

A CLOSER LOOK

Accountability[✧]

“Child welfare agencies are accountable to the community not only because they spend local, state, and federal dollars, but also, most critically, because they are charged with protecting vulnerable children from abuse and neglect.” (Blome & Steib, 2007, p. 4)

Overview

Accountability enables funders, stakeholders, and voters to ensure agencies and their representatives fulfill their responsibilities to those they serve. Within systems serving vulnerable populations, where decisions about safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families must be made every day, accountability is essential. Within a systems of care framework, the principle of accountability extends beyond data or evaluation to focus on processes necessary to build evaluative capacity throughout the child welfare system. Accountability also emphasizes the value of communicating with and soliciting feedback from stakeholders about agency or program activities, expectations, and outcomes.

Meaningful, participatory accountability not only protects those who are served but also helps systems identify better ways to operate, motivate staff, and inform agency decision-makers and funders. Ideally, accountability is integrated seamlessly into routine operations and practices; if not, accountability can be perceived by system staff as a low-value bureaucratic burden.

In the context of the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care demonstration initiative, accountability ensures implementation of the other principles is effective and grant communities' progress is tracked toward improving the child welfare system and outcomes for children and families.



Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care

In 2003, the Children's Bureau funded nine demonstration grants to test the efficacy of a systems of care approach to improving outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system and to address policy, practice, and cross-system collaboration issues raised by the Child and Family Services Reviews. Specifically, this approach is designed to improve the capacity of human service agencies to strengthen and support families involved in public child welfare through a set of six guiding principles:

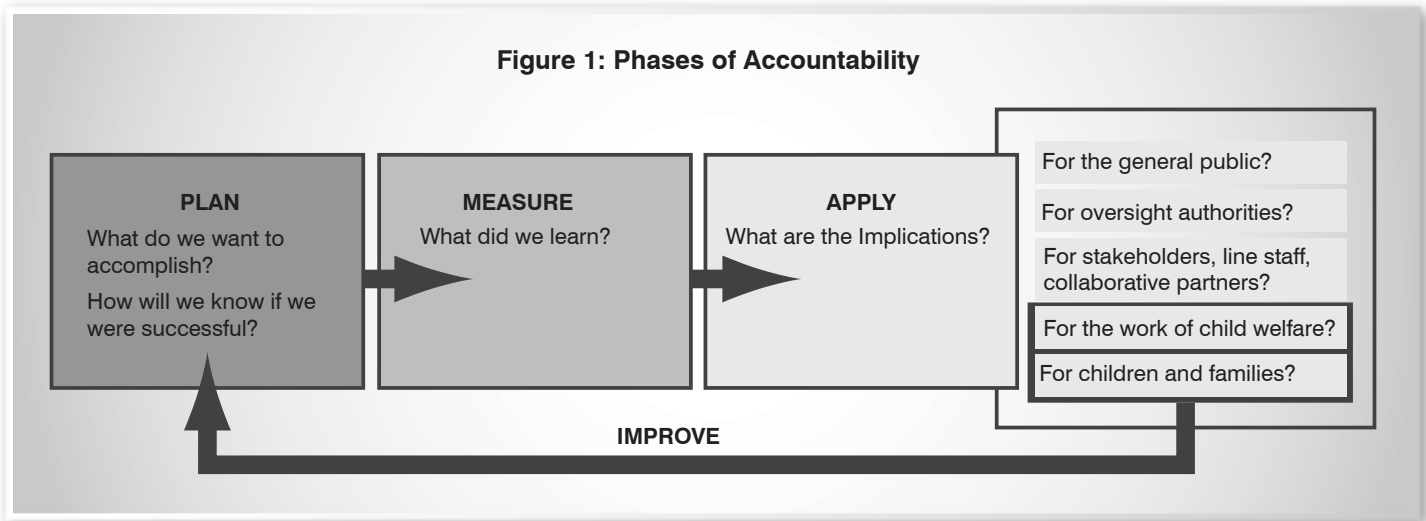
1. Interagency collaboration;
2. Individualized, strengths-based care;
3. Cultural and linguistic competence;
4. Child, youth, and family involvement;
5. Community-based approaches; and
6. **Accountability.**

A Closer Look is a series of short reports that spotlight issues addressed by public child welfare agencies and their partners in implementing systems of care approaches to improve services and outcomes for the children and families they serve. These reports draw on the experiences of communities participating in the Children's Bureau's Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care demonstration initiative, and summarize their challenges, promising practices, and lessons learned. The reports provide information communities nationwide can use in planning, implementing, and evaluating effective child welfare driven systems of care.

