

2024

CHILD AND FAMILY TEAMS - TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT GUIDE





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CALIFORNIA TRIBAL FAMILIES COALITION

[HTTPS://WWW.CALTRIBALFAMILIES.ORG/](https://www.caltribalfamilies.org/)

The mission of the California Tribal Families Coalition is to promote and protect the health, safety and welfare of tribal children and families, which are inherent tribal governmental functions and are at the core of tribal sovereignty and tribal governance.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Child and Family Teaming (CFT) model forms the basis of practice for child welfare services under the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) and California's Continuum of Care Reform (CCR). The ICPM guiding principles hold that practice with children and families through the CFT process must be trauma-informed and culturally and linguistically responsive.[1] For Indian children and families, successful implementation of these principles requires compliance and incorporation of the following into daily practice:

- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirements;
- Understanding how the "essential tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families"[2] impact cases; and
- Comprehending the history of colonization and historical trauma impacting Tribes, Indian children, and their families.

ICWA was passed to prevent the recurrence of historical practices that led to the wholesale and unwarranted placement of Indian children in foster care with White families. ICWA was a completely new approach to child welfare and ICWA's requirements are considered the gold standard.[3] Despite ICWA's passage more than 40 years ago, inconsistent implementation and the continuing effects of colonization have resulted in the disproportional rates of Indian children in foster care. Today, Indian children in California are four times more likely to enter foster care than White children.[4] As California seeks to address disproportionality and increase equity in the child welfare system, this Guide is meant to assist county child welfare and probation staff, contracted providers, and community based organizations in complying with legal requirements and implementing best practices for Indian children, families, and Tribes in the CFT process.

This Guide begins with an overview of ICWA requirements for the CFT. The Guide then moves on to best practices in partnering with Tribes, including learning about the Tribe and understanding differing perspectives. The Guide continues with recommended best practices for including children and engaging all team members in the CFT, provides guidance in making CFT meetings accessible and culturally responsive, and gives tips to practitioners in their ongoing communication with the team between meetings.

Appendix A of the Guide is a checklist to review in preparing for CFT meetings with Indian children, families, and Tribes. Appendix B explains the importance of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and provides further information on CQI's value in fortifying the processes of the CFT and advancing outcomes for Indian children, families, professionals, and Tribes.

ICWA AND CFT REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIAN CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA

CFT meetings are a key component in the delivery of services to parents, children, and families, and when it comes to cases involving Indian children, active efforts must be provided in the CFT process. Active efforts must be “affirmative, active, timely, and thorough.” [5] Further guidance on active efforts prior to removal can be found in [ACL 23-64](#). [6]

- In the context of CFT meetings, active efforts require the timely setting of meetings:
 - (1) To comply with “active efforts” to prevent the break up of an Indian family, a CFT meeting should occur **prior to removal** of an Indian child and placement in foster care; [7]
 - (2) It is required for a CFT meeting to be scheduled **before the Disposition Hearing** (30 days from the date the Indian child entered foster care); [8]
 - (3) Ongoing CFT meetings must be scheduled at a minimum of every six (6) months, but best practice for a case involving an Indian child may require shorter time settings; STRTP, ICC, IHBS, and TFC youth require CFT meetings every 90 days; [8]
 - The Tribe or family may request more frequent meetings, as often as weekly, to address barriers to achieve case plan objectives as required by active efforts.
- As directed under [ACL 19-26](#), the CFT must be engaged whenever there is a **need for a placement change**, to engage the team in developing a placement preservation plan, conducting family finding, and/or creating a transition plan. [9] In cases involving an Indian child, “active efforts” requires that representatives of the Indian child’s tribe be meaningfully included in the CFT meeting. [5,7]
- Scheduling CFT meetings require affirmative efforts, specifically in conducting **early collaboration with the Indian child’s Tribe** to identify the time, date, and location of the CFT meeting. If a Tribal representative is unavailable but would like to participate, the best practice is to reschedule the meeting or provide alternative modes for meeting participation. [10]
- Active and thorough efforts must be provided to invite and include the Tribal representative in the CFT process and meetings. Such efforts foster and support a commitment to collaboration. These efforts should include:
 - Engaging the Tribal representative in pre-meetings to prepare for the CFT meeting.
 - Engaging the Tribal representative in any assessments to inform the CFT process, including CANS, mental health and developmental screenings.

“I WAS CALLED THE DAY OF [THE CFT MEETING] LIKE, ‘WHY AREN’T YOU HERE? WE’RE HAVING THE CFT RIGHT NOW’... AND I WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE PREPARATION OR KNOWING THAT IT WAS HAPPENING.” -TRIBAL ICWA WORKER

ICWA AND CFT REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIAN CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA

- The Tribal representative is a **required CFT team member** and it is essential for the County to collaborate with the Tribe. The Tribal representative cannot be excluded from the CFT process, even at the request of the child or parent. When the Tribe is not participating in the team, the County must demonstrate that active efforts occurred to include the Tribal Representative, including documenting all attempts to contact them.[10] If the Tribe cannot attend the CFT meeting, the caseworker shall inform the Tribe of the outcomes, verbally or in writing.
- Remember, if one parent is incarcerated, active efforts must be made to include that parent in the CFT meeting.
- The Tribe must be invited to each of the parents' CFTs if held separately, even in the situation where one parent is non-Native. Remember, the Tribe is involved because of the child's ICWA status.
- The CFT must include all available supports for the Indian child and their family, including extended family networks and tribal services providers. The CFT should assess on an ongoing basis if all available supports are included. Engage Tribal partners to identify and include spiritual and cultural coaches.
- Case plans, which *must* be informed by a CFT meeting, are required to be carefully tailored and incorporate the prevailing social and cultural standards of the Indian child's Tribe by offering and employing all available and culturally appropriate family preservation strategies and facilitating the use of remedial and rehabilitative services provided by the child's Tribe.[11]
- If a Tribe has intervened in the case but is unable to attend the CFT meeting, the Child Welfare Services (CWS) social worker will provide the Tribe with the CFT meeting notes.[12] Even where a Tribe may not have intervened, the legal requirements of ICWA still apply.
- Structured and standard assessment tools, such as the CANS, can help to assess the Indian family at the time of intervention but may only provide a snapshot of the family's needs. Comprehensive assessments are required for cases involving Indian children and, with the Tribe's participation, must include the prevailing social and cultural conditions and way of life of the Indian child's Tribe to understand the full needs of the family. The caseworker must make initial and ongoing efforts and accommodations to include the Tribe, and to offer the Tribe the opportunity to participate in the Indian child's assessments.[10]

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT NEEDS AND STRENGTHS ASSESSMENT AND TRIBAL COLLABORATION

The Child and Adolescent Strengths and Needs Assessment (CANS) has become an integral part of the Integrated Core Practice Model and the implementation of the CFT process in California. As the primary tool used in the CFT process to both understand the child and family's needs and strengths, and communicate and gain consensus in the development of the case plan, Tribal collaboration in the completion of the CANS is critical to meeting agency active efforts responsibilities. [13]

Tribal collaboration in completing the CANS will assist the county agency in providing active efforts to tribal families in the following ways:

- In helping to identify additional strengths of the child and family from a cultural perspective [14]
- In identifying family for both placement and support
- In understanding more about the child and family's history, culture and community
- In identifying culturally appropriate services and supports
- Through shared decision making on case plan objectives and services in the CFT, avoid protracted legal battles

FAMILY VOICE AND CHOICE AND TRIBAL INVOLVEMENT

Families may express resistance to tribal involvement in their case. If this occurs, it is important to engage the child or parent in a discussion about their concern and clarify that **tribal inclusion is not optional**: The Tribe is a required member of the CFT.

case worker: "I hear your concerns, but the Tribe is not an optional team member. The involvement of your child's Tribe in your case is an essential and required part of this process. This includes case planning and teaming. What can we do to address your concerns or otherwise repair the relationship?"

You may choose to engage the family in a conversation related to the root of their concerns. Is it privacy? Has the Tribe held them accountable in the past? Are they upset with political or other decisions made by the Tribe? Work to unpack these concerns and help the family to understand the historical disruptions in relationship between the Tribe and its membership and the many benefits of tribal involvement, to include: additional support and services, generational knowledge, cultural insight, and a unique commitment to community connection that the Tribe alone can provide.

PARTNERING WITH TRIBES IN THE CFT

THE TRIBE IS A REQUIRED MEMBER OF THE CFT

Active efforts require the county agency convening CFTs to engage with Tribes early and often, to build partnerships and foster joint decision making between the Tribe and the county.[5,15] *Collaboration must start at the hotline level [16] and includes partnership in conducting initial safety and on-going assessments, scheduling CFT meetings, and identifying individuals for the team prior to the first CFT meeting.[17]* The Tribe may be represented on the CFT by its chosen representative, which may be the Tribal attorney, social worker, representative, or advocate.

Note on Tribal attorney participation: Some Tribes do not have Tribal social workers or an ICWA Tribal representative. As a result, the Tribal attorney may be designated to participate in meetings to obtain key information on the case. This may create challenges for counties with practices that limit attorney participation. Counties should create local protocols to balance the Tribe's participation through their attorney while maintaining the non-adversarial communication and collaboration expected at CFT meetings.

WHY BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRIBES?

Early tribal partnership is legally required as part of active efforts. [5] Effectively engaging with Tribes will:

- Reduce delays and contested legal battles (i.e. removal, placement, permanency)
- Provide the CWS social worker with support through shared decision making
- Build connections for tribal families to their community and culture
- Help locate ICWA compliant placements
- Increase positive outcomes for children and families

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING TIPS

- **Early and ongoing communication** helps establish trust and fulfills the legal requirement to partner and collaborate with the Indian child's Tribe.
- Understand that **each Tribe is a sovereign nation** and may have different decision making protocols than another Tribe with which you previously worked.
- Team with the Tribe(s) **as equals and** emphasize shared decision making.
- **Confer** with the Tribe regarding their position on matters and **do not presume to speak** for the Tribe.
- **Meet** the Tribal representative **in-person** (i.e. coordinate carpools to travel to meetings and use time to forge a relationship).
- Understand that the county, the Tribe, and the family may have very different views of the case. **Be careful not to create friction between the family and the Tribe when disagreement exists.**

LEARN ABOUT THE CHILD'S TRIBE

When working with Tribes, Indian children, and families, learning about a Tribe's unique governance structure, history, and culture is an integral part of culturally informed practice. **The Tribal representative can be your greatest resource in this learning.**

