

The Northeast and Caribbean implementation Center (NCIC) is one of five Child Welfare Implementation Centers established by the Children's Bureau in October 2008. Our role is to support and facilitate communication and networking across public child welfare systems, to offer guidance and tools identifying sustainable system change strategies and to provide resources to support intensive implementation projects that improve the quality and effectiveness of child welfare services for children, youth and families.

Each Implementation Center is regionally-focused, serving two of the ten Federal regions. The NCIC will work with the States, Territories and IV-B funded Tribes in Region 1 (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut) and Region 2 (New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands).

We are members of the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network and work

collaboratively with the National Resource Centers and other members of the Network that are also providing assistance to tribal and public child welfare agencies.

Our work is guided by, but not limited to, the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) findings, related Program Improvement Plans, IV-B Child and Family Services Plans, State strategic plans, and the System of Care (SOC) framework. The NCIC team possesses expertise in organizational change and works with child welfare leaders and managers to:

- Provide support for intensive implementation projects that improve the quality and performance of child welfare services;
- Offer technical assistance around system change and effective implementation practice
- Facilitate communication and peer-to-peer networking across State and Tribal child welfare systems; and
- Build and contribute knowledge about effective implementation in the child welfare field.

NCIC Activities and Resources

The work of NCIC to provide technical assistance focused not simply on a discreet problem or issue, but on those that are substantial enough to create sustainable systemic change. We offer a range of activities and resources to the States and Tribes in ACF Regions 1 and 2:

- Peer Networking Opportunities
 - Regional peer networks that share implementation experiences and provide mutual aid and problem-solving.
 - Topic-driven networks might be within the NCIC regions only or part of a multi-region peer network.
 - Support is provided through conference calls, forums and gatherings, webinars and site visits.
- Intensive Implementation Projects
 - Selected jurisdictions will receive resources, intensive technical assistance and support for long-term implementation projects, lasting 2 to 4 years, intended to achieve sustainable system change.
 - As of June 2010, the NCIC is providing resources to six state child welfare agencies to support projects that focus on improving child welfare practice and enhancing the skills of supervisors. Full descriptions of these projects can be found on the NCIC website.
- Evaluation and Dissemination of Learning
 - NCIC website:
<http://ncic.muskie.usm.maine.edu>

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Keys to Effective Implementation

Across the numerous theories describing effective, sustainable systemic change and implementation, there are several commonly identified elements:

- **Leadership Commitment and Executive Sponsorship:** Involvement of the commissioner and his/her executive team is critical to establishing a vision, creating a sense of urgency about the project and authorizing project managers to carry it out.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Throughout the process, planfully involve internal stakeholders (including middle managers, frontline supervisors and social work staff) and external stakeholders (including service providers, oversight agencies, schools, courts, youth advisory groups, university partners, juvenile justice agencies, etc.).
- **Family Engagement:** Support families in playing a significant role in project design and implementation to help ensure the project is designed to meet their real needs in a culturally responsive manner.
- **Culture and Climate:** Conduct an environmental scan of organizational culture and climate to understand potential sources of support, readiness, acceptance, resistance, and other reactions.
- **Communication:** A communication plan focused on clear, consistent and frequent communication is an important component of the implementation plan.
- **Cross-Functional Project Team:** Create and authorize a cross-functional implementation team or taskforce to guide the project, manage its details and solve problems that risk impeding success.
- **Coaching:** Provide deliberate support to help staff assimilate training and improve practice; support the integration of new skills by providing on the job teaching and mentoring.
- **Operational Details:** Pay thorough attention to the operational details and processes required to align/re-align practice, policy, training, quality assurance and personnel to support and sustain change.
- **Organizational Structures:** align organizational structures to achieve horizontal and vertical integration.
- **Resources:** Secure resources for extra costs, effort, equipment, materials, access to expertise and training for new organizational roles during the project.
- **Ongoing Commitment:** Sustained change requires ongoing resources and support providing time, scheduling for coaching, participatory planning, exercise of leadership and evolution of teamwork.
- **Frequent Monitoring and Evaluation:** Assess progress and impact and disseminate findings through a clear feedback loop to ensure fidelity to the new practice or program and to guide adjustments needed to sustain the systemic change.