



# Tribal TANF—Child Welfare Coordination: Collaboration Assessment Tool

OPRE Report 2020-40

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Tribal TANF—Child Welfare Coordination:  
Collaboration Assessment Tool

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## I. INTRODUCTION

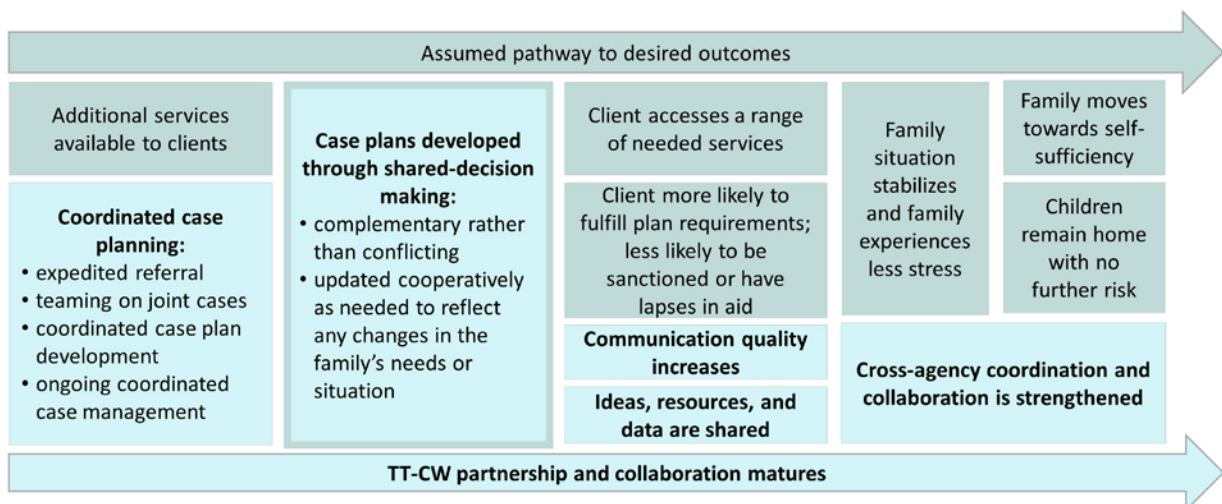
As social service organizations and policy makers increasingly recognize that more can be accomplished when organizations work together, varying levels of partnerships are being explored, developed, and implemented. Through this process, questions naturally arise about whether and how well these partnerships are working. Accurate assessment of the level at which partnerships are operating helps organizations to take steps to intensify and strengthen their partnership. Assessment conducted in regular intervals over time can determine whether or not progress is made. Clearly understanding the status and progression of a partnership can also inform decisions about program improvement strategies and contribute to participant-level outcomes.

### Background

The Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Child Welfare Coordination (TT-CW) grants, funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), seek to improve coordination of Tribal TANF and child welfare services provided to tribal families at risk of child abuse and neglect. Overarching assumptions about TT-CW partnership include that TANF and child welfare staff are in a better position to assist families when they collaborate and have the skills necessary to do so; and that coordinated TANF and child welfare services enables participants to achieve long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

All TT-CW grantees engage in collaboration efforts between TANF and child welfare to meet the unique needs of their service populations. The above-mentioned assumptions form the foundation for grantees' theories of change around how cross-organizational collaboration will ultimately lead to improved family safety, stability, and self-sufficiency. All TT-CW grantees developed logic models that depict the assumed pathway to these desired outcomes through coordinated services. Exhibit 1 illustrates how a TT-CW project's logic model serves as a roadmap for the partnership initiative by visually linking desired collaboration and client outcomes to grant-funded activities.

### Exhibit 1. Collaboration and the TT-CW Logic Model



## Overview of the Collaboration Assessment Tool

This tool is intended to be a resource for TT-CW grantees and other partnering human service programs to help them identify and operationalize collaboration constructs, monitor collaboration efforts, and measure and track progress on collaboration and coordination.

Collaboration and coordination occur along a continuum leading towards more fully developed or mature levels of partnership. Understanding this as a continuum on a maturity scale serves as the foundation for the development and use of the Collaboration Assessment Tool. Information is given on identifying relevant collaboration indicators for TT-CW grantees and other social service partnerships. Detailed instructions are provided on options for completing, scoring, and interpreting the results of the Collaboration Assessment Tool. The full Collaboration Assessment Tool is included as an appendix at the end of this document.