- Each tribe is a sovereign nation. As diverse sovereign nations, each Tribal government has its own way of governing. Decision making processes in cases, as well as the appropriate person to contact regarding ICWA matters at each Tribe will be different. Contact the designated agent for service for ICWA matters by reviewing the contacts listed for each Tribe on the [ICWA Designated Agents List](#) or contact the [CDSS Office of Tribal Affairs](#) if you need help identifying the appropriate Tribal contact in ICWA matters. Be careful not to assume that because one Tribe handles a case one way that another Tribe will do the same.
- All Tribes have their own unique history. While there are common experiences shared by Tribes, there are unique Tribal histories and specific historical events that have shaped the lives of tribal members and families.
- Each Tribal community, and individual Tribal families, have unique cultural contexts that are diverse and range in connection to traditional practices, values, and belief systems. For some Tribal families, entry into the child welfare system may be the first contact they have had with their Tribe.
- Trauma-informed practice with Indian children and families requires understanding the role historical trauma has played in disconnecting Tribal members from their culture and its effect on an individual's trauma responses and coping mechanisms.

TO RESPECTFULLY LEARN ABOUT A TRIBE:

- **Approach Tribes as respectfully as you would when traveling to another sovereign nation. Prepare for any visit to Tribal lands with the proper authorities (which might be Social Services Department staff) and learn about the laws, culture, and history of the Tribal nation**
- **Talk to the Tribal representative**
- **Talk to the [CDSS Office of Tribal Affairs](#) to connect you with a Tribal representative**
- **Access publicly available cultural resources offered by the Tribe, such as videos, books, cultural trainings, and the Tribal website**
- **Attend Tribally-sponsored public community events when invited or if open to the community, when appropriate**

HISTORICAL TRAUMA IMPACTS - EXAMPLE

In many Tribal communities, children were forcibly taken from their homes to attend boarding schools. At the boarding schools, many children were subjected to abuse, neglect, and trauma. Similarly, child welfare systems historically implemented policies and practices that resulted in the targeted removal of Indian children and placement in non-Indian families. As a result, adult Tribal members may be wary of government officials and fearful of losing their children. Understanding the historical context for actions or opinions held by Tribal individuals increases professionals' ability to connect and engage with Tribal families.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

When developing CFTs and holding CFT meetings that involve Indian children, the county social worker must partner with the Indian child's Tribe. This partnership can be challenging if attention is not paid to the differing perspectives held by Tribal and county representatives. Without seeking to learn and understand differing perspectives, misunderstandings can occur leading to unnecessary and avoidable conflicts that may damage collaboration between Tribes and counties. County social workers should strive to understand the Tribal worldview to be culturally informed to support better outcomes for Indian children and families and to meet ICWA requirements. This table highlights some examples of differing perspectives.

County-Based Perspective in Child Welfare	Tribal-Based Perspective in Child Welfare
Safety is assessed based on static legal definitions	Safety cannot be assessed by a single legal definition but is learned and assessed from a variety of shifting factors
Intervention is based on structured-decision making defined by legal thresholds	Intervention is prevention-based and decision-making examines the individual person's needs and multigenerational/community impacts
Family is understood as the nuclear family with extended family and kin like relationships defined as "potential natural supports"	Broader view of individuals included as family, which may include extended family, spiritual family, community members, and the Tribe; family is considered integral to the healing process and not optional
Work with a family is a snapshot in time – generally tied to the date of county intervention	Work with a family considers the whole family – often working and considering 3 generations of family history
Success defined through compliance indicators and behavior changes, often defined through measurable individual goals or objectives	Success is measured by restoring balance to one's role within their family and community, and strengthening connections to self, children and other healthy supports
Agency rules may encourage workers to limit contact in the community and refuse cultural gestures of appreciation	Tribal agency rules may encourage community involvement – interacting with families in the community is expected and developing familial-like relationships is supported

INCLUDING CHILDREN IN THE CFT

THE INDIAN CHILD IS A REQUIRED MEMBER OF THE CFT

It is critical that the Indian child is included in all CFT meetings, as the Indian child is the focus of the CFT. Often the Indian child is not invited or excluded due to the sensitive nature of items discussed in the CFT meeting. In many tribal communities, it is common for children to be present in meetings with adults and elders. In an article titled, "American Indian and Alaska Native Grandfamilies: The Impact on Child Development," researchers explain that tribal children often participate in meetings with families and contribute to discussion:

Children were included in the cultural ways of listening in to conversations by adults and/or with elders that focused on the concerns of the tribal community (Hilger,1992)... and they were able to contribute to the discussion if they thought they had something to add.[18]

If a child/youth does not wish to be present at a meeting or the team has determined that it is in their best interest to not be present, their voice still must be included in the process, and their participation should be continually revisited over time. Be sure to discuss whether the child's attendance is appropriate with the Tribal representative.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING THE INDIAN CHILD

- **Be honest and direct** in a developmentally appropriate way about the reason for child welfare involvement and the limits on your authority. Honesty is the foundation in any relationship with children.
- **Build trust by doing what you say you are going to do.** Consistency is key.
- **Meet the child where they are.** The child may be frustrated with child welfare involvement and may express that in a number of different of ways. No matter how hard they might push you away, never give up.
- **Engage with the child in places where they are comfortable, bring food, and listen.** Building a relationship will take time and require that you show up as an individual and not as an agent of a department.

**"I never connected with my social worker because she always seemed like a robot, someone who didn't care about me just about telling me what to do."
~Former Tribal Foster Youth**

IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE TEAM MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CFT

Identifying and engaging team members for the CFT is the critical foundation that will support ongoing work with the family. Successfully building the team also aligns with the tribal value of developing healthy relationships with family and community.

IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING TEAM MEMBERS

When identifying members of the CFT for Indian children and families, it is important to have an expansive view of who should be included. As described in the differing perspectives section above, family in a tribal context includes a broad array of individuals who have relationships with the child and their parents. This may not align with county perspective of maintaining confidentiality, emphasizing individual participants and nuclear families.

Engaging team members to participate in CFTs for the Indian child prior to the first CFT meeting is necessary preparation. To successfully engage parents, children, and family, work with the Tribal representative to hold pre-meeting and post-meeting conversations that assist all team members in understanding the purpose and process of the CFT.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING AND PREPARING TEAM MEMBERS

- **Explain the purpose and process of the CFT ahead of time.** Provide general information including the structure of the CFT meeting, the purpose of the meeting and what types of decisions can and cannot be made at the CFT meeting.
- **Explain that the team is essential to building supports.** For safety, permanency, and the well-being of the child, the team should understand their own importance.
- **Explain the roles of each team member.** The child, family and other team members should understand who will be at the meeting, the reason for their presence, and the role they may serve in the meeting and throughout the CFT process *prior to* the CFT meeting. Do not assume this has been done.
- **Use accessible language, not professional speak.** To aid in greater understanding, provide members with key terms and explanations ahead of time, this includes spelling out acronyms.
- **Help parents, children, and family members understand ICWA requirements** and how the requirements will be included in the CFT process.

MAKE THE CFT MEETING ACCESSIBLE & ENGAGING

ACCESSIBILITY

Prior to scheduling the CFT meeting, it is important to determine and address any barriers to participation for the parents, child, family, and/or Tribe. Assist team members by:

- Providing or arranging transportation or bringing the CFT meeting to a more accessible location, this may include on Tribal lands, at an Indian Health clinic or Tribal community center. If the meeting needs to occur virtually, make sure the family has virtual access and understands how to use the medium selected.
- Scheduling a time most convenient for the family and Tribal representative, and providing ample notice. **The Tribal representative must be invited and accommodations made to include the Tribal representative in all aspects of planning for the meeting.**
- Working with the Tribal representative and the family to find the most comfortable meeting space. This may include a Tribal office, Indian Health clinic, or community center. Participation in a CFT meeting will be more difficult in sterile county office environments.
- Encourage facilitators to be flexible and dynamic during the CFT meetings. Solely conducting CFT meetings in a prescriptive manner may stifle discussion or cause individuals to disengage from the process.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Communication should be:

- **Direct and Transparent** – shying away from conversations that make us uncomfortable is an abuse of system power & privilege
- **Human/Personalized** – remember, not everyone speaks "child welfare"
- **Ongoing and Consistent** – continually follow-up, check-in, and clarify
- **Respectful** – people need to be seen, heard, felt, and safe for wholehearted engagement

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD

In Tribal communities, food is central to gatherings. It is important when scheduling meetings to inquire with team members about preference for food and snacks. Many times, the food provided at the CFT Meeting are “healthy” options, which may not be preferred by team members. Having options requested by team members further reinforces that the team member is valued and essential to the teaming process.

SUPPORT CHILD AND FAMILY CONNECTION TO CULTURE IN THE CFT

Culture is a key protective factor for tribal families. Connecting tribal children to their culture creates a greater sense of belonging and empowerment.[19] The CFT can ensure case plans include culturally appropriate and responsive services and/or supports to preserve or build cultural identity. Ensuring Indian children have a connection to their tribe is required by California law and must be reflected in the child's case plan.[20] This is not only important for children who grew up around their culture, but also for Indian children who do not live in or near their respective tribal communities.[21]

With over 570 federally recognized Tribes in the United States, and 109 in California, incorporating supports for cultural connection into the CFT meeting and case plans may seem daunting and is very important. While there is no universal cultural guidance, here are some tips for the CFT:

- Culture is not limited to religious practices, but includes **food, clothing, language, relationships, traditions, and places**.
- Cultural connections are **supported through bonds with family and their tribal community**.
- Be clear with team members that the case plan may provide tribally-specific services instead of county offered services. For example:
 - A tribal parenting program would take the place of a county-provided parenting course, not as an additional service.
- If cultural connections have been identified, specific services to support and preserve **those connections may be documented in the CFT Action Plan and/or the case plan**. The CANS may assist in identifying cultural needs and strengths. For example:
 - A county contracting with a tribal cultural resource to create a cradle board or baby basket for a newborn would be captured in a CFT Action Plan (instead of a crib or bassinet for the substitute care provider).
 - A grandmother agreeing to transport (with county provided gas cards) her grandchild to a cultural event would be captured in a CFT Action Plan.
 - A CWS social worker providing active efforts through transporting a child to cultural events or purchasing cultural supplies for the child to participate in a cultural arts workshop would be captured in both the CFT Action Plan AND the case plan.
- Programs and services provided by tribal communities are often grant-funded and may not be centralized or uniformly delivered. County workers must investigate all potential sources of assistance and collaboration with the Tribe is essential in identifying programs and services for the family.