✧ The National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the development of this resource: Peggy Taylor, Patrick Harrington, and Jennifer Zajac.



Figure 1: Phases of Accountability



Defining Accountability

Whether in relation to criminals or lawmakers, U.S. or foreign government, corporations or public institutions, holding people and entities accountable encompasses such a variety of goals and activities that arriving at a comprehensive definition is difficult. According to one policy expert (Koppell, 2005, p. 95), “Layering every imagined meaning of accountability into a single definition would render the concept meaningless.” Instead, Koppell presents a typology of accountability that features five dimensions:

- Transparency (“Did the organization reveal the facts of its performance?”).
- Liability (“Did the organization face consequences for its performance?”).
- Controllability (“Did the organization do what the principal desired?”).
- Responsibility (“Did the organization follow the rules?”).
- Responsiveness (“Did the organization fulfill the substantive expectation/demand/need?”).

Systematic and strategic planning prior to implementing a system improvement effort is vital, which is why the Children’s Bureau required a full planning year before grant communities launched implementation activities.

Koppell emphasizes that no single organization will focus equally on all dimensions of accountability. Behn (2001) identifies four main categories of issues to which people and institutions are held accountable: finance; fairness; abuse of power; and performance. Although all categories serve important purposes, for accountability as a principle within the system of care framework, performance is the main issue, as reflected in the definition of accountability used in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care demonstration initiative: “Accountability refers to the continual assessment of practice, organizational, and financial outcomes to determine the effectiveness of systems of care in meeting the needs of children and families” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2008).

Accountability within large systems is not achieved with a single act. As Figure 1 illustrates, accountability is a process with three important phases: planning, measuring, and applying the information.

Planning. Holding systems accountable requires measuring the extent to which they are successful. Measuring the success of systems requires establishing clear outcomes and a plan for reaching them. Formulating strategic plans, logic models, and theories of change helps agencies and institutions connect activities to outcomes. As plans start to take shape, strategies to measure progress also should be determined (Sahonchik, Frizzell, & O’Brien, 2005). In addition to decision-makers, planners should include individuals who do the work (staff), receive its benefits

Evaluation Basics

Although the principle of accountability covers more than program evaluation, evaluation methods are an essential aspect of accountability.

LOGIC MODELS AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

A logic model is a diagram that connects inputs (resources) to activities, to outputs (direct result of activity), to outcomes (short-term, intermediate, long-term, ultimate). Comprehensive models also include external factors and assumptions. In a theory of change, planners specifically call out the underlining assumptions that drive a particular change in order to best identify the activities that must occur.

For more information on theories of change, visit www.theoryofchange.org.

TYPES OF EVALUATION

Among the different categories of program evaluations, the two most common, and potentially most meaningful, are process or formative evaluations and outcome or summative evaluations.

Process or formative evaluation. Used to understand how a program works. Data collection is ongoing and focuses on outputs from activities. Process evaluations commonly include accomplishing discrete tasks (such as participation in training) required to reach larger goals.

Outcome or summative evaluation. Used to understand whether a program achieved a desired outcome. Measures focus on long-term outcomes, such as improved safety, permanency, and well-being for children. The best evaluation model for understanding if and how a system is improving is frequently a hybrid that includes elements of both process and outcome evaluations.

(families), and measure its effectiveness (evaluators and others involved in accountability).

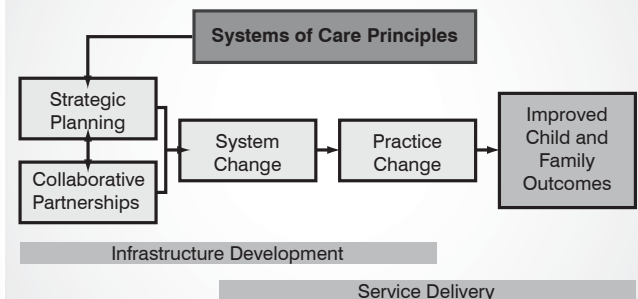
Although planning is the first step toward establishing an accountable system of care, reviewing and revising system planning should be ongoing (Sahonchik et al., 2005).

Measuring. Good measurement is the foundation of accountability. True accountability includes measuring change as it happens as well as measuring the outcomes of change. The systems of care theory of change depicted in Figure 2 proposes that system and practice changes result in improved child and family outcomes. Hence, indicators should be established to measure change in system policies, procedures, and practices as well as change in outcomes for children and families.

Child and Family Outcome Measures. Many child and family measures are associated with long-term outcomes. Accountability often begins with these measures since they represent the goal of the agencies: to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for the children served. Many of these measures are collected from large administrative datasets housed in agencies' electronic information systems. While important, and often mandated by Federal or State agencies, these are not the only kinds of indicators of child and family outcomes. Agencies can obtain valuable information about the population served, or a subpopulation of interest, through a variety of other methods, including focus groups, interviews, and evaluations designed to track cohorts over time.

System and Practice Measures. Systems can be complex, including not only the children and families served, but also staff, partner agencies, and communities, as well as all the practices and operations that contribute to making the system work. If accountability is embedded in the system, both outcomes for children and system change can be measured. Measuring complex system change may require measuring many individual aspects of the system, such as how a new tool works, if training

Figure 2: Theory of Change for Systems of Care



was successful, or how staff members' attitudes about cultural competency change over time. These individual measures should be as accurate as possible, but they do not have to be overly complex. Often, these measures include information that already is, or could easily be, routinely collected. The measures may be quantitative (e.g., how many staff attended a brown bag session on diversity or participant satisfaction with the training, indicated on a scale of 1–5) or qualitative (e.g., response from caseworkers who are testing a new assessment tool or focus group findings about new ideas for foster parent recruitment). Engaging child welfare staff in evaluation planning can be helpful for identifying ways to measure an intended change as well as maintaining accurate records throughout an evaluation project.

Even if collecting measures associated with mundane activities is easy, collection should be planned and systematic and all measures should link to the larger outcomes a system is trying to achieve. Often referred to as performance measurement, a structured process using empirical indicators should be established to allow child welfare and partner agency staff to track whether an agency's activities and services are being provided, used, and ultimately improve the lives of children and families (Bazemore, 2006; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

In addition to being able to accurately assess system progress, measures must lend themselves to the next step in accountability, applying the information.

“Any oversight program or expenditure that does not help the agency advance in the direction of their mandated goals and Federal expectations should be evaluated and questioned”
(Blome & Steib, 2007, p. 4).

Measures must be:

- Thorough enough to be useful to people at all levels of the system and those outside the system without being burdensome.
- Directly related to agency/program/project goals and expectations.
- Flexible and fast enough to guide real-time decisions and test new ideas quickly (Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 1996).
- Continuously collected.

“Improvement comes from the application of knowledge”
(Langley et al., 1996, p. 3).

Applying the Information. To advance from simply measuring to practicing accountability, the information must be shared and used to improve the activity, program, or system. The information must be analyzed and synthesized for multiple communication formats to support a variety of tasks, including:

- Testing the theory of change on which the program or project is based.
- Informing staff about how their practices affect individuals served.
- Helping administrators and decision-makers shape policy.
- Informing families, the community, and the public about, and engaging them in, the work.

Communicating information about performance to a variety of stakeholders is critical for agencies trying to effect significant system change, especially when they are relying on a broad-based collaborative to oversee the change. Small indicators may show improvement long before large, system-wide results are seen. Even if progress is not apparent, sharing data advances system improvement by:

- Creating early opportunities to review and revise system improvement activities that are ineffective.
- Allowing a wider group of stakeholders to participate in improvements.

- Demonstrating an agency's willingness to be transparent to staff and community partners, resulting in increased trust and commitment.
- Showing those who may perform most of the data collection (i.e., caseworkers) how the information is used and how improvements in practice can generate improvements in outcomes.
- Making accountability a routine part of agency operations by building evaluative capacity throughout the system.

