

CFSR Connections and Integration

CFSR Round 4 Planning and Implementation Tool

This document was updated by the National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement in 2025.

Introduction and Purpose

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)¹ is not a standalone event. As in prior rounds, the Children's Bureau (CB) encourages states to adopt an integrated approach that:

- ♦ Aligns with a state's vision to achieve desired outcomes
- ♦ Builds on data exploration and findings from other child welfare monitoring, reporting, planning, and improvement efforts, which may include:
 - ♦ Round 3 CFSR and Program Improvement Plan (PIP)
 - ♦ 5-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)
 - ♦ Most recent Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR)
 - ♦ Court Improvement Program (CIP) Strategic Plan
 - ♦ Prevention planning
 - ♦ Other federal planning and monitoring processes
 - ♦ State continuous quality improvement (CQI) and change efforts
- ♦ Reflects the voices and perspectives of young people and families served by the child welfare agency, legal and judicial communities, and other partners and stakeholders

CFSR Round 4 presents an opportunity to build on and strengthen state efforts to move toward an integrated approach.

Teams can use this Connections and Integration Tool to prepare for CFSR Round 4 by thinking through and building on progress and lessons learned from other planning, reporting, and program improvement efforts. Take time to reflect on what worked and what needs attention, pinpoint opportunities to integrate related efforts, and identify action steps for moving forward.

Use this tool to:

- ♦ Prepare for CFSR Round 4
- ♦ Identify and build on successes, challenges, and lessons learned in prior system improvement efforts
- ♦ Integrate CFSR planning with other federal and state processes

Organization

- ♦ [Part I. Reviewing Progress Toward the State's Vision](#)
- ♦ [Part II. Building on CFSR Round 3](#)
- ♦ [Part III. Exploring Engagement](#)
- ♦ [Part IV. Teaming](#)
- ♦ [Appendix: Tips on Facilitating Reflection Discussions](#)

¹ For background and overview information on the CFSR, see "[Understanding the Child and Family Services Reviews \(CFSRs\)](#)" and watch "[Understanding the Child and Family Services Review \(CFSR\) Process](#)."

Teaming

In planning for the CFSR and completing this tool, a broad array of perspectives should be represented. This may include representatives of some, or ideally all, of the following groups:

- ♦ Child welfare agency directors, county and regional directors, and program managers
- ♦ CFSR coordinators and case review managers
- ♦ CQI and data managers
- ♦ Frontline staff and supervisors
- ♦ Young people, parents, and families with lived experience in child welfare
- ♦ Relative caregivers, foster parents, and adoptive parents
- ♦ Representatives of the legal and judicial community
- ♦ Other system and community partners
- ♦ Tribal representatives
- ♦ Other CFSR team members and stakeholders

CFSR teams may grow and evolve over time, and completing the tool may generate additional ideas for engagement of relevant members.

Given the focus on reflection and integration, every effort should be made to identify individuals who have been involved with CFSR Round 3, the latest APSR and CFSP, PIP implementation strategies, CIP planning, prevention planning, state CQI, and other system improvement efforts. As a result of turnover, individuals who led these efforts in the past may have left the agency, but others who contributed may still be accessible.

Tips and Things to Remember

- ♦ Teams should complete this tool early on as they begin to plan and prepare for their CFSR Round 4 Statewide Assessment.
- ♦ The CFSR reflects a CQI mindset. Reflection on past results can contribute to future improvements.
- ♦ The CFSR and related processes benefit from team efforts and the perspectives of individuals affected by and with a vested interest in child welfare outcomes.
- ♦ Engaging young people, parents, and families with lived experience along with system partners and other stakeholders is a cornerstone of the CFSR and other system improvement processes. It is important to ensure that participants in the improvement effort are representative of the various communities served.
- ♦ Completing the tables in this tool may require multiple sessions and an intentional process of capturing and “boiling down” input from multiple sources into high-level takeaways. See the appendix for some tips.
- ♦ Individuals or groups can type their responses into each table and keep for reference or discussion. When printing, only the text visible in each table cell will appear. For longer responses, teams can copy and append pages.

Part I. Reviewing Progress Toward the State’s Vision

A state’s vision and goals for its child welfare system are central to performance assessment. Work collaboratively to review and reflect on the state’s vision for child welfare, progress in achieving the vision, implications for the CFSR and other improvement efforts, and related action steps.

Revisiting and Reflecting on the State Vision for Child Welfare

Describe your state’s vision for its child welfare system in the box below. Draw from the most recent CFSP and other state visioning efforts.

