

# Strategies that Build Capacity for Systems Change: Lessons Learned in the Evaluation of the Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

Melissa Johnson

Mary Armstrong

Amy Vargo

Cathy Sowell



# Introduction



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Evaluators for the Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center (WPIC)
- Purpose of evaluation:
  - Assess the extent to which WPIC helps selected implementation sites achieve their systems change goals
  - Generate new knowledge about how systems change occurs and successful strategies for supporting implementation

# Objectives



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Increase understanding of the systems change process and the role of Implementation Centers
- Identify effective strategies for overcoming common challenges and building the capacity of child welfare systems to implement change
- Describe the evaluation process and the role of evaluation in guiding systems change

# Partners



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- **American Institutes for Research (AIR)**
- National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)
- National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health (NTAC), Georgetown University
- Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)
- Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI), University of South Florida

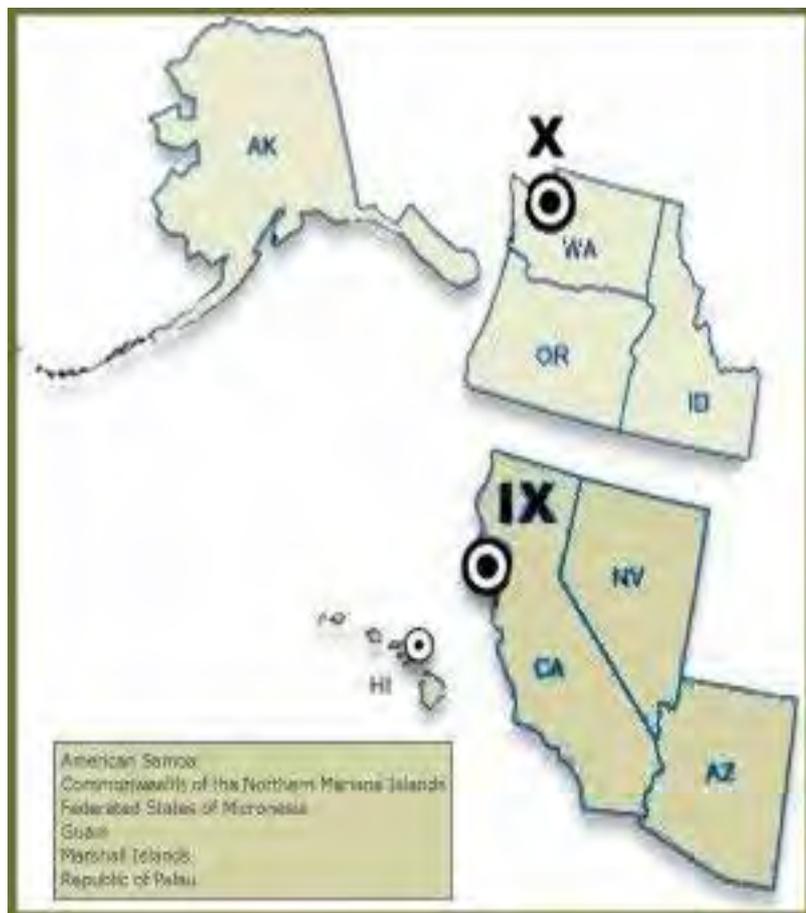
# Background



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

A Service of the Children's Bureau

A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network



States – AZ, ID, NV, CA,  
OR, WA, AK, HI

- Eligible Territories –  
American Samoa,  
Commonwealth of  
Northern Mariana  
Islands, Guam
- Eligible Tribes (Title  
IV-B recipients)



Long-term, intensive technical assistance is designed to:

- Promote organizational readiness for change
- Improve cross-system collaboration and promote shared accountability for child welfare outcomes
- Engage families and youth in defining and achieving systems change
- Integrate cultural and linguistic competence to minimize disparate child welfare outcomes
- Facilitate desired organizational and systemic change in child welfare systems

# WPIC's Role



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

Collectively the Center Partners work to:

- **Assess** the strengths and needs of the system
- **Align** organizational culture, policies, practices, and resources to identified values
- **Act** strategically to effect desired change

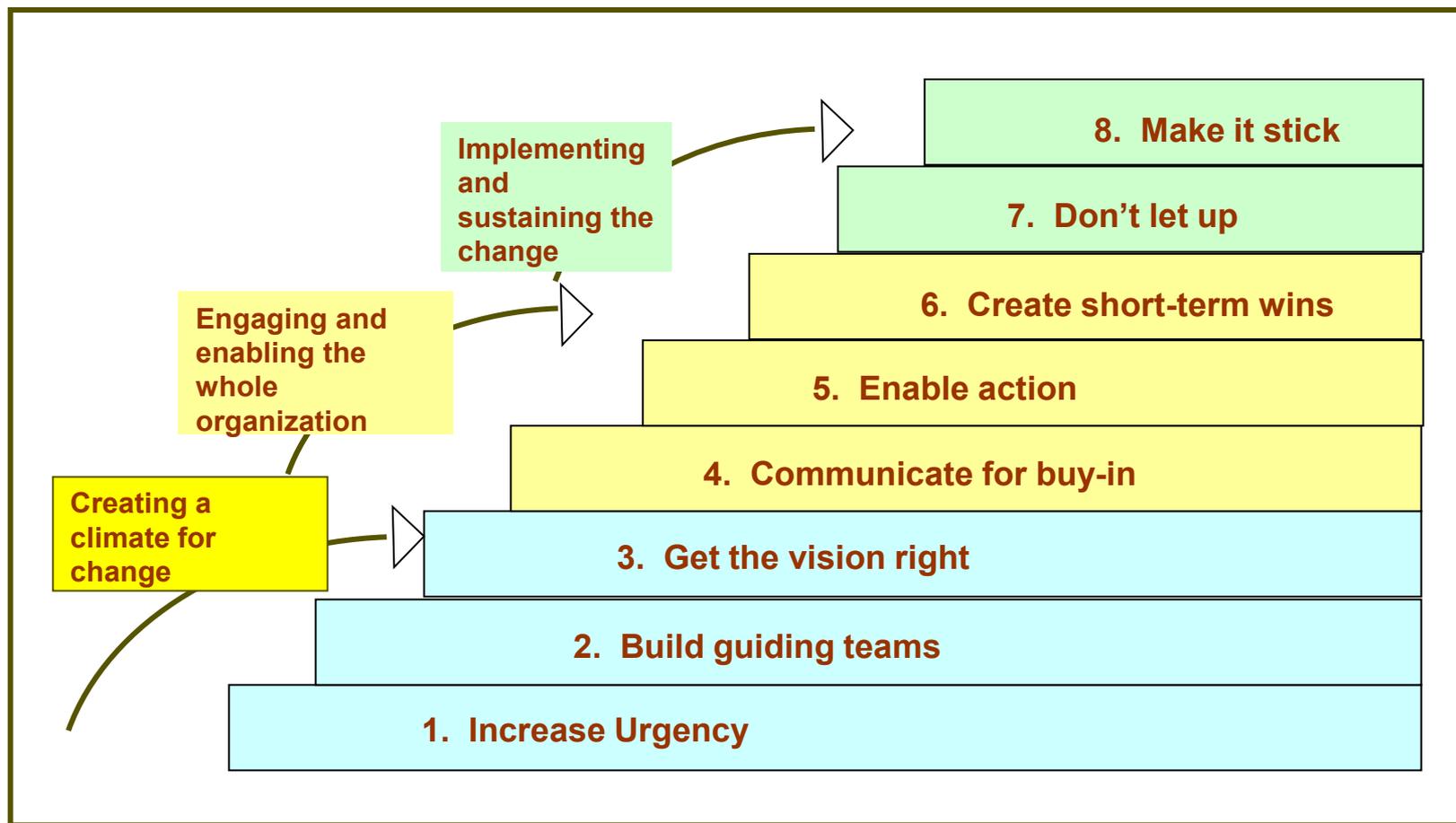
# Eight Step Process for Leading Successful Change



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

A Service of the Children's Bureau

A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network



Source: Reprinted with permission from John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 11.

# Conceptual Framework



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

## Key Elements for Implementing Sustainable Systems Change



# Selected Implementation Projects



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Alaska Child Welfare Disproportionality Reduction Project
- Los Angeles Department of Children & Family Services Achieving Systems Change Project
- Navajo Nation Child Welfare Systems Change Project

# Methods & Data Collection



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Observational data collection
- Stakeholder interviews – semi-structured, qualitative and quantitative questions
- Secondary data analysis and document review
- Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data
- Emphasis on identifying strengths, challenges, and recommendations for improvement

# Leadership & Commitment



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Leaders are committed to establishing a vision for change, creating a sense of urgency, and authorizing the core leadership team to carry out the vision.
- There is buy in, leadership and champions for change at all levels of the system (within the agency and among stakeholders, consumers, and the community).
- A plan for strategically aligning values, practices, policies, and resources to achieve identified outcomes is developed and continuously monitored through ongoing evaluation.
- Results and feedback on progress is communicated and there is shared accountability to outcomes.

# Leadership & Commitment



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Challenges
  - Changes in leadership and key personnel
  - Lack of clear accountability

“It feels like there’s ‘their side’ and there’s ‘our side.’”

“Things could change dramatically and we would be back to square one with the new division director.”

# Leadership & Commitment



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Findings illustrate WPIC's theory of systems change that leaders from all levels of the system need to be involved and supported in the implementation process
- Strategies for building capacity:
  - Create buy-in among internal and external stakeholders
  - Identify and solicit new leaders early on who will be strong champions for the project
  - Foster system-wide collaboration around project goals

“We probably need to have much heavier involvement and relationship building with [tribal] leadership. Important to keep the team together – there will be a lot of politics... Keeping the workgroup on track and help to build the relationship with the tribal council and [new] leaders, and keep the project alive among new leaders so it can continue... identify potential directors of child services in the system, and keep them well informed of the project.”

# Vision & Values



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- There is consensus on the vision for change among leaders and stakeholders.
- There is a shared understanding of the values and principles that will provide a framework for the systems change.

# Vision & Values



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- **Challenges**

- Mission and vision are shared among project leadership, but not necessarily system-wide
- Reconciling differences in values across various partners and stakeholders

“I think people speak the language, but I don’t know how committed they are to it... we’ve been at it a long time and nothing’s changed.”

# Vision & Values



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Findings affirm the importance of having a clearly defined, shared vision for change across system stakeholders
- Strategies for building capacity:
  - Values mapping
  - Courageous conversations
  - Identify venues for consistent and strategic communication to system-wide stakeholders

# Environment



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- There is political will and community readiness and acceptance for the identified change.
- An organizational culture is fostered that promotes open communication and creative problem solving so that the identification of barriers, resistance, and conflict can be constructively addressed.

# Environment



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Challenges
  - Negative media attention
  - Competing needs and problems
  - Sense of hopelessness
  - Lack of system-wide awareness or support

“One of the reasons why disproportionality doesn’t improve is because people don’t want it to change or don’t believe it exists.”

“The media attention around deaths sometimes causes attention to focus on a different goal than prevention, but it really calls for the need for an expanded array of services, it is not black and white.”

“I really think there are overarching concerns with children as a whole – substance abuse, suicide, poverty – They are concerned with the survival of their nation, and the child welfare piece does not get as much focus. Those external factors will be hard to keep in perspective and not let them take over.”



- Environmental challenges vary across the three projects and tend to be context-specific
- Across projects, environment tends to be one of the greatest challenges to systems change
- Strategies for building capacity:
  - Generate stakeholder buy-in and community support
  - Solicit political support
  - Develop channels for consistent and strategic communication to the public
  - Connect the project to other efforts already underway
  - Peer learning opportunities

# Stakeholder Involvement



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Internal stakeholders (managers, supervisors and direct service staff) and external stakeholders (service providers, schools, courts, mental health, juvenile justice, universities, family and youth organizations) are actively involved in planning, implementation, evaluation, and decision making.
- Caregivers, families and young people are actively involved in ensuring the system change effort meets their real needs and is culturally responsive.

# Stakeholder Involvement



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- **Challenges**

- Identifying appropriate roles for stakeholders
- Engaging parents and youth
- Making involvement meaningful
- Lack of dialog and feedback loops
- Ensuring that stakeholders represent the diversity of the community

# Stakeholder Involvement



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

“The state uses a steam-roller approach with the Tribes – they talk down to us. For native people, confrontation is not a way of life, so when the state takes that kind of approach, they shut down, they don’t bring it up, but just because they’re silent doesn’t mean everything’s peachy. We need vocal, educated champions that will bring these issues up and not be afraid of confrontation. Tribes need to find their identity, find their voice. A lot of Tribes aren’t there yet – if they don’t feel like they’ll be heard and honored, they’re not going to speak up.”

# Stakeholder Involvement



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Strategies for building capacity:
  - Connect with community organizations, advocacy and support groups
  - Utilize channels for communication that fit the culture of the community
  - Identify individuals who will be champions for the project
  - Allow for flexibility

“One of the main lessons is to find champions who want to do things in a different way... the champions are there.”

“Once you include stakeholders, they come to expect it and keep us accountable.”

# Capacity & Infrastructure



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Interagency agreements are in place to support collaboration and shared accountability.
- Standards for effective practice are supported by policies, procedures, contracts, technology and adequate funding.
- There is a cross functional team to manage the implementation and adequate staffing to perform functions in carrying out goals.
- There are appropriate resources allocated to support training, technical assistance and expertise needed to support implementation.
- Data is accessible and resources are available to support continuous quality improvement.

# Capacity & Infrastructure



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Challenges

- Insufficient support for interagency coordination and collaboration
- Lack of adequate resources, especially funding
- Collection and use of data

“The state does not encourage Tribal involvement as a system – there are some within the system who do, but as a whole they do not.”

“You’ve got to have data to inform the system, but need to understand why it’s important. Because [Tribes] are so small and insular... they know the information, but they don’t understand why they should write it down. So they need to understand why data is important at the managerial level.”

# Capacity & Infrastructure



**Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center**

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Strategies to build capacity:
  - Develop interagency agreements that establish clear roles for partners and organizations working together
  - Connect with other organizations, projects, and efforts that can bring in additional resources
  - Training on data-based decision making

# General Lessons Learned about Guiding Systems Change



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Importance of relationship building and establishing trust with sites
- Maintaining strong communication with key partners and funders
- Making sure that what we are doing is consistent with what sites want
- Any major reform includes losses of current ways of doing business
- Need to clarify roles early and often
- It takes a lot longer than you realize
- Child welfare systems are generally not ready for change

