

Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies

The elements of the program improvement plans (PIPs) called for in the child and family services review process are the same elements in any basic strategic plan, and parallel the required elements of each states' comprehensive child and family services plan (CFSP). To assist states with the PIPs and with their CFSP, this issue is devoted to strategic planning for child welfare agencies.

Our main article describes a framework for strategic planning, highlighting Nebraska's strategic planning process. Another article discusses the CFSP and PIP requirements, with advice on integrating the processes and enhancing your planning process. We include information on technical assistance available from the National Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, useful publications and a checklist to guide you through the strategic planning process.

We also highlight the technical assistance available from our Resource Center. Beth Frizzell, the former Deputy Director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services, has been working with states, including Nebraska, on strategic planning, and is available to assist you with this process.

We invite your feedback on these resources, and your ideas about strategic planning. We look forward to hearing from you!

– Kris Sahonchik

Many states across the country are facing or anticipating the task of developing program improvement plans (PIPs) as part of the federal child and family services review process. The elements of a PIP – goals, action steps, dates to accomplish the steps and benchmarks to measure progress – are among the basic components of a strategic plan. Best practice nationally calls for agencies to have an active strategic planning process that continually works to improve agency performance. Since 1995, the federal government has required child welfare to develop comprehensive five-year child and family services plans (CFSPs) under Title IV-B incorporating IVB, CAPTA, independent living and Title IV-E training. The planning process as described in federal regulations directly parallels best practice in strategic planning and the required elements of PIPs. Child and family service plans must include goals, specific objectives, long term timetables and interim benchmarks, and methods to measure progress. As states develop PIPs they can build on the CFSPs, and in fact PIP elements must be incorporated into the CFSP. Developing PIPs will be easier for states that have a strong planning process (see article below).

Since the 1980s, strategic planning has become increasingly common in public agencies. On the national level, the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires federal agencies to write strategic plans. Many state governments have also established strategic planning processes, or budget pro-

cesses that require agencies to conduct regular planning. In child welfare, the requirement to develop comprehensive CFSPs is part of this trend. Done right, strategic planning can be the fundamental management tool agencies use to improve outcomes.

Planning processes often produce reports that sit unused on shelves. In contrast, strategic planning focuses on continually moving an organization towards its goals. "Strategy" derives from the Greek "strategos" which means, literally, "general of the army." Generals look at the big picture, and give advice about marshaling the resources and strengths of a military force to achieve goals. In this context, strategy is purposeful behavior that assesses the organization's goals, strengths and weaknesses, and external threats and opportunities that the organization faces in deploying forces to best advantage in pursuit of these goals (Rainey, 1997).

Strategic planning is a continual process for increasing organizational performance that includes four steps:

- preparation;
- planning;
- implementing the plan; and
- reviewing and revising the plan.

In the second step of planning you write the plan – the document that describes where you want to go, how you will get there, and how you will know if you are making progress. However, prior to planning there are some preparation steps that are critical to success – developing a vision, designing a planning process that organizes all the necessary play-

Continued on page 2

Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies

Continued from page 1

ers, and conducting an assessment of how you are doing as an agency. Based on the assessment you then define the goals and outcomes that will be the continual focal point throughout the process, and that will be the starting point of your written plan. Other critical steps follow after writing the plan - it needs to be distributed, and then implemented so that it is used throughout the agency. Finally, agencies need to continually evaluate progress and revise the plan. Strong preparation makes for a strong plan, and the complete planning process - including implementing, reviewing and revising, ensures that the plan is a useful document that guides agency action and focuses attention on progress towards outcomes.

Preparation

The preparation step of strategic planning includes four major activities:

Develop a vision. This step is necessary so that everyone involved in planning is clear on the direction of the agency, and on agency priorities. A vision - also sometimes called a mission - is a statement of the ultimate ends the agency envisions for the future, and the agency's role in achieving those ends. An example might be to protect all vulnerable children and adults from abuse or neglect, support family preservation and prevent family violence and disruption. The vision should be a clear statement that is easy to interpret and communicate to the agency staff, community stakeholders, consumers, and general public. The statements about the agency's role in achieving these ends are sometimes called the agency's goals - or an expression of direction or priority that provides a values-based framework for action. For example, based on the

vision above an agency goal might be to keep children safe in their own homes.