Applying the information must be as inclusive as possible and based on sound leadership. Leaders must be willing to use what is learned through measurement to make changes, holding the agency and their own leadership accountable. However, accountability and leadership both require the participation of a broad group of stakeholders who share responsibility for outcomes (Schorr, 2006).

Accountability in a Child Welfare Driven System of Care

In the mid-1990s, the child welfare field, similar to most public agencies and private industry, experienced increased attention to accountability, in part through the passage of key Federal legislation that included the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, 1994 Child Welfare Amendments to the Social Security Act, Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 and its 1996 Amendments, and Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003). These laws paved the way for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to implement the Child and Family Services Reviews in 2000. The Child and Family Services Reviews have allowed the Children's Bureau to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of children served by State child welfare systems. Prior to the Child and Family Services Reviews, the Children's Bureau held States accountable mainly based on aggregate statistics extracted from State automated child welfare information systems. Child and Family Services Reviews improved the process by analyzing data both about the child welfare population as a whole

and how an agency handles specific cases. These deeper measures have helped shift Federal oversight of child welfare agencies from a focus on compliance to a focus on improvement (Children's Bureau, 2009).

Child and Family Services Reviews and other mandated data reports about the child welfare population are not the only mechanisms used to hold child welfare systems accountable. As community members and families have become more engaged in system change, they have become strong supporters of accountability. Beyond the inclusion of families in Child and Family Services Reviews and statewide Program Improvement Plan processes, families and community members have been included in accountability planning to identify relevant outcomes to measure and an evaluation process that is culturally appropriate. Better data collection techniques and technology, more meaningful Federal standards, and the increasingly active role of families, child welfare direct service staff, and community members have strengthened the role and utility of accountability in the child welfare system in recent years.

“The Children’s Bureau has been clear from the outset, however, that the most important purpose of the CFSR-PIP [Child and Family Services Reviews-Program Improvement Plan] endeavor is to initiate a process of continuous program improvement, not to assess fines” (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003, p. 4).

Challenges and Strategies in Implementing Accountability

The experiences of the nine grant communities involved in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care initiative, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they followed to address them provide useful information to administrators nationwide for implementing accountability in a systems of care framework for change.

1. Unique role of evaluators in systems change

Challenges

Evaluators can help system partners manage the complex, comprehensive, and synergistic nature of systems change work (Schorr, 2006). To do so, evaluators must be engaged and contributing participants in the ongoing work rather than simply observers. Because this is a departure from the traditional evaluator function, not all evaluation or agency professionals are comfortable with the extent of communication and daily involvement the engaged evaluator role requires.

Strategies

- **Use an internal evaluator.** Contra Costa County (California) used grant funds to build its agency's internal evaluation capacity by employing a full-time evaluator. This led to greater use of agency data, not only to monitor and evaluate the system of care effort but also more generally within the child welfare agency and other offices, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Also, relationships developed by this internal position facilitated the aggregation and utilization of data across systems.
- **Foster a good relationship and open communication between evaluator and project staff.** The local evaluator and project manager in Pennsylvania regularly updated each other about issues in and strengths of participating counties. The local evaluator participated in monthly technical assistance calls and meetings with project staff to maintain a focus on evaluation's role in daily practice and provide assistance to agency staff and community partners on evaluation-related issues. This communication helped both the

local evaluators stay informed about the work of the counties, and gave the project manager and other staff opportunities to provide feedback and contribute to the evaluation effort.

- **Be creative about who participates in implementing accountability.** Although the demonstration initiative required grant communities to contract with a local evaluator, much of the work related to accountability has been performed by project staff and collaborative members as they engage in activity tracking, data collection, and assessments. Creativity and inclusiveness in determining who participates in accountability can make the effort easier to sustain.
 - Medicine Moon Initiative (North Dakota) hired a local evaluator coordinator within each of the Tribal child welfare agencies. The new position helped the Tribes develop the capacity to initiate their own evaluation plans based on local needs and interest. Turtle Mountain's Tribal child welfare agency worked with a group of community members who identified a shared need, developed a survey, administered and collected the data, and then worked with the local evaluator to analyze the results. The community members communicated the survey results and recommendations within their networks.
 - Contra Costa County used a State program to fund internships at county child welfare agencies for graduate students in social work. The interns participated in evaluation activities that might not have been conducted without the additional contribution of their time.
- **Use system measures and process data to re-invigorate work before outcome changes are evident.** In Kansas, evaluators noticed that motivation and satisfaction with the demonstration initiative's efforts declined because participants were focused on long-term outcomes that were not expected for several years. Refocusing collaborative and agency participants to system and process measures and their associated activities and accomplishments, and graphically showing how this could lead to long-term change, helped reward and revitalize participants throughout the challenging work of systems change.