## II. COLLABORATION ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Collaboration Assessment Tool was developed to help current and future TT-CW grantees to assess their initiatives' partnership performance in a concrete and measurable way. It is intended to be used to identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement as well as track changes in partnership over time.

### Continuum of collaboration-coordination

Partnership among organizations is commonly conceptualized as occurring along a continuum and as maturing towards fuller forms of collaboration<sup>1</sup>. At the earliest and more nascent levels, partnership has been explicitly introduced and awareness across the organizations is increasing, but specific communication and coordination strategies remain in developing stages. For example, a grant for cross-organizational coordination is awarded and partners are planning referral procedures, staff cross-trainings, and policies and procedures for data and information sharing, but implementation of these strategies is beginning or not yet occurring consistently. At this level, the partnership is being built, but decision-making generally still occurs at the organizational level and the partners may remain more siloed in their individual roles.

As a partnership matures, cohesiveness increases, and communication strategies are formalized and consistently implemented. In the context of the TT-CW projects, this might be reflected in TT-CW program staff coordinating to successfully complete referrals and assist participants in navigating multiple points of entry into services through TANF and/or child welfare. At these integrating levels of partnership information sharing is occurring and procedures such as

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of collaboration continuums and maturity models informing this assessment Tool include the Public Human Services Association's National Collaborative's Health & Human Services Integration Maturity Model available online at <https://aphsa.org/NC/about.aspx> and the Tamarack Institute's Collaboration Spectrum available online at <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/collaboration-spectrum-tool>.

confidentiality agreements or release of information facilitate partners' access to data and data systems integration.

When a partnership initiative has matured into a fully integrated collaboration, organizations work seamlessly together to create a jointly owned and run program that may involve joint case management, supervisory, and administrative functions. Organizations are more interdependent than they were during emerging levels of partnership because resources, data collection and information, and decision-making are all shared. Organizations value collaboration as “greater than the sum of its parts.”

**Exhibit 2. Path Towards Collaboration Maturation**



A partnership initiative may involve numerous levels of maturity within the same initiative. For example, cross-organizational communication and integrated, but data sharing and data systems integration remains at a more emerging stage of development as policies and procedures are being planned and executed. Additionally, developing towards collaboration maturity is not always stepwise. Partnership initiatives may skip levels and they may also go backwards at times. Internal and external influences such as staff turnover, funding lags, leadership changes, etc., can impact how well organizations work together at any given time. However, as is conceptualized in exhibit 2, the pathway towards fully integrated collaboration trends forward and as a partnership matures and structures to sustain it are in place,

these types of internal and external factors become less disruptive.

### **What is the Collaboration Assessment Tool?**

The Collaboration Assessment Tool, displayed at the end of this document as an appendix, is a scale-based assessment tool designed to be completed on an ongoing basis to reflect changes and identify potential areas for growth in collaboration among TT-CW grantees. As will be discussed in detail in the sections below, the Tool allows for flexibility by the user to identify relevant indicators of collaboration, set milestones, and assess and track progress on specific indicators or across categories. The Tool is designed to inform conversations among partners on how to best move forward with improvements in collaboration. It is not designed to be the only source of data for assessing collaboration and coordination and important considerations for interpreting the Tool's scoring are also provided in the sections that follow.

## **III. COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION INDICATORS**

Before beginning to complete the Collaboration Assessment Tool, it is important to understand the way the Tool is organized. One benefit of the Tool is that it allows you to track change at

two different levels: within broad categories of collaboration, and within more specific indicators.

### Categories of indicators

The Collaboration Assessment Tool assesses progress in eight areas or *categories of indicators*. These eight categories are each subsections of the Tool and represent the broad areas that are necessary for strong coordination between your TT-CW program partners. These categories align closely with those used in other measures of collaboration.<sup>2</sup> The eight categories are:

- Relationships and Communication
- Information Sharing
- Staff Training
- Screening and Assessment
- Case Planning and Case Management
- Coordinated Delivery of Services
- Information Systems
- Additional Indicators

### Collaboration indicators

Within each category are a series of statements related to that area of collaboration. These statements are known as *collaboration indicators*. The Collaboration Assessment Tool includes 46 unique indicators with additional room for 5 indicators that you can develop specific to your program and needs. The illustration below shows one subsection of the Tool with *categories of indicators* and *collaboration indicators* labeled.

