANF After-School programs or the number of in-home service cases utilized domestic violence services, etc.

6. What specific strategies, supports, incentives, or penalties are needed to ensure continued quality improvement and achievement of positive outcomes for children and families that are in substantial conformity with Federal child welfare laws?

7. In light of the ability of Tribes to directly operate title IV–E programs through recent changes in the statute, in what ways, if any, should a Federal review process focus on services delivered to Indian children?

- Indian child welfare administrators and families should be acknowledged as having the best plan for the safety and wellbeing of Indian children. From that point, Indians and Federal/State/local child welfare professionals must collaborate about the best ways the Indians can comply with state child welfare laws, policy and practice. Indians sometimes feel devalued when laws and policies are changed without acknowledging that they may have input.

8. Are there examples of other review protocols, either in child welfare or related fields, in which Tribal/State/local governments participate that might inform CB's approach to reviewing child welfare systems?

Additional Comments

Father Engagement – Research indicates that the outcome for children is better when a father is engaged with in a child's life. The Children's Bureau could advocate for funds to support efforts to locate absent fathers and their families and fund services to help fathers engage with their children. Services of the Federal Access Visitation Program could be expanded to cover more engagement activities.

Public Law 108-36 – CAPTA language regarding Citizen Review Panels should be strengthened in relation to gathering community input into child welfare in the community. Gaining input should be designed with geographic locations in mind. Perhaps at a minimum, each county in a state should have a panel or some other avenue to provide child welfare input.

General – Information from the CFSRs should be shared with other federal agencies in regards to needed resources nationwide. All agencies have a stake in outcomes for children and families. Perhaps the Children's Bureau could compile an information report after each review cycle that would detail each federal agency's correlation to child welfare outcomes and how each state is doing by agency.