“Almost every State responding to our survey and all the States we visited reported that insufficient training for caseworkers and inaccurate and incomplete data entry affect the quality of the data reported to AFCARS [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System] and NCANDS [National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System]” (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003, p. 15).

2. Working with agency data systems and sharing data across agencies

Challenges

Collecting and sharing data can be impeded by resource constraints, inconsistent data entry protocols, lack of integrated data systems that cross organizational boundaries, confidentiality issues, and the often highly politicized environment inherent in child welfare (Mears & Butts, 2008). Some grant communities encountered data access issues, often while tracking individual outcomes. For instance, the local team in North Carolina designed an evaluation that would track the progress of individual youth for a number of measures including school attendance, behavior, and performance; involvement in other systems, such as juvenile justice and mental health; and models used by caseworkers, such as child and family team meetings. The evaluators had difficulty recruiting enough youth for the sample, were unable to gain permission to access school information, and were able to track juvenile justice measures only through aggregate data.

Strategies

- **Make data entry convenient and useful for child welfare professionals.** In Colorado, the Jefferson County System of Care project data and technology team conducted focus groups with child welfare workers and supervisors to determine in advance

staff objectives and needs for a data entry system, such as reducing duplication in paperwork. Rather than establish a system and then train child welfare staff afterward, Jefferson County built the data entry system to address the specific needs identified by child welfare workers and supervisors. The Jefferson County Child Welfare Application Timesaver accesses information entered into the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System to automate internal county documents, forms, and referrals, making documentation and data entry more manageable for workers, and summarizes key compliance indicators for caseworkers, supervisors, and managers. The result has been improved worker morale, improved data quality, and more efficient workload management.

- **Educate staff on existing information sharing policies.** In Pennsylvania, the Department of Public Welfare hosted a series of Confidentiality Forums to help county agency staff identify what information they could share across systems and where the legitimate legal challenges to cross-systems information sharing actually existed. The Confidentiality Forums helped resolve questions about the information that could be shared between staff of agencies serving the same family members.
- **Link data from other systems serving similar populations.** Contra Costa County uploaded data on children in foster care from the system of care demonstration initiative to California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids (CalWorks), the State TANF program, which deepened the data capacity for both programs and gave better visibility and understanding to the characteristics and needs of families and individuals served by both systems.

3. Developing and actively using detailed, meaningful plans to track progress

Challenges

Accountability must start during the planning phase of systems improvement. Yet as a system change initiative moves from early planning to implementation, decision-makers and staff are often too busy performing the work to review their initial plans, which can leave the work unfocused, inefficient, and unable to accomplish significant improvements for children and families.