	Beginning to Consider	Proposed	In Planning Phase	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Not Applicable
<b>Relationships and Communication</b>						
Cross-program communication characterized by openness	1	2	3	4	5	NA
All relevant staff from both programs support cross-program collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	NA
At least weekly communication across partner program's staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
At least monthly scheduled meetings with staff from partner programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Staff involved in cross-program collaboration honor commitments and respond to timely to requests	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Level of commitment to collaboration among Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff is high	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →			Out of a possible →			

<sup>2</sup> Frey, B. B., Lohmeier, J. H., Lee, S. W., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring collaboration among grant partners. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27, 383–392.

## Determining which collaboration indicators are relevant for your program

Prior to completing the Tool, identify which indicators are not relevant for your program collaboration and coordination work. For these items, circle NA (i.e., not applicable) instead of assigning a score. It can be difficult to determine whether an indicator is relevant or not, so we have identified questions to guide these decisions.

### *Is the indicator not relevant or just not in place?*

It is important to note that there is a difference between those indicators which are not in place or that your program is “just beginning to consider,” and those that are not relevant. For example, if a program does not have monthly meetings with partners scheduled but sees this as a goal, they would circle **1**. If, on the other hand, the program feels they have adequate coordination with partners via email or phone calls each month and do not feel that a monthly meeting is necessary or appropriate for their situation, they would circle **NA**.

### *Is the terminology different but the indicator still relevant?*

Your program may use different terms than a particular indicator, but it is important to ask yourself if you replace the term, is the indicator relevant for your program? For example, your TT-CW program may have a steering committee or advisory group instead of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT). If this group is similar to a MDT, it may make sense to still complete the scoring for the indicator below:

Multidisciplinary Teaming (MDT) implemented throughout the phases of each joint case	1	2	3	4	5	NA
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	----

### *Do the unique goals and processes of your program make the indicator not relevant?*

It may be that the way in which your program is structured or the unique objectives of your work are different enough from those indicated in the Tool that you should circle NA. For example, if a program has both child welfare and TANF services situated under one agency with common leadership and staff, it may not be necessary to have an interagency agreement in place to coordinate services. In this case, that program may decide to circle NA on the following indicator:

Interagency agreement in place to facilitate service delivery	1	2	3	4	5	NA
---------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	----

These cases can be difficult to determine and may require some additional conversation with your project team and partners as you complete the Tool.

## IV. YOUR PROGRAM ALONG THE COLLABORATION CONTINUUM

Collaboration across programs changes and evolves along with the services and individuals providing those services. A question such as “does your program coordinate with its partners?” is not adequate or helpful in understanding how your TT-CW program works across the partner agencies. Program collaboration is multi-faceted, complex, and frequently changing. It is not a



goal that is either achieved or not. To best assess ongoing collaboration, this Tool was designed to be completed on an ongoing basis to reflect changes and identify potential areas for growth.

### How to use the Collaboration Assessment Tool to measure cross-program collaboration?

The Collaboration Assessment Tool is intended to serve as a guide for identifying collaboration progress. The results of completing the Tool can also help you and your partners to discuss how to enhance collaboration by identifying strengths and areas in need of improvement. You can use the Tool on your own, with other staff in your program, and together with your program partners.

As the Tool is designed to identify collaboration strengths and challenges, using the Tool with your program partners can be beneficial for prompting discussions about the level of collaboration between partners and to spur brainstorming of strategies to enhance current level of collaboration. One strategy is for program partners to complete the Tool individually, share their ratings with others in the group, and generate discussions across the partners around potential variation in responses to arrive at a consensus. Once consensus is achieved, one Tool might be completed based on the agreed-upon responses to further generate brainstorming around key areas in need of improvement of collaboration across the partners. The following sections provide guidance on scoring the Tool and using the Tool to gauge progress over time.

