

Guidance on Potential Data and Information That Can Be Used To Assess Systemic Factor Functioning

The Children's Bureau is providing this guidance and set of examples to assist states in providing relevant data to evaluate systemic factor functioning pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) statewide assessment.¹

Background

The CFSP Program Instruction (CFSP PI; ACYF-CB-PI-14-03) requires each state² to assess its performance on each of the seven systemic factors that are part of the CFSR. We also advise that each state reference any relevant assessment of the systemic factors from its CFSP in completing the CFSR statewide assessment (see CFSR Technical Bulletin #7). States may use a variety of relevant data, methodological approaches, analyses, and data sources to assess their performance and show how well systemic factor requirements function statewide. This document provides examples of such data and information because there is no defined set of data or information that is required of every state or that will work for every state. The examples do not address every systemic factor item and do not indicate levels of CFSR substantial conformity. We encourage states to consider this information not only for the purposes of the CFSP and the CFSR, but to continue to develop a fully functioning continuous quality improvement system for child welfare.

Systemic Factor Functioning

The Children's Bureau considers a systemic factor to be "functioning" if it is occurring or is being met 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 show the level of functioning. For example, consider the systemic factor item for permanency hearings. A description of laws, policies, and court processes the state has "in place" requiring that permanency hearings be conducted at least every 12 months, and that they include and engage the necessary parties, does not demonstrate that this is actually happening as required.

Relevant Data

A state should consider how relevant a piece of data or information is to a systemic factor's functioning. For example, the level of satisfaction caseworkers have with the user-friendliness of the statewide information system says little about its functioning. Alternatively, the level of satisfaction caseworkers have with how well the state's initial training prepared them to do their jobs is relevant to functioning. 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.

¹ States should review the *CFSR Procedures Manual* and statewide assessment instructions for a detailed explanation of systemic factors.

² This Program Instruction provides guidance to states, territories, and insular areas (hereafter "states").

Quantitative and Qualitative Data or Information

States are encouraged to use quantified data to show how well each systemic factor functions statewide, when possible and appropriate. However, some of the relevant data and information cannot easily be counted. Rather, information that is more qualitative in nature, such as narratives, explanations, or themes that emerge from interviews and focus groups may be useful to assess systemic factor functioning. The Children's Bureau does not require that systemic factor data or information be in any particular form.

Context of the Data and Information

States should also consider how the context and quality of the data inform an assessment of systemic factor functioning. States should provide this information or analysis along with the actual data when responding to the CFSP and the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR):

- 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

Examples of Relevant Data and Information

Statewide Information System

The state is operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum 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.

Example

- **An analysis of a statewide sample of children in foster care indicated that X% of the placement, demographic characteristics, status and goals for placement information in the case management system was verified as accurate when compared to a case reading of the full case file.**

Case Review System

Written Case Plan

The state provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan, to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s), that includes the required provisions.

Example

- **The state's case review process shows that in X% of foster care cases reviewed, there were strength ratings for the item that rates whether plans were developed jointly with the parents as required.**

Periodic Reviews

The state provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child that includes the required provisions no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

Example

- **A review of the statewide child welfare information data system shows that X% of periodic reviews occurred in a timely manner and contained the required provisions.**

Permanency Hearings

The state provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the state has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body that includes the required provisions no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

Example

- **A review of court data shows that for children who were in foster care for at least 2 years, X% of permanency hearings were conducted timely. Focus groups with judges in X% of the court districts in the state indicate that hearings, with few exceptions, meet the permanency hearing requirements.**

Filing for Termination of Parental Rights

The state provides a process for filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) proceedings in accordance with required provisions.

Example

- **The state provides child welfare information system data indicating that TPR petitions were filed or compelling reasons were documented in accordance with the required provisions, in X% of the applicable cases.**

Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers

The state provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Example

- **A random sample of caregivers of children in foster care indicated that X% recalled receiving a notice of the last court proceeding for children in their care and the notification included information on how they could exercise their right to be heard.**

Quality Assurance System

The state is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates implemented program improvement measures.

Example

- **The state provides a public website that references the state's case review results from the past X years, summarizes the findings of the case reviews, indicates which jurisdictions have developed improvement plans based on the standards of the state's review, and identifies the programmatic changes the state has taken to improve services in response to the information.**

Staff and Provider Training

Initial Staff Training

The state is operating a staff development and training program providing initial training that includes the basic skills and knowledge required of all staff who deliver services pursuant to the CFSP.

Example

- **Survey data indicate that X% of staff believe the initial training provides them with the knowledge and skills needed to do their job.**

Ongoing Staff Training

The state is operating a staff development and training program that provides ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Example

- **See example for initial staff training.**

Foster and Adoptive Parent Training

The state provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and the staff of state-licensed or -approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E, and the training addresses the skills and knowledge base trainees need to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Example

- **See example for initial staff training.**

Service Array and Resource Development

Array of Services

The state provides an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families as well as the 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. The state ensures that these services are accessible in all political jurisdictions covered the CFSP.

Example

- **An analysis of the services available across the state indicated that formal programs for intensive in-home services/reunification/independent living/post-adoption services are available in X of Y counties. Further, separate focus groups were conducted across the state with parents, youth, caseworkers, and community leaders, and these corroborated the above analysis. In addition, the focus groups identified that in X number of counties for X (specified) services, there were significant gaps/alignment between the needs of the population and the available slots.**

Individualizing Services

The service array (see services described in the above-referenced “array of services”) can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Example

- **Focus groups were conducted with service recipients, caseworkers, and other agency stakeholders in each county of the state. The results indicated that services were routinely/infrequently tailored to meet child and family needs. Services in languages other than English were available/not available. A key gap/strength across approximately X of the counties in the state was the capacity of providers to individualize services provided to children and parents with developmental disabilities. For example (here the state specifies the focus group themes).**

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

State Engagement and Consultation With Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP and APSR

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.

Example

- **A description of these collaborations and the types of participants was provided as part of the CFSP.**

Coordination of CFSP Services With Other Federal Programs

The state's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Example

- **The state describes the memorandum of understanding (MOU) in operation with other child- and family-serving agencies to coordinate services.**

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Standards Applied Equally

The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds.

Example

- **Licensing data indicate that X% of foster homes and institutions were approved without meeting full licensing standards (include type of licensing standard exception, if any).**

Requirements for Criminal Background Checks

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.

Example

- **A statewide random sample of all foster care providers and pre-adoptive homes approved within the past year indicates that in X% of all files reviewed, criminal background clearances were completed per the federal requirement.**

Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes

The state has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed in the state.

Example

- **The state indicates how its general, targeted and child specific recruitment efforts are adjusted based on annual analysis of AFCARS and other information available to the state on the race and ethnicity of children in foster care.**

State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements

The state has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Example

- **Based on all home studies received from another state (specify dates) to facilitate a permanent foster or adoptive care placement, X% were completed within 60 days.**