Strategies

- **Assess strategic plans routinely to measure progress.** North Carolina conducted a systems of care planning retreat annually and has used the strategic plan as a working document throughout the initiative. The local evaluators led an annual blueprinting exercise to document the process of system change, identify lessons learned, and determine action steps for sustainability. This approach helped integrate planning, work, and results into a unified vision for the initiative.
- **Use detailed plans to monitor progress and engage everyone performing the work.** In a broad-based collaborative, many participants are responsible for accomplishing a variety of activities. While agency administrators may be able to hold their own staff accountable, it can be difficult to hold members of a collaborative accountable. Colorado, New York, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania created and used collaborative work plans that identified activities and persons responsible.
 - New York emphasized the role of community members in its collaborative. Community members held the agency accountable, but through good project management and thorough tracking tools, the collaborative also held community members and agencies accountable for activities they promised to accomplish.
 - Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, used the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) improvement process (Langley et al., 1996) to monitor and guide the work of several subcommittees involved in systems improvement activities in the child welfare agency. Each subcommittee followed the PDSA process to create, implement, assess, and act on the results of systems improvement activities such as developing cross-system training and revising an intake form to be more family friendly.
 - Colorado's Progress to Goals Survey measures the perceived progress in each of the collaborative's committees by asking participants about the committee goals, membership, and productivity. Based on this feedback, grant staff can make modifications to the facilitation and activities of the subcommittees to ensure meaningful and productive meetings.
- Bladen County, North Carolina, developed an outline-style tracking tool that identified the tasks assigned to each collaborative partner and enabled the collaborative to track progress toward goals.
- **Develop logic models for specific areas of work.** Some efforts within a large initiative are so complex that they may benefit from their own planning documents. For instance, Kansas developed models for each of the activities articulated in the grant logic model. The activity models helped the grant team and local system of care steering committees stay focused on grant goals. The activity models also provided a framework for dialogue among diverse stakeholders on various grant activities and progress toward goals. The Medicine Moon Initiative and New York also developed planning documents (logic models and strategic plans) for specific activities or areas of work. Such focused plans can be especially helpful for collaboratives with dedicated subcommittees.

“Effective evaluation data reports can be powerful tools for improving and sustaining interagency service delivery systems for children and families” (Woodbridge & Huang, 2000, p. 11).

4. Addressing implications

Challenges

Applying the information can be seen as critically examining the data collected about the work and asking the question, “So what?” With any systems improvement effort, two obstacles are associated with this phase of accountability: ensuring regular opportunities are offered to reflect on the data collected, progress made, and lessons learned, and making and carrying out decisions based on this information.

Strategies

■ Change organizational culture to embrace accountability.

- In Kansas, the project team and local evaluators created a culture of evaluation, beginning with development of a logic model. The project team then used the logic model to increase local capacity for data usage and data-driven decision-making in several ways: (1) conducting focus groups that included questions about how systems of care principles would be operationalized, proposed action steps, and identified measures of effectiveness; (2) conducting training on the logic modeling process with local and State systems of care steering committees; and (3) responding to requests for data on issues identified by systems of care collaborative councils. Though more time intensive and complex than traditional evaluation approaches, the Kansas approach has resulted in local steering committees that have incorporated logic modeling as a central part of planning and evaluation in ongoing work.
- In Clark County, Nevada, local evaluators provided regular data and evaluation updates at county and State meetings. In addition, they provide the grant community with technical assistance on issues related to data collection, assessing program effectiveness, and interpreting data in preparation for presentations at meetings.
- In Pennsylvania, local evaluators participated in various collaborative subcommittees. At subcommittee meetings, the local evaluator provided informal updates on the evaluation, formally presented evaluation findings biannually, and provided evaluation technical assistance for specific subcommittee tasks.

- **Link findings to other agency priorities.** In Kansas, the local evaluation team gave several presentations to local and State systems of care leadership, illustrating how the activities conducted through their systems of care related to findings about the length of stay in foster care, which is a priority for the State as it works to comply with the mandates of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews.

■ Use what is learned through measurement to sustain and grow programs.

- Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York, participates in agency and citywide efforts to implement a neighborhood-based services system through the realignment of all foster care, prevention, and protective services along community district lines. This grant community has received additional funding to continue improving neighborhood-based service coordination, collaboration, and accountability to the community via the child welfare funded agency's community partnership initiative (designed to help the child welfare agency and community coalitions come together to design a plan to increase safety, permanency, and well-being in their communities).
- Contra Costa County focused on using data to inform decision-making regarding agency practices. For instance, one of the internal evaluators assessed caseworker workloads for 12 months to give supervisors and managers a better idea of their needs, resources, and how workload may affect child and family outcomes.
- Spirit Lake's (North Dakota) implementation of the SuperFileIt electronic data management system allowed the director of the child welfare agency to provide the Tribal council with agency performance data as well as information on the needs of Tribal child welfare involved youth and families. Because of the disproportionate number of American Indian children in foster care in North Dakota,¹ the director was invited to provide testimony to the State legislature on Tribal child welfare needs in Spirit Lake.



¹ According to the North Dakota Department of Human Services (2009), although American Indian children represent only 7 percent of the total population of children in North Dakota, they make up 27 percent of children in foster care in the State.