### Scoring the Collaboration Assessment Tool

You will score each subsection of the Collaboration Assessment Tool separately using the following method:

- 1) Add up the points of the items you circled. Write this score next to the arrow beside “Total the scores from circled boxes here” as show in illustration below.
- 2) Add up the total possible points. Each indicator that you scored equals 5 and each indicator you circled NA is 0. Write this score next to the arrow beside “Out of a possible” as shown in the illustration below.

Screening and Assessment						
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess and address safety	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess self-sufficiency	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess protective factors	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess risk factors	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Information from the assessments is consistently shared across Tribal TANF and Child Welfare	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Assessment findings are consistently reviewed and discussed across Tribal TANF and Child Welfare	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Coordinated screening and response is in place for substance misuse and mental health issues	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →	23		Out of a possible → 30			

Step 1

Step 2

Once you have completed steps 1 and 2 above for each of the eight subsections, complete the scoring table at the end of the Tool. The score from step 1 will be written to the left of the slash (division symbol) and the score from step 2 will be to the right. Divide these two numbers and multiply by 100 to get to a percentage that is your score for that subsection. You can round your score to the nearest full number. Using the Screening and Assessment example from above, the scoring would be as follows:

Screening and Assessment	23 / 30 *100 = 77%	___ / ___ *100 = ___	
--------------------------	--------------------	----------------------	--

The illustration below shows an example of a completed final scoring table for two time points.

Categories of Indicators	Today's score (date: )	Previous score (date: )	Previous score	Percent change
Relationships and Communication	27 / 30 *100 = 90%	20 / 25 *100 = 80%	80%	+12.5%
Information Sharing	36 / 40 *100 = 90%	32 / 40 *100 = 80%	80%	+12.5%
Staff Training	23 / 25 *100 = 92%	20 / 25 *100 = 80%	80%	+15%
Screening and Assessment	27 / 35 *100 = 77%	27 / 35 *100 = 77%	77%	No change
Case Planning and Case Management	22 / 30 *100 = 73%	27 / 30 *100 = 90%	90%	-18.9%
Coordinated Delivery of Services	25 / 25 *100 = 100%	25 / 25 *100 = 100%	100%	No change
Information Systems	12 / 20 *100 = 60%	8 / 20 *100 = 40%	40%	+50%
Additional Indicators	14 / 20 *100 = 70%	14 / 20 *100 = 70%	70%	No change

### Interpreting and using the assessment scores

It is important to interpret scores on this assessment Tool cautiously. Scores and changes from one assessment to the next are useful but should not be used as the only source of data for assessing collaboration and coordination. A low score on the Relationship and Communication category, for example, does not mean your program is bad at strengthening relationships with partners. Consider the following when interpreting scores in each category:

#### *How has the score changed from the last assessment?*

Ultimately this Tool is most useful as a way to track progress over time. If you have completed the assessment previously, pay close attention to whether the score has changed from that previous assessment. If it has, how has it changed and why?

#### *How high or low is the score?*

It is important to examine the score by itself in addition to comparing to previous assessments. Is the score close to 100% (good news!) or closer to 10% (you might have some additional work to do)?

#### *Does the score and/or change match my perception?*

Ask yourself and your partners what they think about the score. Is it surprising? Do they think that the actual practice is not accurately reflected by the score? These conversations can be helpful in guiding future collaboration.

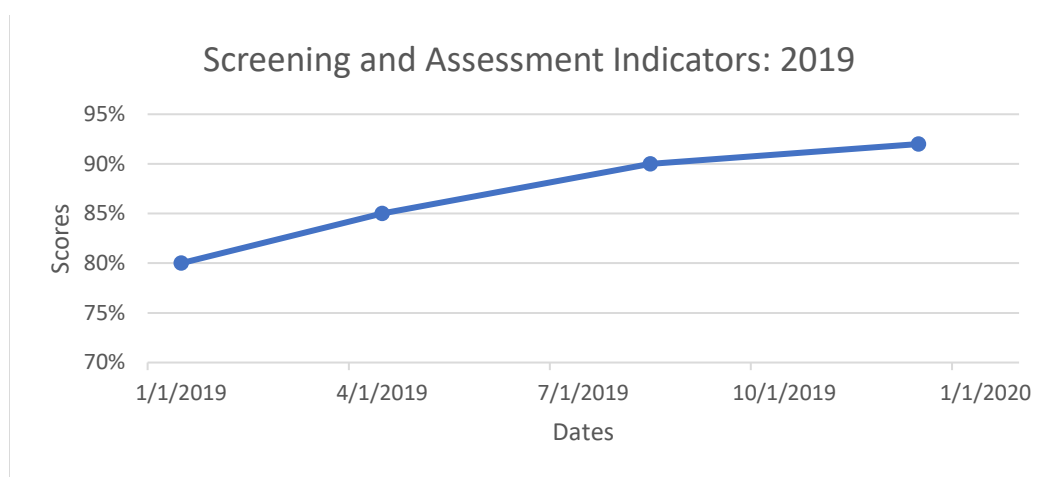
#### *What should we do with this information?*