Develop a planning process. Before planning it is important for an agency or organization to establish a structure for planning, identifying who will be involved in and responsible for the plan. The roles and responsibilities of those involved need to be defined, and necessary training and orientation should be provided to participants. Agencies should identify the key decision makers for the plan, and who will lead the planning process. Strategies must be developed to ensure staff and stakeholder involvement and input throughout the process. In addition, it is also important to understand what the process will be for actually writing and maintaining the plan.

Assessment. An assessment identifies agency strengths, resources, needs, barriers and gaps in programs and services to target the planning efforts. A good assessment collects information internally within the agency or organizational system as well as externally utilizing providers, contractors, stakeholders, and consumers. The assessment utilizes data, statistics, reports, surveys, focus groups, and any other relevant and valid information to help focus planning efforts. As the information is gathered, it is critical to evaluate it to determine the strengths and needs of the agency for planning purposes.

Define outcomes and clear expectations: Based on both the needs identified in the assessment, and state and federal mandates, agencies need to determine what outcomes they want to achieve. Outcomes are the result of actions, and they are tangible, measurable, time-specific. For example, the agency might decide that one of their outcomes should be to reduce the recurrence of child

abuse and neglect. The outcomes must be understandable, and there should be a clear expectation that the plan, and implementation and evaluation of the plan, will focus on these outcomes.

Planning

These four preparation activities provide the needed foundation for the agency to develop a strategic plan. Prior to writing the plan, the planning group should agree on a structure and format for the plan. Then, the group can develop and write the plan. A strategic plan is a written document that:

- defines organizational goals and outcomes;
- defines indicators of progress; and
- lays out the action steps that will be undertaken to achieve these outcomes.

The strategic plan itself, or a related workplan, includes:

- who is responsible for the action steps; and
- associated timeframes.

The goals and outcomes in the plan are developed in preparing to plan. The plan then needs to define the indicators - sometimes called measures - which will provide evidence of achievement of the



outcome. For example, an indicator might be the percentage decrease in abuse/neglect cases during a specific time period compared to a previous period.

The action steps are what the agency will do, and are developed based on assumptions. Assumptions are statements of what needs to be changed, often based on the assessment. The planning group chooses action steps the agency will take to address the needs. Based on knowledge about best practice and what is possible within the agency, the planning group decides which actions would address the needs, and result in improved performance on the indicators and associated outcomes. For example, the assessment may have revealed a high number of children reentering out of home care. The planning group might then decide to expand reunification services for families with children returning to the home.

After putting the organization's goals, outcomes, indicators and action steps into the agreed upon format, the group can establish priority areas for attention. Then the group needs to assign responsibility for carrying out the action steps, and define timeframes by which actions will be completed. Action steps can be broken down to specific actions that are indicators of progress (sometimes referred to as benchmarks). A benchmark for the action step above might be to issue a request for proposals for additional reunification services by a certain date.

Once the plan is drafted, it should be circulated for additional input and revisions. Consensus and a true buy in to the plan must happen before finalizing the document. After the plan is finalized and approved, it must be shared with everyone who will implement and carry out the goals and objectives, including staff and stakeholders.

Implementing the plan

To implement the plan, managers need to ensure that action steps are being carried out, and progress on the indicators and outcomes is being tracked and reported. A designated plan manager should coordinate on a regular basis with those responsible for implementing the action steps. More broadly, the plan becomes a management tool which focuses the attention of managers on all levels - state, regional or county, district and unit - on supervising the work being done under the plan and on agency performance. As agency leaders work to manage by the plan, they often need to coordinate with the whole range of child and family service programs provided by the agency and by other public and private service delivery systems. Supervisors also need to use the plan to guide the work of their staff on a day-to-day basis.

As the plan is implemented, managers need to develop systems to track and report on the implementation of the plan and on performance on the indicators. Plan managers should draw on the data and statistical reports that are available from existing information systems to measure indicators and implementation of the plan. In addition, other program and service reports as well as information generated from case reviews, contractors reports or evaluations, consumer satisfaction surveys and other research studies can be used. Regular reporting systems on the indicators, outcomes and implementation should be built on any existing quality assurance systems.

