



## Frequently Asked Questions: The Child and Family Services Review<sup>1</sup>

The Child and Family Services Review process (CFSR) holds states accountable for services to children through a results-oriented approach. During the CFSR, the federal government, through the U.S. Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), determines: (1) if a state child welfare agency's practice is in conformity with Title IV-B (Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services programs) and Title IV-E (Foster Care and Adoption Assistance) requirements; (2) if children and families are achieving desirable outcomes; and (3) if a state needs assistance with its efforts to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The CFSR process has three major parts:

- **Statewide Assessment:** Prior to the scheduled review, a state completes a self-assessment addressing specified topics in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being and several systemic factors that impact the child welfare system.
- **On-site Review:** Conducted by an interdisciplinary review team, the on-site review focuses on hard copy records and computer documentation and interviews with children, family members, state staff, and other professionals that are serving the family. Seven outcomes and seven systemic factors are measured during the review. Following the on-site review, the Children's Bureau prepares a final report containing the review outcomes.
- **Program Improvement Plan (PIP):** Following the final report phase, a state is required to submit a Program Improvement Plan to address non-compliance with any of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors subject to review. The Children's Bureau must approve the plan. A state has two years to satisfy the goals described in the PIP. Financial penalties can be imposed for failure to achieve PIP objectives.

### ***General Process Questions***

#### **1. How and when did this process start?**

In 1994, Congress adopted amendments to the Social Security Act that required the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to review state child welfare programs to ensure 'substantial conformity' with state plan

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Frequently Asked Questions: The Child and Family Service Reviews*, Child Welfare League of America, 2004.

requirements in Titles IV-B and Title IV-E of the Act. The law requires that state child welfare programs be measured in certain areas utilizing specific criteria. HHS, working with the states and other stakeholders, developed the outcome measurements to be used in the reviews. The planning for the CFRS was completed in 2000 and the reviews started in 2001.

## **2. What are the measurements used in the reviews?**

The way states are measured can almost be thought of as a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are three general categories, or “domains,” within these three domains are seven outcomes, and within these seven outcomes are 25 data indicators or measures.

The three “domains” are: (1) Safety, (2) Permanency, and (3) Child and Family Well-Being.

Under the three domains are more seven specific measures:

### Safety:

- a) Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- b) Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

### Permanency:

- a) Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- b) The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

### Child and Family Well-Being:

- a) Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.
- b) Children receive appropriate services to meet their education needs.
- c) Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Within these seven outcome measures are twenty-five data collection outcomes, such as timeliness of investigations, services to families to protect

children, incidence of children re-entering foster care, and placement of children in foster care with their siblings.

### **3. How many states have undergone a CFSR?**

As of March 2004, all fifty states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia had completed their reviews.

### **4. What have been the findings?**

The results have been mixed and the bottom line is that no state has been found to be in conformance with all fourteen outcome measures and systemic factors. States were slightly stronger in the safety outcomes than in the permanency and well-being outcomes. States were weakest in helping children achieve their permanency goals in a timely manner and in helping families with services they need to care for their children. The Children's Bureau has been very careful not to compare states in any area, but rather encourages a state to compare itself over a period of time, measuring progress and improvement.

### **5. Why have all the states failed?**

The Children's Bureau does not use the term "fail" or "pass," but considers the outcomes in terms of "in substantial conformity" or "not in substantial conformity."

### **6. Why should these results not simply be viewed as pass or fail?**

The CFSR process is intended to reflect both the areas in which the state is doing well and the areas in which the state needs to make improvement. While the tendency is to focus on the areas that need improvement, the entire child welfare system needs to be considered when making any type of evaluation and subsequent change based on the evaluation. For most states, the CFSRs are not revealing any new surprises, but now the states are being held accountable in two areas: (1) outcomes for children and families in terms of safety, permanency and child and family well-being; and (2) the administration of state programs that directly affect the capacity to deliver services leading to improved outcomes. This accountability had not been a focus in the past. The CFSR is also just the first step. States will also be

evaluated in their ability to implement the changes outlined in their Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

## **7. What happens after a PIP has been approved?**

If a state is required to follow up their CFSR review with a PIP, the PIP is submitted to HHS for review. Once a state has received Federal approval of the PIP, quarterly reports of progress, with supporting data, are required. At the end of the two-year PIP, a final report is prepared and the Federal staff determines if compliance has been achieved. Failure to achieve compliance may result in financial penalties.

## **8. What happens next? Will the process for reviewing the states and measuring the outcomes change after the first round of state reviews is finished?**

ACF is currently planning a process for scheduling the second round of CFSRs, now that the initial CFSRs have been completed in all 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Federal regulations require that States that were not in substantial conformity in the initial review begin a full review two years after approval of their Program Improvement Plan. This requirement applies to all States. ACF will schedule the beginning of each State's second CFSR statewide assessment at the earliest possible date following the completion of its PIP and the preparation of its data files, as described in Child and Family Services Review, Technical Bulletin #1, January 2005.