ONGOING COMMUNICATION AND WORK BETWEEN MEETINGS

Preparation and engagement with team members continue throughout the life of a case and the CFT. Before all CFT meetings, ask yourself, “**How am I engaging all the team members?**” Work done before and between the meetings is just as important as work conducted during the meeting.

Meet with Tribal representatives and family members in between meetings to:

- Prepare for the next meeting by identifying new team members that might be included. Active efforts requires identifying and utilizing the resources of the Tribe and extended family.[5,15]
- Help parents and family in completing action steps developed at the last meeting. Active efforts requires actively assisting parents in addressing barriers to completing service plans.[5,15] Remember, if a parent is incarcerated, active efforts must be made to include the incarcerated parent in the CFT meeting.
- The Tribe must be invited to each parents’ CFT meeting, if held separately, even if one parent is non-Native. Remember, the Tribe is involved because of the child’s ICWA status.
- Check in on any changes that may have occurred between meetings. Has anything changed between meetings that would cause the CFT meeting purpose to have to shift? For example, parents have separated and there is now a restraining order, which requires separate CFT meetings for each parent.
- Monitor safety plans. If safety plans were made in the CFT, follow up between meetings to ensure the safety plan is being implemented. If it is not, you may need to call an emergency CFT Meeting or take other necessary next steps.
- Seek feedback from participants on their comfort and experience during the CFT meeting to improve engagement and accessibility.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Seeking feedback from all participants on the CFT process and meetings will assist the CWS social worker in building a more successful team. For example, in many tribal communities, elders have a significant role and are treated with high levels of respect. For example, CWS social workers may seek feedback from the tribal representative and the family about how elders are being treated and included in the CFT process. Often, tribal members may defer to a tribal elder due to the experience and wisdom they have collected throughout their life. Some ways of showing deference to elders would be by letting the elder speak first and not interrupting until the opinions and thoughts of the elder are fully expressed.[22] Elders will often offer advice through indirect storytelling.[22] For non-tribal members, this may seem meandering and facilitators may interrupt elders to hasten the process. Interrupting an elder is seen as disrespectful and can harm the intent of the CFT meeting.

Appendix A: Child and Family Team Meeting

Best Practices and Sample Structure

Pre-Meeting Checklist

1. Place

Conference with the family and Tribal representative (TR) and agree to meet where the family and Tribe are most comfortable. This could be at the Tribal office, or the family or a relative's home, and should be a suitable space to discuss sensitive information. Consider offering a virtual option to allow all individuals to participate.

2. Facilitators

TR's may choose to co-facilitate the CFT meeting and an offer to co-facilitate should be made. When this is the case, the co-facilitators should have ample time to plan and prepare for the meeting to determine roles. Co-facilitation should not result in the TR being put on the spot to lead the difficult conversations on behalf of county child welfare. Tribes should be offered opportunities to participate in state-wide CFT facilitator trainings and/or offered compensation for their co-facilitation.

3. CFT Members

Aim to have more healthy informal supports present at the meeting and avoid misconceptions that "less is more" unless advised by your TR. Conference with the TR and the family to identify any individuals who are healthy supports for the family. When inviting supports, make sure they understand the purpose of the meeting and invite them to share what they would like to contribute to the meeting. Large family meetings about difficult topics *are* a cultural practice.

4. Reminders

On the day of the meeting, remind the family, the Tribe, and all other *mutually agreed* upon invitees of the meeting time and place. A call or text the morning of the meeting is helpful to encourage attendance.

5. Check-ins with the Tribal Representative

Prior to the CFT meeting, the CWS social worker should do a check-in, up to 24 hours before the meeting, to relay any emerging updates so that you and the TR are on the same page. Discuss how to approach the concerns of the Tribe during the CFT meeting to maintain a relationship between the Tribe and the family. Have an open and candid discussion about what decisions can and cannot be made by the CFT at the CFT meeting. This can alleviate "surprises" and allows for better teaming during the CFT.

6. Transportation

Provide or arrange transportation to the meeting for the family, or consider bringing the meeting to a more accessible location. If your offer to transport is declined but there is still a need, brainstorm with the family to identify reliable transportation, and offer gas cards.

7. Considering Safety

If there is an active restraining order or domestic violence in the family, consider how this may impact the choice of CFT meeting location, guest list, transportation plans and structure.

THE MEETING

1. Provide refreshments for participants. Offer refreshments to elders first. Speak to the family and TR prior to the meeting about food preferences. Be mindful of the role that food can play in one's culture.

2. Allow space for the family or Tribe to open with a prayer or intention setting words for the meeting.

3. Is the family present and what do they need to participate?

If the family is unable to make it or is inconsistent in attendance, the onus is on the CWS and/or Probation case worker to resolve. Determine barriers, for example family stressors or transportation, and address them. Barriers might be resolved through additional preparation time, pre-meeting check-ins with the family, team agreement on meeting location and times, and working to alleviate any immediate stressors on the family that may impact their ability to be present during the meeting. (Are they facing eviction? Have they eaten today? Did they just leave an abusive argument? Do they have childcare? Will they have to take time off work to attend?) Getting the family to the meeting and, whenever possible, alleviating barriers to their ability to focus, is just as important as facilitating the meeting.

4. Introductions

Have individuals introduce themselves and their connection to the child and family. Allow elders in the room to introduce themselves first.

5. Level Setting

Facilitator(s) discuss why the team is meeting. CWS and/or Probation case worker to share that utilizing the CFT meeting structure is meant to bring the family and their supports into the decision-making process by providing input or perspective on what needs to happen next when child welfare is involved in the family's life. Explain the following items to the team:

- i. Each CFT member has a role, including the youth, family, case worker, Tribe, attorney and court.
- ii. How CWS and/or Probation can offer support to the family, especially within the context of active efforts requirements.
- iii. Placement preferences under ICWA.
- iv. The child's rights, including Foster Youth Bill of Rights. [20]
- v. The parents' rights.
- vi. What is a CFT meeting and the types of decisions that can be made at the CFT meeting; For example, the TR or CWS and/or Probation case worker may need to go back and consult with supervisors or other decision making bodies regardless of team consensus.
- vii. Who can be included on the team, who must be included on the team and what confidentiality rules are required of the team. Also discuss the different roles of members on the team, ensuring to include the family

This level setting does not have to be done at every meeting. If all of these things have been done well in the pre-meetings with team members, then you may not have to do this in every meeting. If you have not done this preparation, go over these important topics at the meeting. Checking in at the start of each meeting will help you know if you need to do level setting in the CFT meeting.

6. Purpose of the CFT Meeting

The CWS social worker should address exactly what type of input will be sought at the present meeting and explain how the meeting will be structured, including any follow up that will occur. Use language that is clear and direct. If there is fear of initiation of a removal or court process at this meeting, this needs to be discussed immediately. The CWS social worker should explain the purpose of the meeting and the issues that need to be addressed, including:

- i. If the team is meeting regarding potential removal of the child, explain what the safety risks are and the bottom lines of what child welfare needs to see for the child to remain at home.
- ii. If the team is meeting to discuss development of the case plan, reiterate what the safety issues are and that a case plan needs to be developed for parents, with the help of the team, to create the safety needed for the child to return home or stay at home. Make sure to meet with each parent again post-meeting individually to review each goal of their case plan, answer questions, provide clarity and confirm their understanding regarding next steps and implications for removal.
- iii. If the team is meeting to discuss progress in the case plan, the items of the case plan should be clearly laid out in a visual fashion.
- iv. If the team is meeting to discuss a potential placement change, the current need for the placement change should be explained and the ICWA placement preferences should be provided in a visual fashion.

7. Reviewing Team Membership

Review team membership and who might need to be there but isn't, or utilize an exercise (Circles of Support, Genogram or Ecomap) to identify any additional supports who could join the team. (This should have been done prior to any meetings but is inconsistently done and so may need to be a part of every meeting with the family).

Who's missing? Are there new supports who should be invited? Did the family or tribe want a relative or support present who was not invited or unable to make it? Why not? If the support person is appropriate, briefly address barriers and ways to ensure their attendance moving forward. See if they might be available to be phoned in to the present meeting.

8. Working Well

Discuss what is currently working well with the family (utilize the prompts and strengths-based questioning, focusing on the ways in which the family currently handles crises, safety, meeting case plan objectives, daily functioning, etc). Provide opportunities for individuals to contribute thoughts in writing as well as orally. For example, this could be done as post-its by each team member and then placed on a white board or sheet.

Always identify multiple strengths for every family member of focus, or for each parent and each child at minimum. Do not struggle with identifying strengths during the meeting. Come prepared by identifying strengths in advance. Do not rush through this as this is where all the tools and strengths to develop your action plan of solutions should come from. When naming strengths, be honest and rigorous and meaningful. Be flexible. If team members discuss worries and strengths at the same time, document both. Do not cut people off.

9. Worries/Needs

Discuss “worries or needs”, to include: The safety issues, case plan objectives, placement needs, child’s medical/educational/developmental/cultural or transition needs. Frame your concerns with compassion rather than judgment, while also naming the “elephants in the room” candidly. Have parents and/or the child discuss what they see as barriers to meeting the needs. Do not frame any worries as solely “concerns of the tribe.” All identified worries are team worries, and the county should demonstrate due concern for each. When naming worries, as with strengths, be honest and direct. The families you work with will remember.

10. Brainstorm

Allow all team members to discuss what strengths of the family or other network resources (especially child welfare) can assist the child and family in addressing:

- Safety threats
- Case plan objectives
- Other child and family needs
- Identifying another placement
- Preserving a current placement
- Transitioning the child to a permanent plan

11. Next Steps/Plan

Develop an action plan with specific steps that have an identified person responsible and a timeline. This plan should be in writing and discussed in the context of active efforts, meaning all items cannot be heaped on the family. The family should be completing action items in conjunction with other supports (especially child welfare) and the focus should be on eliminating the barriers the family has identified to their success. You should not wait until the next CFT meeting to see the family in person.

Notes from the meeting should be in writing and shared with the TR and family within 24 hours. The notes should include contact information for all team members. Consensus on decisions made in CFT meetings is the goal but not always possible. The notes should reflect if the Tribe or family members disagree with the decision made. It is critical to follow up with the TR if they disagreed with the decision made at the CFT meeting and that may require you to include your supervisor in the discussion to address the issues. The team, and the CWS social worker especially, should be working between meetings on various agreed upon action steps to ensure that parents and child will not be alone in completing action items.

12. BE FLEXIBLE!

Post-Meeting Checklist

1. Follow Up with Tribal Representative

After each CFT meeting, if the TR was not able to participate, the CWS social worker should reach out to the TR within 24 hours of the meeting to discuss the following:

- What decisions were made at the CFT meeting. If any decisions were made that the TR may not have agreed with, what next steps may be needed to correct this. For example, if decisions were made to place the child in a non-ICWA preferred placement, how must this now be remedied and how will communication and repair happen with the family.
- What follow up actions steps are needed. Be sure to share a copy of the notes and written action plan.
- Scheduling the next meeting at a time, place and date in which the TR can participate.
- Scheduling the steps in monitoring implementation of the action plan. This may include meeting with providers, assisting the family in scheduling appointments and/or transportation to appointments.

If the TR was able to participate, the following action steps should be taken:

- What follow up actions steps need to be completed, including sharing a copy of the notes and written action plan.
- Scheduling the next meeting at a time, place and date in which the TR can participate.
- Scheduling the steps in monitoring implementation of the action plan, this may include meeting with providers, assisting the family in scheduling appointments and/or transportation to appointments.

2. Follow Up with the Family

After each CFT meeting and a follow up meeting with the TR, schedule follow up meetings with the family to implement the steps outlined in the action plan. Remember that active efforts means assisting the family in accessing services including overcoming barriers that may impede the family in achieving the goals of the case plan. Active efforts are implemented on a case by case basis for each family but should be timely, active and thorough.

3. Plan the Next CFT Meeting in Collaboration with the Tribe

Before the next scheduled meeting it is critical to return to the beginning and follow the pre-meeting checklist outlined above, which should include planning all parts of the CFT meeting in collaboration with the TR.

Appendix B: Tribal Inclusion in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

“Continuous Quality Improvement” or “CQI” is a system of processes that, when effectively implemented, can better ensure that a set of desired practices are delivered in the manner they were intended, continuously, and over time. CQI is valuable for strengthening CFT processes and improving outcomes for youth, families, and professionals. CQI can be utilized to ensure systems and teams are working collaboratively and effectively. This helps partners work together with improved inclusion and equity, while ensuring problems and solutions are explored from multiple perspectives.

County Interagency Leadership Teams, Tribes, and CQI

It is essential to collaborate with Tribes throughout all steps of the CQI process, and county Interagency Leadership Teams (ILTs) provide a vehicle through which such collaboration can occur. [ACL 23-49](#) [23] provides guidance on the inclusion of a process for tribal engagement developed through Tribal Consultation in System of Care (SOC) memorandums of understanding (MOU) per [Assembly Bill \(AB\) 153 \(Chapter 86, Statutes of 2021\)](#), effective July 16, 2021. This bill amended [Welfare and Institutions Codes \(WIC\) section 16521.6](#) [24] to require that each county ILT establish a process, through tribal consultation with the federally recognized Tribes, to engage and coordinate about the ongoing implementation of the SOC MOU initially required by [AB 2083 \(Chapter 815, Statutes of 2018\)](#). Counties and Tribes should consider including their collaboration regarding CFTs and CQI.

The webinar entitled [Systems of Care With Inclusion of Tribal Governments](#) on the [UC Davis Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice website](#) can be used as a resource for the ILT. These resources are valuable to further enhance collaboration between Tribes and counties and can be applied to CFT practice.

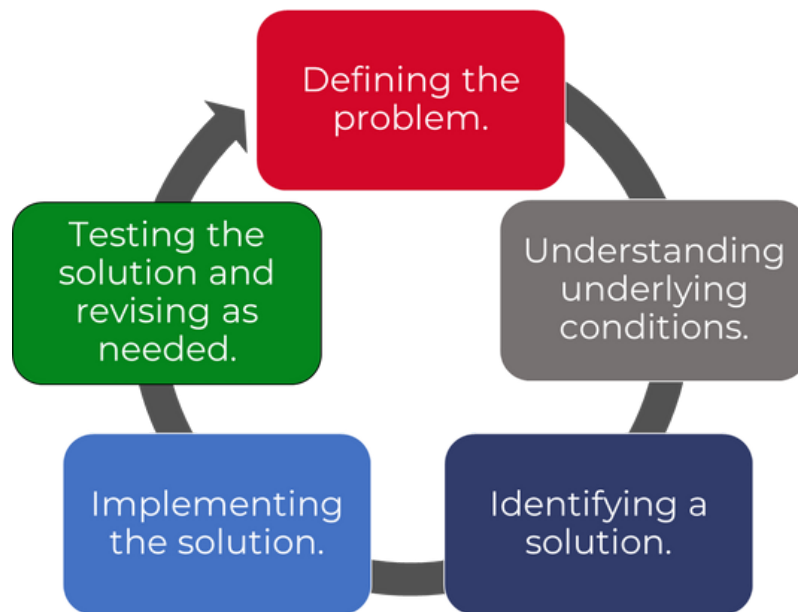
The Five Stages of CQI

CQI philosophy incorporates quantitative and qualitative data to determine the effectiveness of CFTs and methods to improve. CQI practices also consider racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in order to bring about substantial change. It is vital to include tribal partners in improvement efforts. There are five stages in a well-developed CQI process:

- Defining the problem,
- Understanding underlying causes,
- Identifying a solution,
- Implementing the solution, and
- Testing the solution and revising as needed.