Once an agency has tracking and reporting systems in place, the reports should be reviewed regularly. In this way the plan becomes an evaluation tool, guiding ongoing assessment of agency performance.

Review and Revise the Plan

The planning group, staff, stakeholders and others should review progress towards outcomes on a regular basis and make necessary revisions to the plan. The plan needs to be reassessed or evaluated at least annually. Based on the results of the evaluation, additional input should be collected from planning participants and the plan should be modified or updated to address the issues identified. As the plan is reviewed and revised, it becomes a living document that is current and meaningful for the organization.

The planning process is circular and ongoing, as preparation sets the stage for planning, and the plan is then implemented and evaluated, leading to additional assessment, input into the planning process and changes in the plan itself. In practice, agencies can jump in and start strategic planning at any point in the process, building on systems already in place (*see T.A. article on page 10*).

These four steps are reflected in the literature on strategic planning, and are referred to consistently as part of the strategic planning process in business, education and human services. For example, a widely cited book on strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations defines a ten-step Strategy Change Cycle that includes all the major components of preparation, planning, implementing and reviewing and revising. The cycle calls for initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process, establishing the organizational vision, mission and mandates, and assessing the organization's internal and external environment. Then in the planning step, organizations should identify strategic issues facing the organization, formulate strategies to manage these issues, and then review and adopt the strategic plan. Finally, organizations should develop an effective implementation strategy and then reassess strategies and the strategic planning process (Bryson).

Continued on page 4

Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies

Continued from page 3

Organizations that have developed national standards for the management of child welfare agencies – the Child Welfare League of America, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, and the Council on Accreditation of Services for Children and Families (COA) – all specify that agencies should develop a strategic plan. All agree that the plan should include the mission or vision of the agency, the agency goals and objectives, and strategies or action steps to meet these objectives. They also call for engaging stakeholders in the planning process.

Federal requirements, literature, and national standards all suggest that strategic planning is an essential process for child welfare agencies

today. A strong strategic planning process:

- provides a process agencies can use to improve performance;
- allows agencies to refocus their purpose by developing a shared vision, goals and outcomes;
- provides a structure states can use to respond to the results of assessments;
- creates a process for prioritizing the use of organizational resources;
- provides direction and meaning for day-to-day activities within the agency;
- reduces duplication across programs; and

- develops and implements action plans and new operating procedures necessary to achieve outcomes.

In addition to these benefits, states will also be better prepared to develop and implement a program improvement plan. The strategic planning process used by Nebraska, described on page 5, illustrates how the process can work for states.

Bryson, John M. (1995). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Rainey, Hal G. (1997). *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

DEFINITIONS

Strategy

is purposeful behavior that assesses the organization's goals, strengths and weaknesses, and external threats and opportunities that the organization faces in deploying forces to best advantage in pursuit of these goals. (Rainey, 1997)

TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Vision/Mission	A statement of the ultimate ends the agency envisions for the future, and the agency's role in achieving those ends	To protect all vulnerable children and adults from abuse or neglect, support family preservation and prevent family violence and disruption
Goals	Statements about the agency's role in achieving these ends. Goals are expressions of direction or priority that provide a values based framework for action	Keep children safe in their own homes
Outcomes	The result of actions. These statements are tangible, measurable, and time specific.	Reduce recurrence of child abuse/neglect
Indicators/Measures	Provide evidence of achievement of the outcome	Percentage decrease in abuse/neglect cases during a specific time period compared to a previous period
Action Steps	What the agency will do	Expand reunification services for families
Benchmark	Specific actions steps that are indicators of progress	Issue a request for proposals for additional reunification services by a specific date

The Nebraska Family Portrait: Making a Difference for Children and Families

Katie McLeese Stephenson, MSW, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

In the fall of 2000 Nebraska began to prepare for the on-site CFS Review scheduled for July 2002. We considered conducting a pre-review in one or more locations and after consulting with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NCWRCOI) we determined that our efforts would be better spent developing a strategic plan for Nebraska's Protection & Safety System. Nebraska is a state administered system and the Protection & Safety system serves children, youth and families in child protection and juvenile service.

Nebraska's strategic plan, called the Nebraska Family Portrait, was developed using a multifaceted process. The major steps included:

Preparation and Buy-In

- Determined that a strategic plan needed to be developed
- Central Office took a lead role in developing a suggested process to develop the plan
- Met with the Director and Deputy Director of Health and Human Services to seek their approval and support
- Met with Service Area and Central Office Staff to share information

Training, Assessment and Planning

- NCWRCOI conducted training with 60 staff from the field, central office and others areas (mental health, developmental disabilities, Information Systems, Training etc.) in preparation for the planning session (March 2001)

- Staff conducted "homework" on the strengths and needs in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being and the seven systemic factors and we also accessed recommendations from previous work group activities related to these topics
- NCWRCOI facilitated a planning session with staff that was held over three days. Based on the homework and previous assessments, the group produced a preliminary draft of the plan. (May 2001)
- Preliminary plan was presented to the Policy Cabinet at the conclusion of the meeting (May 2001)

Writing and Distributing the Plan

- Based on the work of the staff at the planning session, central office staff edited, finalized and sequenced the activities in the plan (May and June 2001)
- Broad Indicators were identified (June 2001) and more specific information was developed after the plan was started (Fall 2001)
- Logo designed; brochures, wallet cards, pins and magnet developed (Spring 2001)
- Plan was shared and approved by the Director and the Governor (July 2001)
- Meeting held with 200+ Stakeholders to release the plan (July 2001)
- 40+ Meetings held throughout the state to educate about the Nebraska Family Portrait (July-December 2001)

Implementing and Evaluating

- Staff report progress as tasks are completed
- The plan is used to manage and focus the priorities
- Six-Month Progress report completed, Governor shared results at a press conference, results distributed (February 2002)
- Begin planning for year two activities (Spring 2002)
- Annual Report to be released (August 2002)

The Nebraska Family Portrait is a four-year plan. As we near the conclusion of the first year it is evident that we have seen increased focus and accountability in Protection & Safety as a result of the plan. It has also helped us to prepare for the CFS Review and will assist us in our Program Improvement Planning Process. There has been support for the Portrait from the state's Governor, the Department Director, and many internal and external partners. As time progresses we continue to learn how to best manage and prioritize this planning process.

More information on the Nebraska Family Portrait can be found under "what's new" at the Department's web site: www.hhs.state.ne.us. For more information on Nebraska's planning process, contact Craig Erickson, Program Specialist, (402) 471-9364 or craig.erickson@hhss.state.ne.us

How Program Improvement Plans Can Build on the Title IV-B Child and Family Services Planning Process

In 1994, Amendments to the Social Security Act authorized the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to review state child and family services programs in order to assure compliance with the state plan requirements in Title IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. As the result of this mandate, ACF began designing the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) to help states improve child welfare services and the outcomes for families and children by identifying strengths and needs within state programs as well as areas where technical assistance can lead to program improvements. DHHS piloted the review process with 11 states and further refined the CFSR through 2000. The reviews were actually implemented in 2001. With seventeen (17) states having completed the Child and Family Service Reviews last year and fifteen (15) more states scheduled for review in 2002, Program Improvement Plans (PIP) and Title IV-B Child and Family Service Plans (CFSP) have become a hot national topic.

The Title IV-B CFSP is a document which describes the publicly-funded state child and family service continuum [45CFR 1357.10(c)]. The PIP is a document based on the CFSR specifically addressing any of the outcomes or systemic factors in which the state is determined to be in non-conformity.

Both of these documents are to be developed through joint planning with the Administration of Children and Families. Joint planning is an on-going partnership between ACF and the state in the development, review, analysis, and refinement of the state's Child and Family Service Plan and PIP. The expectation of joint planning is that both ACF and the state will reach an agreement on substantive and procedural matters related to the plan or PIP.

An important factor to consider in planning for the PIP is the state's existing planning process for the Title IV-B CFSP and Annual Progress and Service Report (APSR). Many states are implementing a parallel system for developing the PIP, duplicating efforts rather than integrating the PIP development with the child and family service planning process. Preparation for the PIP planning process should include a review of the federal regulations related to the Title IV-B CFSP and understanding how the child and family service planning process is supposed to work. The PIP planning can easily be integrated into or build on the states existing Title IV-B planning process.

What are the CFSP requirements specifically related to planning?

The state must base the development of the CFSP on a planning process that includes:

- Broad involvement and consultation [45 CFR 1357.15(d)(2)];

The state's plan must describe the internal and external consultation process used to obtain broad and active involvement of stakeholders

across the entire spectrum of the child and family service delivery system in the development of the plan. The CFSP requirements outline specific representatives that must be part of the process including state, local, and community-based agencies and organizations, parents, professional and advocacy organizations, staff at all levels of the family service agency, representatives from Indian Tribes within the state, representatives from local government, and representatives from federal or federally assisted programs. This theme of broad involvement and internal and external consultation is important to the review process as well. The team for the CFSR must include representatives from those groups with whom the state is required to consult in developing the plan. As part of the CFSR, the on-site review conducts stakeholder interviews and must include, at a minimum, those who participated in developing the state's plan. Therefore, the composition of the Title IV-B planning group is important to the development of the CFSP but is also the source of representatives for the review team and process.

- Coordination of services with other federal and federally assisted programs [45 CFR 1357.15 (d) (2)];

The state's plan must coordinate with representatives from the full range of child and family services provided by the state agency as well as other service delivery systems providing social, health, education and economic services to improve access and deliver a range of services to children and families. The description of this ongoing service coordination in the plan must include the participants involved in the process and examples of how the process led or will lead to additional coordina-



tion of services. This on-going service coordination is necessary to improve the child and family service delivery system and also directly impacts the established well-being outcomes and indicators for the review.

- Collection of existing or available information to assess the child and family service delivery system and to develop more effective and accessible services for children and families [45 CFR 1357.15 (d)(3)].

The CFSP calls for states to collect and analyze existing statewide data, available baseline information and any trends over time on indicators related to the well-being and needs of children and families, as well as the nature, scope, and adequacy of child and family related social services.

While the CFSP calls for an assessment to develop the Five Year Plan and also an annual assessment for the Annual Progress and Service Report (APSR), the CFSR process provides a very specific approach for assessing the child welfare system through the statewide assessment and the on-site review including internal and external stakeholder interviews. The review process further provides a comprehensive assessment in the final report that provides a blueprint for developing a program improvement plan and clearly has implications for updating or revising the state's plan. States will be required to provide an annual report on progress toward implementing the PIP in the APSR. Many states are incorporating the Statewide Assessment instrument as a method for annual evaluation and assessment for the APSR. Other states are integrating the on-site case review instrument into the quality assurance system as an on-going process for quality case review.

What else do the Title IV-B requirements tell us about the planning process?

- **Preparation**

As discussed in the lead article, there are several steps in preparation for planning that are important to the process (see page 1). Many times preparation steps for planning are ignored or passed over due to time constraints or other organizational issues having a profound effect on the actual content and effectiveness of the plan.

Visioning is an important step in preparation for planning. The CFSP Five Year Plan requires that states include a vision statement, which articulates the philosophy in providing child and family services and developing or improving a coordinated service delivery system. While all states have a vision or mission statement for the organization or agency, many states do not use this vision to guide the planning process and the vision is not an integral part of the development of the CFSP.

Developing clear expectations and outcomes is also part of preparation for planning. The review process specifies 7 specific outcomes associated with the areas of safety, permanency and well-being and further defines seven (7) systemic factors examined in the review process (see table on page 10). These factors directly reflect systems that must be in place and described in the plan (such as quality assurance and staff development and training) as they are essential to an effective child and family service delivery system. During the review process, the systemic factors are judged by the extent to which the associated plan requirements are in place and functioning. At a minimum, most states have incorporated these outcomes, systemic factors and measures into their Title IV-B CFSP.

- **Planning**

Planning includes developing the format or structure for the plan as well as the work and activities that actually go into writing the plan. The CFSP requirements provide a basic structure or format for the contents necessary to write the plan or PIP. The goals of the plan must be based on the vision statement. The goals within the plan must be expressed in terms of improved outcomes for the safety, permanency and well being of children and families. The state must define specific measurable objectives to achieve the goals and outcomes, including benchmarks and a timetable to achieve the objectives. In addition to the CFSP requirements, the PIP requirements include action steps to be undertaken to correct each area of nonconformity and the dates by which each action step will be completed. Therefore the format should include: goals, outcomes, indicators or measures, objectives, action steps, benchmarks, and timeframes.

