

PLANNING FOR YOUR PROGRAM'S CHILD WELFARE DATA SYSTEM

JOURNEY THROUGH THE RIVER OF DATA SERIES, FEBRUARY 2018

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Data is a river that flows through all aspects of child welfare work, as well as through the community -- a key resource but one that can sometimes be challenging to navigate.

Developing data capacity can be like traveling from downstream to upstream. You may need someone who is further upstream to give you guidance on how to avoid rough waters or undercurrents that may throw you off course.

What are your program's data needs?

- Do you and your staff collect data on clients and services? If so, what is your current data system (pen and paper, spreadsheets, an integrated data system)? What works and what needs to be changed? For example, does your program need a system that is more user-friendly? Do you and your staff have access to the data you need? Can you run necessary reports?
- If your program does not currently collect data, how could data inform your practice? Be sure to know what your program needs before spending time and resources developing a new system.
- Does your tribe have policies in place about data collection, confidentiality and ownership?
- Does your program have the support of tribal leadership to establish or make changes to the data system? If not, what steps are needed to get their support?

Does your tribe have the capacity to implement a new system?

- What is your tribe's or your program's capacity to develop, enhance or maintain a data system based on your identified needs? (computer system, internet access, staff trained with appropriate computer skills)
- Have you identified appropriately skilled staff to develop, enhance and maintain a data system?
- Do you have others who may be able to advise you such as other tribal departments that have data systems you could learn from? Do you know of other tribes who could mentor or provide advice on data systems?
- Are there resources available to purchase, develop, enhance or maintain a data system?

Is your program ready for change?

- Are program staff ready and willing to support change? For example, are they willing to be trained and comfortable with computers? If not, what can be done to prepare them?
- Can you clearly describe the rationale for establishing or changing the data system? How will building data capacity improve your program's ability to provide services more effectively?
- Do leaders and other key stakeholders support establishing or enhancing the data system?
- Are program staff able to commit the necessary time and resources needed for set up, training, and maintenance?
- Is this the right time for your agency to undertake the development or enhancement of your data system? Do you have the time and staff to commit to undertake this change?
- Have you done background research about what data systems are used successfully by other tribes?





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OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING OR ENHANCING YOUR DATA SYSTEM

Potential Costs

- Expenses associated with developing or changing a system using a vendor
- Staff time to plan, implement and manage the data system
- Initial equipment and software costs
- Software customization, if any
- Software license and maintenance
- Training, training, and more training
- Data conversion from old system (automated or paper)
- Data Storage

Policy Development

- What policies need to be developed for the new system based on your program's specific needs?
- How do you currently develop and obtain approval for implementing agency policies?
- Policies should include: Who will have access to data? Do you need to have different levels of access for various staff? How accessible can data be? Will you have direct access or access through a vendor? Timelines for entering data (same day, within 48 hours). Who has data ownership? How will data be stored (paper files, computer system or online)? What data sharing agreements might you want? Who will be responsible for training, maintenance, and future changes to the data system?

Benefits of an Effective Data System

- Having greater access to accurate data for those who need to know information for supervision or practice.
- Ability to monitor changes in outcomes for children and families over time.
- Being able to track effectiveness of referrals and other important data elements.
- Ability to track worker caseloads in order to assign cases to account for workload and severity of cases.
- Capacity to meet federal, state, BIA, or tribal reporting requirements.
- Being able to provide tribal leaders, staff, the community and funders accurate information about your program outcomes.
- Ability to meet data requirements to apply for direct tribal IV-E and other federal funding that requires specific data elements.
- The ability to create an integrated data system to allow for greater consistency across programs.

ABOUT "TOOLS FOR GROWTH" RESOURCES. The Capacity Building Center for Tribes' Tools for Growth resources are developed by a team of American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous child welfare professionals from across Indian Country who are dedicated to providing tribal communities with the tools they need to thrive and build their capacity to strengthen children, youth, families, and communities. The group works together to both establish a common vision of the resources needed and create content.