Implications for Administrators and Stakeholders

Effectively addressing accountability requires long-term and continuous commitment from agency leaders to create an environment that values transparency and informed decision-making, and that also provides adequate staffing, technology, time, and other resources to fulfill this commitment (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004). Although funding for accountability typically is limited within most human service agencies, the grant communities implemented several strategies to help administrators and stakeholders maintain accountability.

Selecting, supporting, and sustaining those who carry out accountability work. While measures may be collected by a variety of individuals (agency data technology staff, caseworkers, project coordinators, and evaluators) someone must be responsible for coordinating the effort. Enough staff time must be allotted for all roles to ensure the quality of the data and resulting analysis. Finding ways for accountability work to be done by program staff, or other individuals who will have a long, active relationship with the agency (e.g., staff from a local university that often works with the agency), is important for two reasons:

- Accountability should be considered central to system improvement; therefore, evaluators (or those doing the measuring) should be engaged throughout the work, rather than being objective outsiders.
- Integrating accountability into operations will help sustain momentum after finite funding ends.

Knowing the limits of child welfare outcome data. Sometimes, balancing meaningful and feasible measures is challenging. No system can collect all information perfectly. Knowing the kinds of data that can be collected and what that data can reveal about child welfare agencies and the families served by them is critical. Great strides have been made over the last decade by child welfare agencies in tracking data about children. Because of Federal reporting requirements and child welfare agency goals, there is an emphasis on collecting data about outcomes for children. Agencies face many challenges when trying to track long-term outcomes across a large population of at-risk children. Currently, while data collected by public agencies may offer a good indication of how children are faring in child welfare agencies overall, these data can be less useful when evaluating the effect of a specific initiative

or a specific activity. The ability of a community to use agency outcome data in real time for systems change depends on the technological and staffing resources of the county or State. Agencies often are limited in the kinds of data extractions and computations they can perform, and may have to wait 6 months or more to obtain data. To be fast, flexible, and targeted for systems of care activities, grant communities augmented traditional child welfare outcome data with process data and found creative ways to use the agency's outcome data (e.g., linking it with data about TANF).

Accountability for improvement versus compliance. Administrators can leverage accountability to improve systems. Moving from compliance-driven management to sustainable improvement requires administrators to harness and embrace new data technologies, engage new family and community perspectives, and integrate evaluative capacity-building strategies throughout the child welfare system and agency culture.

When implemented appropriately, accountability can be a valuable tool for building and sustaining effective systems of care. Demonstrating effectiveness, whether in terms of cost, outcome, or benefit to society, can mean the difference between sustainability and the end of a program, especially in difficult fiscal environments. Ultimately, the strength of measurement and accountability practices comes from the commitment of leaders to thoughtfully and faithfully apply what is learned to guide systems to better serve children and families.

“By showing the results of your efforts to date, you are helping those who need to invest the finite resources of a State, county, city, or Tribe to ensure that their investment will yield promising results for children and families and enhance the work of the agencies that engage with those families.”

—Gary De Carolis, Senior Consultant, National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center

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Additional Resources

The following online resources offer valuable information for child welfare practitioners, administrators, and community partners and feature ready-to-use tools and examples from the field.

Free Management Library—<http://managementhelp.org>

United Way: Resources on outcomes—
<http://www.unitedway.org/outcomes/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway: Logic Model Builder—<http://toolkit.childwelfare.gov/toolkit/>

University of Wisconsin: Program development and evaluation resources —<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicbiblio.html>

Harvard Family Research Project: Evaluation exchange—<http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange>

Tools for self-evaluation in child welfare, compiled by Dr. Lynn Usher, University of North Carolina—
<http://www.unc.edu/~lynnu/setool.htm>



The National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care is funded by the Children's Bureau, under contract with ICF International. The Center assists and supports grantees funded through the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care demonstration initiative by providing training and technical assistance and a national evaluation of the demonstration initiative. Contact: Aracelis Gray, NTAC Project Director, 9300 Lee Hwy, Fairfax, VA 22031, 703-225-2290, agray@icfi.com.

Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care Demonstration Sites

California—Partnering4Permanency—
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