## **9. What is the Children's Bureau process for reporting on the results of these CFSR reviews? Is there a report that will be produced?**

The Children's Bureau has prepared several reports summarizing the results of the reviews. The reports can be found at

<http://www.ach.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm>

## **10. Where can I get a copy of my state's CFSR?**

The Self Assessment, the on-site report, and the Program Improvement Plan (once approved) become public documents. Many states have posted these documents on their websites. All released on-site Final Reports are posted on the Children's Bureau website at

[http://www.basis.caliber.com/cwlg/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/searchform](http://www.basis.caliber.com/cwlg/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/searchform)

## **11. Where can I get a copy of my state's PIP?**

Contact your state's CFSR Coordinator and request a copy. If it has been approved by the Children's Bureau, it is a public document. Many states will release draft copies to stakeholders. If you do not know who the state CFSR Coordinator is in your state, the State Child Welfare Agency director's office should be able to direct you to the right person.

The Children's Bureau has also provided links to some state websites at:  
[http://www.basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/searchform](http://www.basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/searchform)

Or to obtain a copy of the Program Improvement Plans completed to date, please contact:

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information  
330 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20447  
Phone: (800) 394-3366 or (703) 385-7565  
Fax: (703) 385-3206  
email: [nccanch@calib.com](mailto:nccanch@calib.com)

## **12. How can CBCAP State Leads public child welfare agencies best work together to meet the requirements of the CFSR's/PIPs?<sup>2</sup>**

The CFSR process is an area in which CBCAP lead agencies are strongly encouraged to become more actively engaged. The CFSR process is a major effort to change child welfare systems at the Federal and State level. The CFSR process measures a State's substantial conformity with the State plan requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. It identifies performance on outcomes for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and reviews the systemic factors leading to child welfare outcomes.

Recent Program Instructions (PIs) ACYF-CB-PI-02-05 and ACYF-CB-PI-03-05 discussed the requirement for States to integrate the CFSRs with their CFSP/APSRS process. Findings from the States that have completed their CFSRs thus far indicate that many States and communities lack adequate prevention and community-based services for families. There is also a need for comprehensive family assessments and for greater engagement of parents in the case planning process.

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpted from: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Program Instruction on Availability of Fiscal Year 2004 Funds under the Community-Based grants for the Prevention of child Abuse and Neglect program created by Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as amended by Pub.L.108-36. April 7, 2004. Page 9.

Since the provision of prevention services and the emphasis on parent engagement have always been strong components of the CBFRS/CBCAP program, greater coordination between the state's CFSR and the CFSP/APSR process and the development and operation of the CBCAP program are greatly encouraged.

Below are some suggested ways in which the CBCAP programs can work more closely with the child welfare agencies in their States:<sup>3</sup>

- CBCAP lead agency contacts and/or members of their prevention network can become more active participants in various stakeholder meetings and planning committees related to the CFSR/PIP and Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)/Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). Review the goals and objectives of the CFSR/PIP and CFSP/APSR and identify which of them are related to child abuse prevention, family support and family strengthening. Schedule meetings with representatives from the child welfare agency to discuss ways to collaborate and coordinate efforts. The ACF Regional Office is also available to help facilitate this process.
- CBCAP lead agencies can use the relevant sections of the CFSR Statewide Assessment, PIP and/or CFSP that pertains to prevention programs as part of the required description of the inventory of unmet needs in the State.
- CBCAP lead agencies can prepare the CBCAP plan by incorporating the relevant goals and objectives contained in the State's CFSR/PIP and CFSP/APSR. Lead agencies may choose to place a stronger emphasis on prevention-related goals identified in these two processes as part of their CBCAP program plans. For example, if the CFSR finds that the lack of prevention resources is a prime concern, and the State child welfare agency is required to redirect its resources to address this area, the CBCAP program may identify specific programs and activities that will be focused on those issues.
- CBCAP lead agencies can work with the child welfare agency to pool the IV-B prevention and family support funding with their CBCAP funds and issue a joint Request for Proposals to fund programs that meet the shared goals and objectives of the two programs.

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpted from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Program Instruction on Availability of Fiscal Year 2004 Funds under the Community-Based grants for the Prevention of child Abuse and Neglect program created by Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as amended by Pub.L.108-36. April 7, 2004. Attachment 3.

- CBCAP lead agencies can work with the State's child protective services (CPS) system to plan and develop triage procedures to refer children not at imminent risk of harm to community organizations or voluntary preventive services. Developing such triage procedures is a new provision of the Basic State Grant for CPS agencies outlined in the new Child Abuse and Treatment Act requirements.

For further information about the Child Welfare Services and Promoting Safe and Stable Families programs, contact: Vicki Wright at (202) 401-0406, email: [vwright@acf.dhhs.gov](mailto:vwright@acf.dhhs.gov).

For more information about the Child and Family Services Reviews, please visit the Children's Bureau website at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb>