

**Hawaii AFCARS
Assessment Review
Report**

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and
Office of Information Services
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Executive Summary

From September 13 - 16, 2004 staff of the Children’s Bureau and the Office of Information Services (OIS) conducted an assessment review of Hawaii’s Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). The AFCARS data used for the review was from the report period October 1, 2003 through March 31, 2004 (2004A).

Two major areas are evaluated as part of an AFCARS assessment review (AAR): the AFCARS general requirements and data elements. The general requirements include the population that is to be reported to AFCARS and the technical requirements for constructing a data file. The data elements are assessed on the basis of whether the State is meeting the AFCARS definitions for the information required, if the correct data are being entered and extracted, and the quality of the data submitted. Each of the 103 foster care and adoption data elements is rated on the basis of its compliance with the requirements in the AFCARS regulation, policy guidance, and technical bulletins. Information that is collected from each of the components of the review is combined to rate each data element. A scale of one (does not meet AFCARS standards) to four (fully meets AFCARS standards) is used to assign a factor to each element. The general information requirements are also assessed and rated separately using the same scale. A summary of the significant findings is included in the report, and detailed findings can be found in the “Detailed Findings” matrices for the foster care and adoption data elements, and the general requirements (Tab A). The minimum tasks that are required to correct the State’s reporting of the AFCARS data are included in the AFCARS Improvement Plan (Tab B).

The final rating factors may differ from those given as the preliminary on-site ratings. Changes in the rating factors reflect findings from further analysis of the State’s program code and system screens, and changes made by the State and submitted to the Children’s Bureau after the on-site visit. The final rating factors received by the State are:

General Requirements	Rating Factor
Foster Care/Adoption Population Standards	4
Technical Standards	4

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66 elements)	Adoption (37 elements)	Full Data Set (103 elements)
4	37 (56%)	24 (65%)	61(59%)
3	22 (33%)	8 (22%)	30 (29%)
2	7 (11%)	5 (14%)	12 (12%)
1	0	0	0

The State is in full compliance with the foster care and adoption population requirements and the technical standards. In regard to the data elements, the most significant area the State needs to address is the quality of the data.

The State needs to improve the quality of its data. Several items were given the rating of “3” because of underreporting of information and will necessitate additional training for caseworkers and monitoring by supervisors to ensure accurate data entry. The State may want to consider reviewing the data in the file at the time of a periodic review to ensure it is accurate and up-to-date. (See AFCARS Federal regulation at 45 CFR 1355 Appendix A, I. I. E.)

Changes made to the system with regard to data entry will inevitably result in improved data accuracy and quality. The State’s semi-annual data submission may, as a result, fail to meet the missing data standard. In order to ensure that the data are complete, the agency must require workers to enter the data, and assess its validity prior to submitting it to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). To do so, the State may utilize the management reports created by the agency, as well as the Data Quality Utility and the Frequency Utility issued by ACF.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AFCARS Improvement Plan, the State staff must submit the Improvement Plan to the ACF Regional Office with estimated due dates for completing the tasks in the Improvement Plan. Test cases will be provided to the State once all of the required modifications are completed. Dates for the submission of the extracted test data file will be arranged with the ACF Regional Office and OIS. Once ACF and the State agree that the quality of the data is acceptable, the AFCARS Improvement Plan will be considered finished, and a letter will be sent to the State from the Children’s Bureau confirming this fact. The letter will include a summary of the actions taken by the State and the completed AFCARS Improvement Plan.

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Section 1: Foster Care and Adoption Elements	

BACKGROUND

The Children's Bureau is committed to assisting States in the collection of reliable and accurate data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). To this end, an AFCARS assessment review (AAR) process was developed. The State's information system is assessed against the AFCARS requirements in the Federal regulation and policy issuances. The AFCARS assessment review evaluates a State's information system's capability to collect, extract, and transmit the AFCARS data accurately to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). A second focus of the AFCARS review is to assess the accuracy of the collection and documentation of information related to the foster care and/or adoption case of a child.

The review process goes beyond the edit checks that must be met by a State in order to pass the AFCARS compliance error standards. The review also ascertains the extent to which a State meets all of the AFCARS requirements and the quality of its data. Additionally, while the review is an assessment of the State agency's collection and reporting of AFCARS data, it is also an opportunity for Federal staff to provide substantive technical assistance to State agency staff. During the review, the Federal team identifies improvements to be made to the system and recommends changes to the program code used to extract the AFCARS data.

Each AAR consists of a thorough analysis of the State's system technical documentation for the collection, extraction and reporting of the AFCARS data. In addition to this review of documentation, the Federal AFCARS team reviews each data element with the State team to gain a better understanding of the State's child welfare practice and policy and State staff's understanding of the data elements. The data is also compared against a small, randomly selected number of hard copy case files. Through this exercise, the accuracy of the State's data conversion process and understanding of the information reported to AFCARS is tested.

RATING FACTORS

Two major areas are evaluated during an AFCARS assessment review: the AFCARS general requirements and the data elements. The general requirements include the population that is to be reported to AFCARS and the technical requirements for constructing a data file. The data elements are assessed to determine whether the State is meeting the AFCARS definitions for the information required, if the correct data is being entered and extracted, and the quality of the data submitted.

AFCARS data submissions are subject to a minimal number of edit checks, as listed in Appendix E of 45 CFR Part 1355. Based on these edit checks, substantial compliance can be determined for the timely submission of the data files, the timeliness of data entry of certain data elements and whether the data meets a 90% level of tolerance for missing data and internal consistency checks. However, "substantial" compliance does not mean a State has fully implemented the requirements in the regulations. This explains why a State formerly may have been penalty-free, but does not currently have accurate and reliable quality data. For example, data cannot be assessed to determine whether the State submitted the correct foster care population required by the regulations.

Information collected from each component of the assessment review is used to rate each data element. The general requirements are assessed and rated separately using the same scale. A scale of one (does not meet the AFCARS standards) to four (fully meets the AFCARS standards) is used to assign a rating factor. Below is a chart that lists the factors that were used for the analysis of the State’s AFCARS.

RATING FACTOR	DEFINITION
1	<p>The AFCARS requirement(s) has not been implemented in the information system. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State information system does not have the capability to collect the correct information (i.e., there is no data field on the screens). • There is no program logic to extract the data.
2	<p>The technical system requirements for AFCARS reporting do not fully meet the standards. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State information system has the capability (screen) to collect the data, but the program logic is incorrect - - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State uses defaults for blank information. • Information is coming from the wrong place on the system. • Information is located in the wrong place on the system, i.e., it should be in foster care screens, not adoption screens. • The system needs modification to encompass more conditions, e.g., disability information.
3	<p>The technical system requirements for AFCARS reporting are in place, but there are data entry problems affecting the quality of the data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system functions as required, but-- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the data are underreported due to inconsistent data entry. • the data are not being entered and/or there are no supervisory controls for ensuring data entry.
4	<p>All of the AFCARS requirements have been met. The information system is functioning as required, and the information is being accurately collected and extracted.</p>

For data elements and general requirements that do not meet existing AFCARS standards (factors 1 through 3), the State is required to make the corrections identified by the review team. It is possible that the problem with a data element and data are due to both system issues and case worker data entry issues. In such instances, the element will be rated a “2” to denote the need for modification to the system logic. Once the corrections are made to the system, the data will be re-analyzed. If problems related to case worker training or data entry still exist, then a “3” will be assigned to the requirement. A rating factor of “4” (compliant) will not be given to the element until all system issues and/or data quality issues have been addressed.

When assessing the general requirements, all specifications must be met in order for the item to fully satisfy the requirement. If the issue is a programming logic problem, then a “2” will be assigned. If it appears the problem is due to data entry, then a “3” will be assigned to the requirement.

Some data elements are directly related to each other. When this occurs, all related elements are given the same rating factor, because incorrect programming logic could affect the related data elements.

The State is required to make the changes to the information system and/or data entry in order to be compliant with the applicable requirements and standards. Since the AFCARS data are used for several significant activities at the Federal and State level, the State must implement the AFCARS Improvement Plan, under Tab B of this report, as a way to improve the quality of its data.

FINDINGS

This section provides the major findings resulting from the review of the State's AFCARS data collection. Tab A provides detailed information on the findings for the general AFCARS requirements, each of the foster care and adoption data elements, and the case file review. The AFCARS data used for the review was from the report period October 1, 2003 through March 31, 2004 (2004A).

As part of the post-site visit analysis, the State's documents, the data, the case file review findings, team member notes, and corrections to the program code submitted by the State are assessed to make the final determination of findings. As a result, the original rating factors were modified from those given at the end of the on-site review. The findings matrix in Tab A reports the previous rating with a "strike-through" mark on it, and the new rating. The AFCARS Improvement Plan in Tab B contains the final rating factor.

General Requirements

The State is in full compliance with both the foster care and adoption population requirements and the technical requirements.

Data Elements – Technical Changes

There are seven foster care elements and five adoption elements that require system modifications.

- Foster care elements #11-15 and Adoption elements #11 – 15, diagnosed disabilities

The State made changes to the program code during the post-site visit period. However, analysis of one of the changes indicates it is incorrect. If any basis of special need other than medical, physical or psychological conditions is selected, elements #11 – 15 should be blank. A response of "applies" or "does not apply" should only be reported if the response to adoption element #10, primary basis for special need, is a medical, physical or psychological condition.

- Foster care element #44, caretaker family structure

According to the programmer's notes in the revised program code, changes in the extraction code were made to this element. However, these corrections could not be found. The State needs to check the program code and re-submit the corrected code to ACF.

- Foster care element #65, source of financial support

AFCARS asks whether certain Federal funds are sources of income for the child during the current report period. One of the options is "none of the above - child is receiving support only from the State or from some other source (Federal or non-Federal) which is not indicated above." In many instances, a source of income could be funds provided under title IV-B, subpart 1, of the Social Security Act (Child Welfare Services), or funds from a trust fund. The State's program does not check to see if any other source of income also applies for the report period. If it were to do so, this element may be "applies" in addition to any of the other sources of Federal support.

Data Quality

There were 35 elements (27 foster care and 8 adoption) that require additional training and supervisory oversight. The quality of the data needs to be improved. There are instances where missing data had been defaulted to a valid AFCARS value. Now that these defaults have been removed, underlying data entry issues will be unmasked. The State needs to incorporate ongoing data quality assurance in its newly implemented quality assurance methodology that it developed in response to its Child and Family Services Review.

One of the issues of accuracy of the data pertains to the "pre-adoptive" living arrangement. The State may be underreporting the number of children placed with the families that will be adopting them. It is important that this practice be reflected in the data that is submitted to ACF.

An issue related to missing data was in the area of foster parent information. The State contracts for placement services with private child placing agencies. However, data on the demographics of the foster families are not being provided to the State agency. This is required information that the State must provide and it is important to assess the make-up of families that volunteer to be foster parents.

CONCLUSION

The State has taken a very proactive approach to making necessary technical corrections, both as a result of this review and prior technical assistance provided to the State by the Children's Bureau. The State has also begun to implement methods to assess the quality of its data on an ongoing basis. Many of these approaches were developed in conjunction with the State's CFSR program improvement plan. The State will need to add the areas noted in the "findings" section of this report to its training and quality assurance plans.

Tab B contains the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP). The AIP contains the AFCARS data elements that need to be addressed by the State. The matrix contains a column that identifies the task(s), the date the task is to be completed, and one for comments.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AFCARS Improvement Plan, the State staff are to submit the Improvement Plan to the ACF Regional Office with estimated dues dates for completing the tasks in the Improvement Plan. The State and the ACF Regional Office (in conjunction with the Children's Bureau) will discuss the completion dates outlined by the State and negotiate the final due dates. The State should provide written quarterly updates of its progress to the Regional Office. Additionally, the State's plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the State's title IV-B Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required in 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5).

The State should contact the ACF Regional Office once it has completed the changes to the system. The ACF Regional Office will then provide the State with a set of test case scenarios. These scenarios test the system by requiring the State to enter the information and extract the data, which is then compared to known answers for each scenario. Dates for the submission of the test data file will be arranged with the ACF Regional Office and the Office of Information Systems.

In order to assess the quality of the data, a frequency report will be generated on the data submitted after the system changes have been implemented. Once ACF and the State agree that the quality of the data is acceptable, and all tasks and revisions, based on the test cases, have been completed, the State must submit the completed AIP to the ACF Regional Office. The State will receive a letter summarizing the final results of the review.

The ACF Regional Office will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AFCARS Improvement Plan. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's resource centers. To request onsite technical assistance from the resource centers, contact your ACF Regional Office.