This Tool is designed to spur improvements in collaboration. Once you have completed the scoring, reflect on each score and identify the areas that require more attention from your

team and begin conversations with your TT-CW staff and partners on how to best move forward.

### How to use the Collaboration Assessment Tool over time?

In order to assess progress, it is important to complete the assessment multiple times and on a consistent basis. It is recommended that you identify a realistic frequency for completing the Tool such as quarterly, biannually, or annually. Transfer scores from the previous assessment to the current one so that you can quickly see changes from one time period to the next. You may want to track scores graphically using a *run chart* which is a type of graph that tracks one data point over time and typically connects the points using a *trend line*. An example of a run chart for one set of indicators is shown below.



Run Chart Example

## V. CONCLUSION

Given the importance of increased collaboration and service coordination across Tribal TANF and Child Welfare programs as a priority of TT-CW grants, the Collaboration Assessment Tool can assist you in examining the key collaboration indicators in eight elements of collaboration that may be relevant to TT-CW projects: Relationships and Communication; Information Sharing; Staff Training; Screening and Assessment; Case Planning and Case Management; Coordinated Delivery of Services; Information Systems; and Other Indicators. Appendix A has the full version of the Collaboration Assessment Tool for your use.

Regardless of the current state of Tribal TANF and Child Welfare collaboration across your program partners, it is important to continue to track and monitor your collaboration goals and the progress your program is making toward full integrated partnership. The Collaboration Assessment Tool is a self-assessment tool that can assist you in evaluating your progress over time. Furthermore, you and your partners can also use the Tool as an impetus for ongoing conversations about your partnership's strengths and areas in need of growth in order to collaboratively develop and identify strategies to continue to enhance collaboration across the partnership.

APPENDIX:

The Collaboration Assessment Tool

## Collaboration Assessment Tool

Assessing the depth of a partnership across programs can be quite beneficial, particularly when assessment is conducted at regular intervals over time to determine whether or not progress is made. Terms such as collaboration can be used casually without fully considering their meaning or whether the partnering truly reflects the desired level of partnership. Having a clear understanding is not just an issue of semantics; it can have real consequences for the children and families that a partnership aims to serve. For example, collaboration between a child welfare program and a TANF program may in fact be confined to networking or making referrals that may or may not be pursued. In this case, deeper levels of partnership could help families follow through on referrals and uncover barriers to service delivery that need to be addressed. If programs accurately assess the level at which their partnership currently operates, they can take steps to intensify and strengthen it. This Collaboration Assessment Tool can be used at regular intervals to assess the level of collaboration across your Tribal TANF and Child Welfare programs and how well the services are coordinated.

**Current status of your cross-program collaboration:** As you read the collaboration indicators below, please circle the box that best reflects the extent to which your partnership has each of the indicators in place: Fully in Place (5); Partially in Place (4); In Planning Phase (3); Proposed (2); Beginning to Consider (1). If an item does not pertain to your collaboration effort, please circle NA in the Not Applicable column.