State Vision for Our Child Welfare System

Use the table to summarize responses to reflection questions related to achieving your state’s vision. Consider findings from your state’s Round 3 CFSR, the latest APSR and CFSP, PIP implementation strategies, CIP plan, IV-E Prevention Plan, state CQI, and other system improvement efforts.

Reflection Question	Team Reflection	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
1. How clearly has your state articulated and communicated its vision and goals for its child welfare system? Is there a shared understanding of the vision?			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
2. What did findings in your most recent APSR performance assessment reveal about progress toward goals and advancing the state's vision?			
3. What did findings from Round 3 of the CFSR reveal about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Systemic factor functioning? ♦ Safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes? ♦ Advancing the state's vision? 			
4. How did the Round 3 PIP strategies help with achieving goals and advancing the state's vision? Consider, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Would you say the right strategies were selected? Why or why not? ♦ Were strategies implemented as intended? Why or why not? ♦ Did strategies achieve intended results? Why or why not? How do you know? 			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
5. How does the state IV-E Prevention Plan support the state's vision?			
6. How does the state CIP Strategic Plan support the state's vision?			
7. How are other federal or state planning, CQI, and implementation efforts supporting the state's vision? How are consent decrees or settlement agreements (where applicable) affecting progress toward the state's vision?			
8. What current challenges are impeding achievement of the state's vision and goals?			

Action Steps for Preparing for CFSR Round 4

Considering the strengths and opportunities for improvement noted in the reflections above, identify action steps to prepare for CFSR Round 4. Try to be as specific as possible (for example, *establish a team structure to develop a shared vision across child welfare system partners*). For each step, identify a challenge, need, or strength the action step addresses and document the expected timeframe, the person(s) responsible, and supporting contributors and partners. Note those steps that may require external support (e.g., information from CB, capacity building).

Action Steps	Challenge, Need, or Strength Addressed	Timeframe	Lead/Contributors	Support Needs

Part II. Building on CFSR Round 3

Recognizing successes and challenges in CFSR Round 3 can help inform preparation for CFSR Round 4. Work collaboratively to reflect on what worked well and what didn't throughout CFSR Round 3 processes, implications for CFSR Round 4, and related action steps.

Reflecting on CFSR Round 3

Use this table to summarize responses to reflection questions. In this section, focus on the process of conducting the CFSR. To respond to the reflection questions, consult individuals who participated in CFSR Round 3 (where available) and examine CFSR work products (e.g., the Statewide Assessment, Onsite Review documentation, CFSR Final Report, PIP plans and progress reports). Not every team will be able to answer every question.

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For “what worked” or “what didn’t,” describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
<p>1. What worked well and where were the challenges in conducting the Round 3 CFSR Statewide Assessment?</p> <p>Review the Statewide Assessment and consider, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ How did the state collect and generate data and evidence?♦ Was the assessment grounded in quality and relevant evidence?♦ Were there gaps in data and evidence in assessing systemic factor functioning?♦ Did the assessment represent voices of young people, parents, and families with lived experience; caregivers; Tribes; legal and judicial communities; frontline workers; system partners; and other stakeholders?♦ Did the individuals engaged reflect and represent the varied communities served by the system?			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For “what worked” or “what didn’t,” describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
<p>2. What worked well and where were the challenges in conducting the Round 3 CFSR Onsite Review?</p> <p>Consider, for example, were there challenges related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Case sampling ♦ Reviewer availability ♦ Securing case-specific interviews ♦ Training and preparing state reviewers and quality assurance staff ♦ Preparing young people and family members for participation ♦ Quality assurance ♦ Other 			
<p>3. What worked well and where were the challenges in the Round 3 final report communication process?</p> <p>Consider, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ How were findings communicated to staff, individuals with lived experience, legal and judicial community, system partners, and other stakeholders? ♦ Was context provided to help groups understand the rationale behind the findings? 			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For “what worked” or “what didn’t,” describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
<p>4. What worked well and where were the challenges in the Round 3 PIP process?</p> <p>Review PIPs and progress reports and consider, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ How did the state use data and evidence to identify root causes of underperformance and identify strategies to address? ♦ Were the Statewide Assessment process and related data analyses sufficiently comprehensive to support the PIP process? ♦ How were individuals with lived experience (youth, parents, and families), Tribes, representatives of legal and judicial communities and other system partners, frontline workers, and other stakeholders engaged in PIP development? ♦ How were individuals who participated in CFSR Round 3 processes reflective of the communities served by your child welfare system? ♦ How were sound implementation practices supported? ♦ How did technical assistance and capacity building activities support PIP development and implementation? ♦ How were data and evidence used to monitor progress and make adjustments? 			

Action Steps for Preparing for CFSR Round 4

Considering the strengths and opportunities for improvement noted in the reflections above, identify specific action steps to prepare for CFSR Round 4. For each step, identify a challenge, need, or strength the action step addresses and document the expected timeframe, the person(s) responsible, and supporting contributors and partners. Note those steps that may require external support (e.g., information from CB, capacity building).

Action Steps	Challenge, Need, or Strength Addressed	Timeframe	Lead/Contributors	Support Needs

Part III. Exploring Engagement

CB emphasizes authentic, meaningful, and ongoing engagement as a guiding principle in the CFSRs. Work collaboratively to review and reflect on what worked well and what didn't in prior engagement experiences, implications for CFSR Round 4, proposed engagement strategies, and related action steps. Be sure to include the perspectives of the subjects of the questions in the reflections (e.g., ask individuals with lived experience about what worked well and the challenges from their point of view).

Reflecting on Past Engagement Experiences

Use this table to reflect on your state's prior experiences with engaging young people, parents, and family members with lived experience in the child welfare system; Tribes; legal and judicial communities; community partners; and other stakeholders during CFSR Round 3 activities and decision-making. Consider lessons learned from engagement in other systems improvement efforts (the latest APSR and CFSP, PIP implementation strategies, CIP planning, prevention planning, state CQI, and other system improvements).

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For "what worked" or "what didn't," describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
<p>1. What worked well and where were the challenges in engaging young people, parents, and family members with lived experience in Round 3 CFSR?</p> <p>Consider, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ How were young people and family members with varied experiences represented?♦ How were non-custodial parents and/or fathers engaged?♦ How were individuals with lived experience prepared to participate?♦ How were their voices reflected in assessment findings and decision-making?♦ Has the agency incorporated individuals with lived experience into the child welfare workforce?♦ How can engagement be more meaningful in Round 4?			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For “what worked” or “what didn’t,” describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
2. What worked well and where were the challenges in engaging relative caregivers and foster and adoptive parents the Round 3 CFSR?			
3. What worked well and where were the challenges in engaging Tribes in the Round 3 CFSR?			
4. What worked well and where were the challenges in engaging legal and judicial communities in the Round 3 CFSR? (Consider broad engagement of CIP representatives, judges, court personnel, and attorneys representing the agency, parents, youth, and children.)			
5. What worked well and where were the challenges in engaging frontline workers in the Round 3 CFSR?			
6. What worked well and where were the challenges in integrating the voice of community members, system partners, and other stakeholders in the Round 3 CFSR?			

Reflection Question	Team Reflection (For “what worked” or “what didn’t,” describe how you know.)	What Strengths Can Your Team Build on in CFSR Round 4?	What Improvements Can Your Team Make in CFSR Round 4?
<p>7. How have the following groups contributed to CFSP/APSR processes, CIP planning, prevention planning, state CQI, or other system improvement efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people, parents, and family members with lived experience • Relative caregivers, foster parents, and adoptive parents • Tribes • Legal and judicial communities • Frontline workers • Community members • Other system partners and stakeholders (e.g., education, child care, law enforcement, health care, mental health and substance use service providers, domestic violence shelters) <p>What are some lessons learned for engagement and teaming?</p> <p>8. How has your state examined and addressed variations in the experiences or outcomes across communities served by the child welfare system during the CFSR, CFSP/APSR, CIP planning, prevention planning, state CQI, and other system improvement efforts? For example, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaggregating data to identify and explore differences in services and outcomes based on demographics (e.g., geographic area, race/ethnicity, sex, age). • Considering the impact of current or proposed policies, programs, practices, or decisions on different populations served and identifying, implementing, and monitoring interventions to improve outcomes. 			

Initial Ideas for Engagement Strategies

Brainstorm initial ideas for improving engagement of various groups in CFSR Round 4. Some strategies may apply to multiple groups.