- **Implement**

One of the most difficult tasks is to roll out or implement the plan. A system for monitoring implementation and progress toward outcomes is essential to evaluating the effectiveness of the plan. Both the plan and review require routine evaluation of progress to be reported to the ACF Regional Offices. The plan requires an extensive assessment each five-year period (the current period being 2000-2004) and an annual progress and service report for the interim review of progress made in each year toward accomplishing the goals and objectives of the Five Year Plan. The PIP requires quarterly reporting as well as reporting progress on implementing the PIP in the

Continued on page 8

Program Improvement Plans

Continued from page 7

APSR. Some states are currently developing and/or implementing systems for monitoring and reporting on the CFSP or PIP as the plan is actually implemented. States are incorporating the monitoring and reporting process for the plan and/or PIP within existing structures including the information management system and the quality assurance system.

- **Review and Revise:**

After completing the evaluation and assessment of the plan, the state needs to make necessary revisions or updates to the CFSP. It would be a waste of effort to evaluate and assess progress, without further using that information to make improvements to the plan to reflect what the state is actually doing. At least annually, states should utilize the assessment information and revisit the plan for needed revisions or update.



An effective planning process repeats itself on some routine basis. It is important to note that planning is not an event but an ongoing process, much the same as child and family assessment and case planning. The strength of the family case plan or service plan is dependent on the quality of the assessment of the family's needs and the strategies for building on the family's strengths with appropriate services and resources. Routine case reviews help to monitor the implementation and progress of the plan and also the effectiveness of the plan in assisting the families in reaching their outcomes or goals. If the plan is not helping the families reach their goals or outcomes then it is time to reassess and revise the strategies of the plan to help move families toward more positive outcomes. If you think of the CFSP and the PIP planning process in relation to the assessment and case planning that social workers do everyday, it makes this planning process more meaningful and easier to integrate into your daily work routine.

In April, 2002, the Children's Bureau released an information memorandum (IM-02-04) that provides guidance and suggested formats for program improvement plans in the child and family services reviews. The information memorandum can be found on the Children's Bureau website at www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb under What's New/Laws and Policies.

Basic Strategic Planning Process

Prepare	Plan	Implement	Review and Revise
Visioning Develop planning process Assessment Develop outcomes and clear expectations	Develop structure/format Write the plan Finalize the plan Distribute plan	Management Supervision Monitoring Reporting system Evaluation	Review and assess progress on plan Revise and update plan

Checklist for Strategic Planning for Child Welfare Agencies

Detailed below are the steps involved in a comprehensive and effective strategic planning process. This checklist can be used to assess current planning processes and identify areas for development, or to guide the work of management teams or existing planning groups working on strategies for organizational improvement.

Preparation – Vision/Mission

- ☐ Develop vision/mission statement for organization
- ☐ Develop goals for the organization

Preparation – Develop Planning Process

- ☐ Decide on the structure for a planning group
- ☐ Select members for the planning group
- ☐ Define roles and responsibilities of the planning group
- ☐ Provide training/orientation for planning group members
- ☐ Define who will provide leadership and how the group will make decisions
- ☐ Ensure stakeholder involvement in the planning process
- ☐ Ensure staff involvement in the planning process
- ☐ Decide on a process for writing the strategic plan
- ☐ Decide on a process for implementing and monitoring the plan

Preparation – Assessment

- ☐ Conduct internal assessment of agency operations
- ☐ Conduct external assessment of agency operations
- ☐ Consider using the CFSR statewide assessment instrument for conducting assessments
- ☐ Use all relevant information (data/statistics, reports, surveys, focus groups, etc.)