# Role of Evaluation in Guiding Systems Change



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

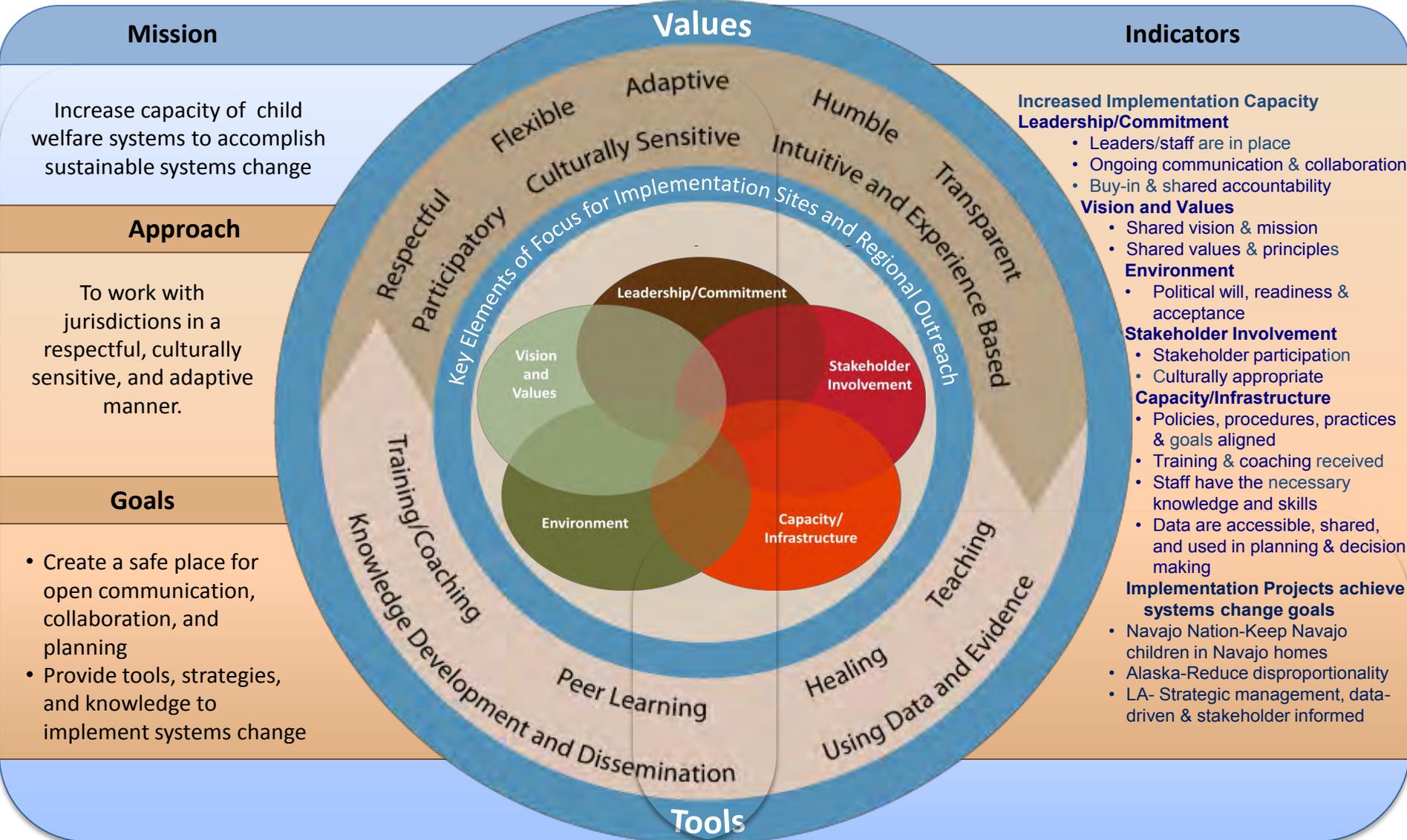
*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Assessing progress towards goals and outcomes
- Providing useful and critical feedback
- Clarifying desired systems change and outcomes
- Identifying strengths and challenges to promote continual quality improvement
- Understanding the context and factors that facilitate or hinder success
- Connecting theory to practice

# Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*Logic Model*



# Policy & Practice Implications



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Need to build organizational readiness and capacity for systems change before you can implement
- Inclusion of leadership and stakeholders at all levels is critical to successful implementation of new policies and practices
- Development and implementation of systems change should be specific to the particular environmental and cultural context of the community/system.

# Contact Information



Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center

*A Service of the Children's Bureau*

*A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network*

- Mary Armstrong      [miarmstr@usf.edu](mailto:miarmstr@usf.edu)
- Melissa Johnson      [mhjohns4@usf.edu](mailto:mhjohns4@usf.edu)
- Cathy Sowell      [Csowell@usf.edu](mailto:Csowell@usf.edu)
- Amy Vargo      [avargo@usf.edu](mailto:avargo@usf.edu)

Department of Child & Family Studies

Division of State and Local Support

Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute

University of South Florida