



Child and Family Service Reviews Administration for Children and Families

US Department of Health and Human Services

Purpose of the Reviews

The 1994 Amendments to the Social Security Act authorized the Department of Health and Human Services to review State child and family service programs in order to assure compliance with the State plan requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The reviews cover child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support, and independent living. They are designed to help States improve child welfare services and the outcomes for families and children who receive services by identifying strengths and needs within State programs, as well as areas where technical assistance can lead to program improvements.

Conceptual Framework

The child and family service reviews are based on a set of central principles and concepts, including the following:

- The reviews emphasize accountability. The review process includes opportunities for States to make program improvements before having Federal funds withheld due to non-compliance, although there are significant penalties associated with the failure to make the improvements needed to attain compliance.
- The reviews are conducted in collaboration between the State and Federal governments. A review team composed of both State and Federal staff conducts the reviews and evaluates State performance.
- The reviews rely on information from multiple sources in making decisions about a State's performance, including a statewide assessment, onsite reviews of a sample of children and families served by the State, statewide aggregate data, and interviews with State and community representatives.
- The reviews examine State programs from two perspectives: the outcomes of services provided to children and families served by the State agency, and systemic factors that affect the agency's ability to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

- The reviews identify both the strengths and needs of State programs with a strong emphasis on using the reviews to drive program improvements.
- The reviews promote practice principles that support improved outcomes for children and families, such as family-centered practice, community-based services, strengthening parental capacity to protect and provide for their children, and individualizing services that respond to the unique needs of children and families.

Structure of the Reviews

The reviews examine outcomes and systemic factors in each State's child and family service program, using a process that consists of two phases: the statewide assessment and the onsite review.

The statewide assessment is completed during the six-month period prior to the onsite review by a team of State agency staff and other State representatives who are not staff of the State agency. It includes an analysis of data indicators that address safety and permanency issues for children served by the agency, and helps to guide certain decisions about the onsite review, such as the locations in the State where onsite review activities will occur and the composition of the sample of cases to be reviewed onsite.

The onsite review is carried out by a team of State and Federal staff, State representatives who are not State agency staff, and expert peer reviewers. It consists of an intensive review of 30-50 cases per State, interviews with the parties to the cases reviewed, and other interviews with State and community representatives who inform the review team about the State's child and family services programs.

The reviews examine outcomes for children and families in three areas: safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. Within these three areas, seven outcomes are assessed through statewide data and reviews of cases, as follows:

O U T C O M E S

Safety

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

Permanency

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

Family & Child Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

The reviews also examine seven systemic factors that affect the quality of services delivered to children and families and the outcomes they experience. The statewide assessment includes the State's evaluation of Federal requirements related to each systemic factor. During the onsite review, selected State and community stakeholders are interviewed to determine how well each of the systemic factors functions in the State. The systemic factors are:

- Statewide Information System
- Service Array
- Case Review System
- Staff Training
- Quality Assurance System
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster & Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, & Retention

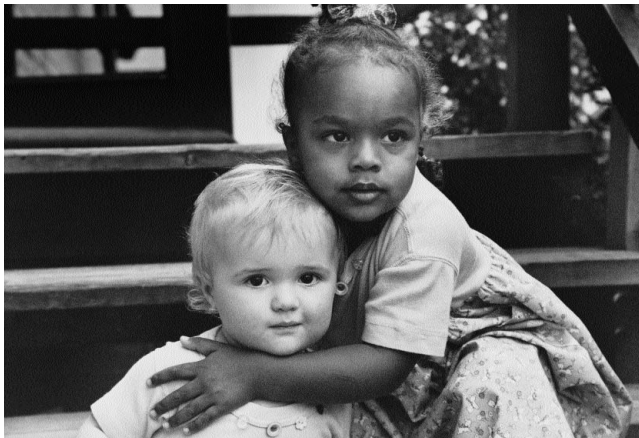
The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) makes a separate determination about the State's conformity with each of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors following the onsite review, and confirms the determination of conformity to the State in a written report issued within 30 days of the onsite review.

For any of the outcomes or systemic factors in which the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity, the State must develop and implement a program improvement plan (PIP) designed to correct the area of non-conformity. The PIP must be developed and submitted to the Regional Office for approval within 90 days of the State receiving written notification of non-conformity. Penalties associated with non-conformity are suspended while the State implements the approved PIP, and are rescinded if the State is successful in ending the non-conformity through completion of the PIP.

Steps in the Review Process

- Determine the dates for the review. A schedule has been developed to review all States by June 2004. Specific dates for the onsite reviews scheduled each year are determined by the State and ACF.
- Form the review team. The review team includes State and Federal staff, individuals from the State who are not State agency staff, and expert contract peer reviewers.
- Transmit data profiles to the State. The Federal government compiles data submitted by the State to NCANDS and AFCARS into reports that the States use in completing their statewide assessment.

- Complete the statewide assessment. State members of the review team analyze the data and address the outcomes and systemic factors included in the statewide assessment.
- Designate locations for the onsite review activities. The Regional Office and State identify 3 locations in the State for the onsite review, including the State's largest metropolitan subdivision.
- Select the sample and types of cases to be reviewed on-site. The number and type of cases to be reviewed is determined by the Regional Office and the State, based on the statewide assessment.
- Prepare for the on-site review. The State and Regional Office collaborate on schedules, stakeholder and case interviews, logistical arrangements, the case review sample, training of reviewers, and other activities associated with the onsite review.
- Onsite review. The review is completed in one week by a State and Federal review team.
- Issue the final report. The Regional Office prepares the final report of the review and the determination of substantial conformity within 30 calendar days of the onsite review.
- Develop the program improvement plan (PIP). The State develops a PIP that covers all areas of non-conformity within 90 calendar days of receiving written notice of non-conformity.
- Implement the program improvement plan. The State implements the approved PIP, receives technical assistance according to the plan, and the Regional Office monitors implementation of the plan.
- Withhold Federal funds for non-conformity. If the State fails to end non-conformity through completion of the PIP, Federal funds are withheld commensurate with the level of non-conformity.
- Conduct subsequent reviews. States determined to be in substantial conformity are reviewed at five-year intervals, with a 3-year interim statewide assessment. States determined not to be in substantial conformity are re-reviewed at two year intervals.



*This document was prepared
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