Group	Engagement Strategies
Young people with lived experience ⁷	
Parents and family members with lived experience (including non-custodial parents and/or fathers)	
Relative caregivers, foster parents, and adoptive parents	
Tribes	
Legal and judicial communities	
Frontline workers and supervisors	
Service providers and other system partners	
Community members	
Others: _____	

Action Steps for Preparing for Engagement During CFSR Round 4

Considering the strengths and opportunities for improvement noted in the reflections above, identify specific action steps to prepare for and sustain engagement during CFSR Round 4. For each step, identify a challenge, need, or strength the action step addresses and document the expected timeframe, the person(s) responsible, and supporting contributors and partners. Note those steps that may require external support (e.g., information from CB, capacity building).

Action Steps	Challenge, Need, or Strength Addressed	Timeframe	Lead/Contributors	Support Needs

Part IV: Teaming

Consider your team’s responses to the reflection questions and action steps in Parts I–IV and begin to think about additional team members needed for working on the Round 4 CFSR. Use the worksheet below to brainstorm needed knowledge and skills (e.g., data collection, data analysis, family engagement and empowerment) and groups that should be represented on your CFSR Team (e.g., parents and young people with lived experience, frontline workers, Tribal representatives, legal and judicial communities). Next, brainstorm some potential team members who possess the needed knowledge and skills and/or represent the identified groups.

What Knowledge and Skills are Needed on the CFSR Team?	What Groups Should be Represented on the CFSR Team?	Who Are Potential Team Members?

Appendix: Tips on Facilitating Reflection Discussions

This appendix offers tips for internal agency staff (e.g., CFSR coordinators, agency leaders) and external supports (e.g., capacity building and technical assistance providers) to facilitate reflection discussions.

1. Identify Individuals With Varied Perspectives and Experiences

True reflection requires looking at an issue from varied perspectives. To complete this tool, bring together individuals with experiences in prior CFSR activities, CFSP/APSR, CQI, and other system improvement efforts. Check those groups below that have been contacted for discussions and consider additional outreach strategies for others. Note that some individuals may reflect multiple positions.

- Child welfare agency directors, county and regional directors, and program managers
- CFSR coordinators and case review managers
- CQI and data managers
- Frontline staff and supervisors
- Young people, parents, and family members with lived experience in child welfare
- Relative caregivers, foster parents, and adoptive parents
- Representatives of the legal and judicial community
- Other system and community partners
- Tribal representatives
- Other CFSR team members and stakeholders
- Individuals who contributed to the most recent CFSP/APSR

Given turnover in child welfare, individuals who led prior CFSR and system improvement efforts may have left the agency. Try to identify others who have contributed in various capacities. In addition, pay attention to representation of individuals who reflect the communities served.

2. Prepare and Arrange for Virtual, In-Person, or Hybrid Discussions

Teams may complete the tool through in-person discussions, virtual meetings, or hybrid meetings (with some people in the room and some joining by phone or computer).

During planning:

- ☐ Set realistic goals for facilitating reflection and completing the tool; not every team will need to respond to every question. Completion will likely take more than one conversation. Consider holding multiple sessions to complete different parts.
- ☐ Consider whether some questions have already been answered through other tools or meetings and avoid duplication where possible.
- ☐ Arrange for in-person, virtual, or hybrid meetings, as appropriate and accessible.
- ☐ Consider and prepare mechanisms for information sharing (e.g., flipcharts to support small group collaboration tools) and build in ways to familiarize team members with new platforms.
- ☐ Share the objectives and tool questions with participants in advance and allow them time to consider the questions individually.

3. Connect and Reflect

During discussion sessions:

- ☐ Remind participants that the CFSR is an opportunity to make things better and this tool and related discussions are a means to build on past successes and address challenges and lessons learned.
- ☐ Create a safe space for sharing and be mindful of power dynamics.
- ☐ Enable sharing in multiple ways (e.g., anonymously on physical or online post-it notes and through small and larger group discussions).
- ☐ Begin broadly by allowing participants to share their ideas and thoughts, continue by working to identify common themes, and end by summarizing key takeaways and action steps.

4. Follow Up

After the discussion sessions:

- ☐ Summarize responses to questions, key themes, and prioritized action steps and send to participants for review and input.
- ☐ Check in on progress of action steps.
- ☐ Incorporate findings into related CFSR Round 4 planning and preparation activities.

Need Additional CFSR Support?

The National Child Welfare Center for Innovation and Advancement (NCWCIA) is available to provide state child welfare agencies with support in completing CFSR tools and preparing for CFSR Round 4. To request services tailored to your needs, contact your innovation and advancement navigator or email NCWCIA-Info@jbsinternational.com

Additional CFSR Round 4 Resources

JBS International. CFSR Information Portal. [CFSR Round 4 Resources](#)

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