Preparation – Outcomes/Expectations

- ☐ Define outcomes for the organization
- ☐ Include federal outcomes and systemic factors
- ☐ Add others specific to state
- ☐ Ensure that everyone is clear on outcomes and expectations for the organization

Plan – Write the Plan

- ☐ Decide on a structure and format for the plan
- ☐ Include agency goals and outcomes in the plan
- ☐ Based on the needs identified in the assessment (or assumptions), define action steps the agency will take
- ☐ Define indicators that will be used to measure the degree of achievement of the outcomes
- ☐ Prioritize action steps
- ☐ Establish timeframes for action steps
- ☐ Define benchmarks to measure progress on implementing action steps
- ☐ Assign responsible parties for completing action steps
- ☐ Integrate PIP action steps, benchmarks and timeframes into the strategic plan
- ☐ Circulate draft of the plan for input
- ☐ Make revisions based on the input

Plan – Finalize and Distribute Plan

- ☐ Circulate revised plan to build consensus – finalize the plan
- ☐ Submit the plan for approval within the agency and to ACF
- ☐ Share the plan with everyone involved in implementation (staff, stakeholders, etc.)
- ☐ Publish the plan

Implement the Plan

- ☐ Designate a plan manager to coordinate those responsible for action steps
- ☐ Ensure managers at all levels are using the plan
- ☐ Ensure supervisors are using the plan to guide day-to-day activity
- ☐ Implement reporting systems to track progress on the plan
- ☐ Draw on existing information (data/statistics, reports, surveys, focus groups, etc.)
- ☐ Build on existing information systems
- ☐ Build on existing quality assurance systems
- ☐ Routinely evaluate reports and information to assess progress on plan

Review and Revise the Plan

- ☐ Review progress on plan
- ☐ Produce annual report of progress on plan (APSR including PIP benchmarks)
- ☐ Stakeholders and staff are informed of progress; input is solicited
- ☐ Make revisions and updates to the plan

Technical Assistance on Strategic Planning from the Resource Center for Organizational Improvement

The framework for strategic planning is intended to be a comprehensive overview of all of the steps that agencies need to consider when engaging in strategic planning. However, in practice, these steps can be done in any order, and agencies can start at any point in the process. For example, one state might have a strong quality assurance system, so needs to work on developing a plan to be monitored. Another may have strong stakeholder involvement in planning processes and defined outcomes, but needs to conduct an assessment and develop a plan. Another agency may have a number of different plans that need to be integrated into one that can be used as a management and evaluation tool. Our technical assistance is designed to assist you in assessing the situation in your agency and then will be tailored to work with you on your needs.

Some of the things we've assisted states with include:

- assessing current IV-B plans and strengthening planning processes to help prepare for PIPs;
- providing feedback, input and recommendations on PIPs and IV-B plans;
- helping focus planning groups on producing the information and products needed for planning;
- providing formats, tools and instruments for the planning process; and
- structuring a planning process.

Our staff is available by phone, e-mail or on site. Remember each state has ten free days of on-site technical assistance available in each federal fiscal year! Contact us at: 1-800-HELP KID, or patn@usm.maine.edu.

RESOURCES

- Teleconference series on Program Improvement Plans: In May, 2002, the Resource Center for Organizational Improvement sponsored a series of three teleconferences on program improvement plans, including an overview and two sessions on lessons learned from states on developing PIPs. Audiotapes of these sessions are available from the Clearinghouse at the Resource Center at 1-800-HELP-KID.
- The ASFA Training Project Website: www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/asfa
- *A Framework for Quality Assurance in Child Welfare*. This new guide presents a framework for child welfare quality assurance systems, which includes the broad elements all agencies should consider in creating new or energizing existing quality assurance systems. The elements are presented in the form of implementation steps, and the steps are illustrated with state examples. The guide is available for free from our website, or can be ordered from the Clearinghouse at 1-800-HELP-KID.
- **Coming soon:** Strategic Planning Practice Package

Child and Family Services Review

The seven outcomes are as follows:

Safety

1. Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
2. Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible.

Permanency

1. Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
2. The continuity of family relationships and connections are preserved for children.

Child and Family Well Being

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

The seven systemic factors are:

1. Statewide information system
2. Case review system
3. Quality assurance system
4. Staff training
5. Service array
6. Agency responsiveness to the community
7. Foster and adoptive parent recruitment, licensing and retention

Strategic Planning for the Courts

By Mimi Laver, Assistant Director, National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues

It is an exciting time for child abuse and neglect courts. In January 2002, Congress extended the Court Improvement Program (CIP) for five more years. Soon, courts will need to develop a plan specifying how they will best use the additional time and resources. Additionally, many courts around the country have experimented with a number of promising practices to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children, and this is a good time to expand and share these initiatives. Careful strategic planning can help ensure that courts will develop strong plans and ultimately use the CIP funds wisely and effectively.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues and the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement can help your court plan for the future and make the most of the available resources.

The Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning for your court may seem like an overwhelming task at first, but it is just a process to help set short- and long-range goals and benchmarks by which progress towards the goals can be measured. The strategic planning process is a good way to bring key decision-makers together to determine your priorities for reform and then decide who will do what, by when, to accomplish your goals. With all of the players around the table, you can design a workable plan made up of measurable steps.

Resource Centers Can Help

Staff from the two Resource Centers can help you focus your efforts on the most crucial court reform issues. These may include, for example:

- improving judicial competence and skills;
- limiting workloads to allow timely and well informed judicial decisions;
- developing information systems to track cases and measure performance;
- encouraging communication and cross-systems training;
- improving legal representation; and
- giving fairer treatment, notice, and consideration to all parties before the court.

Once your courts have identified and prioritized key areas for improvement, we will help them design a plan that is realistic, achievable and measurable over the long term.

Include Courts in the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)

Courts can become involved in their state's CFSR in a number of ways. When Congress recently reauthorized the CIP, it directed courts to help implement the CFSR program improvement plan (PIP). Court participation in the PIP can help lead to the agency's success, but can also result in court improvement. Everyone benefits – the agency, courts and mostly children and families.

Participation in the PIP is certainly an appropriate way for the court to support the agency in the CFSR process. However, court involvement can begin as early as the planning for the statewide assessment and should continue through the onsite review and the creation and implementation of the PIP. For instance, in Arkansas, the CIP Director was an active member of the CFSR team, served on the on-site review team, and provided legal expertise throughout the process.

Similarly, a Kansas judge was a member of the on-site review team and he worked long hours reviewing cases along with the rest of the team. For him and for Kansas, the experience was invaluable.

Involving your court in the process may take careful planning and new types of relationship building with your child welfare agency. The Resource Centers can assist you in this process by:

- providing examples of what other states have done;
- identifying aspects of the review process that are ripe for legal involvement;
- facilitating discussions between the key players to make court involvement a reality; and
- including CFSR participation in any strategic planning your court plans to do.

Strategic Planning Benefits Children

High quality courts are an essential element of a strong child welfare system. Each court, like each agency, has room to grow and improve. Through careful planning, with an eye towards identifying strengths and building on them, you can reach your long-term goals for reform.

For more information about the Resource Center for Legal and Judicial Issues, contact Mimi Laver, Assistant Director, at (202) 662-1736, laverm@staff.abanet.org

The Resource Center for Legal and Judicial Issues has recently released a paper for child welfare administrators: *How and Why to Involve The Courts in Your CFS Review*. To obtain a copy, contact Yvonne Brunot at (202) 662-1746.

Child and Family Services Reviews

A resource book on the new federal child and family services review process

Contents	— The national standards
	— The review process
	— Focus of the reviews
	— Procedures manual, instruments and instructions
	— State experiences
	— Background
	— Managing Care newsletter focusing on the reviews

August, 2001

If you have our binder "Child and Family Services Reviews: A Resource Book on the New Federal Child and Family Services Review Process," please check our website regularly to ensure that you have the most recent version:

www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids

Since first distributed in early 2001, the Resource Book has been revised several times, and we will continue to post new documents on the website as they become available. Material added over the past year includes:

- *Statewide Assessment with Built In Instructions*
- *ACF Information Memorandum on National Standards*
- *Revised Review Instruments for FY 2002 reviews*

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement

A service of the Children's Bureau, US Department of Health & Human Services

ManagingCare FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Published by the
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service
University of Southern Maine
PO Box 15010, One Post Office Square
Portland, ME 04112

Kris Sahonchik, Director

Tel: 207-780-5810
Toll Free: 1-800-HELP KID
Fax: 207-780-5817
TTY: 207-780-5646
email: patn@usm.maine.edu

A service of the Children's Bureau,
US Department of Health & Human Services

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Portland, Maine 04101
Permit No. 370



USM

UNIVERSITY OF
Southern Maine