

# Supporting Systems Change in Child Welfare: Tips for T/TA Providers

## From an Evaluation of T/TA in Child Welfare

### Supporting Change in Child Welfare

An Evaluation of Training and Technical Assistance



#### TIP SHEET 3

The term “systems change” within child welfare is often used to describe the process of changing how organizations approach their work or operate. Examples include adopting new strategies to meet client needs, implementing systemwide practice models, and incorporating safety assessment tools into ongoing casework. According to child welfare directors, training and technical assistance (T/TA) contributed significantly to the ability of their agencies to achieve systems change. The 2015 report *Supporting Change in Child Welfare: An Evaluation of Training and Technical Assistance* summarizes lessons learned from five regional Child Welfare Implementation Centers (ICs) that supported jurisdictions to facilitate systems change. This tip sheet makes recommendations to providers based on study findings and implications.

- 1 BUILD TRUST WITH AGENCY STAFF.** Jurisdictions reported that when trust and openness was established with providers, they felt comfortable discussing issues and areas of concern.
- 2 ASSESS THE AGENCY'S READINESS TO ENGAGE IN T/TA, INCLUDING COMPETING PRIORITIES.** Child welfare directors indicated financial constraints, staffing limitations, and other change initiatives influenced the agencies' abilities to engage in T/TA. Providers need to assess agency readiness and consider how multiple initiatives align.
- 3 HAVE A CLEAR FOCUS AND MANAGEABLE SCOPE.** IC-supported change initiatives were more likely to achieve their intended outcomes when they had a clear focus and manageable scope.
- 4 ALLOW SUFFICIENT TIME FOR UPFRONT PREPARATION AND PLANNING.** The majority of T/TA was spent helping jurisdictions conduct organizational assessments to understand culture, climate, and capacity; identify and tailor interventions; engage stakeholders; and plan for implementation.
- 5 PROVIDE SERVICES ONSITE.** Child welfare directors reported the greatest contribution to systems change occurred when providers were present in the jurisdiction to deliver trainings, develop new tools, or assist with installing new practices in the agency.
- 6 GROUND T/TA IN IMPLEMENTATION AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES.** Findings from a synthesis of IC evaluations of change initiatives showed that consistent and quality implementation of interventions increased the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.
- 7 DEVELOP AGENCY LEADERSHIP AND BUILD SUPPORT FOR THE INITIATIVE AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.** Child welfare directors reported that agency leadership was critical to the success of change initiatives. ICs reported that cultivating leadership at all levels of the organization helped keep the initiative's momentum, particularly during times of transition.
- 8 OFFER FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE SERVICES.** Jurisdictions identified barriers to achieving change such as lack of financial and staffing resources, and staff turnover. A flexible approach to T/TA that offers long-term intensive support and short-term assistance can help overcome these barriers.
- 9 INVOLVE EVALUATORS EARLY IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HOW TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF T/TA.** Many jurisdictions reported that 3 years was not long enough to determine whether child and family outcomes were achieved. Also, prior T/TA evaluations often relied on recipient perceptions of change. Evaluators should seek to assess outcomes that are feasible and appropriately rigorous within study timeframes.

The report *Supporting Change in Child Welfare: An Evaluation of Training and Technical Assistance* includes information gathered through surveys of State and Tribal child welfare directors as well as lessons learned in 2012, when the five Implementation Centers convened to discuss their experience working with States and Tribes. For more information, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/capacity/cross-center-evaluation>.

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