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_

	Beginning to Consider	Proposed	In Planning Phase	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Not Applicable
<b>Relationships and Communication</b>						
Cross-program communication characterized by openness	1	2	3	4	5	NA
All relevant staff from both programs support cross-program collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	NA
At least weekly communication across partner program's staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
At least monthly scheduled meetings with staff from partner programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Staff involved in cross-program collaboration honor commitments and respond to timely to requests	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Level of commitment to collaboration among Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff is high	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		
<b>Information Sharing</b>						
Confidentiality agreements and releases in place to share information across the programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Established procedures consistently followed to share information between partner programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Case plans or treatment plans are consistently shared across the programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Cross-referral procedures are in place across the partnering programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
The partnering programs consistently receive referrals from each other	1	2	3	4	5	NA
The partnering programs consistently follow up on referrals received	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Child Welfare staff member acts as a liaison with Tribal TANF	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Tribal TANF staff member acts as a liaison with Child Welfare program	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		

	Beginning to Consider	Proposed	In Planning Phase	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Not Applicable
<b>Staff Training</b>						
Cross training is regularly provided to Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
All relevant Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff are trained on joint confidentiality procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NA
All relevant Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff are trained on joint data sharing procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NA
All relevant Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff are trained on joint assessment tools	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Tribal TANF staff are trained on Child Welfare program procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Child Welfare staff are trained on Tribal TANF procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Timely cross-training is provided to all new Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		
<b>Screening and Assessment</b>						
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess and address safety	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess self-sufficiency	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess protective factors	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common assessment tool is consistently used to assess risk factors	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Information from the assessments is consistently shared across Tribal TANF and Child Welfare	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Assessment findings are consistently reviewed and discussed across Tribal TANF and Child Welfare	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Coordinated screening and response is in place for substance misuse and mental health issues	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		
<b>Case Planning and Case Management</b>						
Coordinated case planning by Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff for all joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Coordinated case management by Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff for all ongoing joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Multidisciplinary Teaming (MDT) implemented throughout the phases of each joint case	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Single case or treatment plan across the programs for all joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Coordinated plan in place for all referrals to partner agencies	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Interagency agreement in place to facilitate referral process	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Case plans and case notes accessible to Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff via linked databases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		

	Beginning to Consider	Proposed	In Planning Phase	Partially in Place	Fully in Place	Not Applicable
<b>Coordinated Delivery of Services</b>						
Interagency agreement in place to facilitate service delivery	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Shared resources (e.g., funds, space, items for families, etc.) support services for joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Coordinated provision of services to all joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Wraparound service approach followed for all joint cases	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Client families view Tribal TANF and Child Welfare as a collaborative service provider	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		
<b>Information Systems</b>						
Data system structured to efficiently facilitate Tribal TANF-Child Welfare collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Common data collection system (e.g., linked databases) across the partnering programs	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Client data from the data system (e.g., MIS) directly accessible by Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Referral logs directly accessible by Tribal TANF and Child Welfare staff	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		
<b>Additional Collaboration Indicators</b>						
Tribal policy manuals address Tribal TANF and Child Welfare collaboration	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Evaluation of TANF-Child Welfare collaboration is part our program activities	1	2	3	4	5	NA
As needed, add here additional indicators important to your collaboration program:						
Specify:	1	2	3	4	5	
Specify:	1	2	3	4	5	
Specify:	1	2	3	4	5	
Specify:	1	2	3	4	5	
Specify:	1	2	3	4	5	
Total the scores from circled boxes here →				Out of a possible →		

## Scoring the Collaboration Assessment Tool

Enter here the total raw score and the possible score from each collaboration indicator category and calculate your percentage score:			
Categories of Indicators	Score	Possible	Your Score (percentage)
Relationships and Communication	/	*100	=
Information Sharing	/	*100	=
Staff Training	/	*100	=
Screening and Assessment	/	*100	=
Case Planning and Case Management	/	*100	=
Coordinated Delivery of Services	/	*100	=
Information Systems	/	*100	=
Additional Indicators	/	*100	=

Enter here the percentage score from each collaboration indicator category above, percentage scores from your previous completion of the Tool, and calculate your percentage change				
Categories of Indicators	Today's score	Previous score	Previous score	Percent Change
Relationships and Communication	-	/	*100	=
Information Sharing	-	/	*100	=
Staff Training	-	/	*100	=
Screening and Assessment	-	/	*100	=
Case Planning and Case Management	-	/	*100	=
Coordinated Delivery of Services	-	/	*100	=
Information Systems	-	/	*100	=
Additional Indicators	-	/	*100	=

Note here the key areas where improvement is needed/desired:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_