These steps are iterative and can be repeated many times until an organization achieves its desired level of improvement for a practice or process. More in-depth information regarding CQI can be found in [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-48-19](#) [25] and [ACIN I-84-16](#) [26].

FIGURE 1. CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESS



1. Defining the Problem – Engage Local Tribal Partners.

In this stage, organizations within the California child welfare, juvenile probation agencies, and tribal partners need to clearly articulate a problem and the population impacted by this problem. This is also called an “area of focus.” In defining the area of focus, CQI team members should work together to clearly flush out the problem by articulating it in writing. This includes specifying the population to be studied, modified, or enhanced via specific improvements in service provision, practice, or other processes. This is an important step because identifying an area of focus helps the team prepare to ask evaluative questions about the breadth and depth of the problem.

- Are tribal communities experiencing positive permanency and wellbeing outcomes? Why or why not?
- Do CFT meetings help tribal children and families meet their needs and achieve their goals? To what extent?
- Did inquiry regarding ICWA occur with the family in a timely manner so the Tribe’s input could be considered in decision-making?

Agreement at this early stage is crucial and will facilitate all future conversations about the area of focus. Failure to have the agreement at this stage will guarantee additional work later for CQI team members in the future. Therefore, as part of your county’s ongoing CQI process, it’s important that Tribes are engaged early and embedded throughout the CFT and CANS practices. Counties should work with local tribal partners to identify areas that are functioning successfully and those that may be improved.

2. Understanding Underlying Causes.

If Indian children are not achieving favorable outcomes through the CFT process, it is critical to understand why. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews are valuable in understanding obstacles that prevent tribal communities from achieving positive outcomes.

One issue that could potentially be identified is that the CFT process was not implemented as intended. For example, the CFT meeting may have not occurred in time for the tribal representative to provide valuable input into the youth's case plan. Therefore, it is important to use resources to fully explore and discover the underlying causes of the problem needing to be solved. CDSS has tools available to measure CFT quality, including those within the CFT CANS Implementation Toolkit.

3. Identifying a solution.

When developing a solution to enhance outcomes in tribal communities through CFTs, it is critical to evaluate their strengths, needs, and resources, as well as if the intervention is appropriate for the community. The solution should be developed together with tribal partners and people with lived experience who are most familiar with community challenges. Furthermore, it is essential that the solution's goals are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. An example of a SMART goal could be:

By January 2025, the number of children with Native American heritage who receive a CFT meeting within 30 days of entering care will increase by 10%.

Each county and Tribe can determine which goals are the most relevant and actionable within their population. Again, it is important to actively work with your tribal partners and other stakeholders to determine what areas of improvement would be best to prioritize.

Counties and tribal partners may discover multiple approaches to resolve the identified problem. It is best to implement one solution at a time to avoid confusion regarding which intervention is most effective in obtaining desired goals.

4. Implementing the solution.

County leadership and tribal partners need to communicate with staff and stakeholders to prepare for the implementation of a solution to the identified problem. Consistent messaging about efforts is important, and leadership should ensure that staff understand the necessary steps and reasons for the changes. The CQI team, including relevant partners, should collaboratively develop a thoughtful implementation plan. This plan should outline the tasks involved in changing the system or practice, such as providing tools, resources, and training, adjusting policies, and establishing tracking and accountability mechanisms. It is crucial to communicate the proposed changes and desired outcomes to those affected. The plan should include the development of data reports to measure the effectiveness of implementation and its impact on the problem and the system. A monitoring strategy should be incorporated into the plan to assess the successful implementation of activities. Leadership, CQI team members, and partners should regularly update staff on CQI efforts, including the plan and timeline for implementing activities.

The data collection and evaluation plans should include steps to develop data reports for an evaluative component designed to provide measures of initial and intermediate outcomes expected so that as implementation goes forward, there are ways to measure its effectiveness on the problem and on the system at all levels. Such data may already exist or may have been developed previously. However, the plan might describe the development of new data or tracking methodologies that your organization will develop to better monitor CQI implementation. Counties, for example, might create checklists that indicate whether Tribes participated in identified CFT and CANS processes and disseminate them to case-carrying social workers.

5. Testing the solution and revising as needed.

During this step, the county and tribal organizations will achieve the following:

- Develop criteria to assess the effectiveness of CQI implementation and measure improvement.
- Data and evaluation tools to determine effectiveness are identified in the data collection and evaluation plans discussed above. These tools may include checklists, surveys, CWS/CMS and/or software such as SafeMeasures by Evident Change.
- Gather and analyze feedback from those implementing the plan.
- Establish a process to monitor unintended consequences.

To start, determine the assessment criteria beforehand, before any CQI activities take place. Then, create a plan to solicit, receive, and analyze feedback based on these criteria from those involved in CQI activities. Progress through the monitoring process and make adjustments if necessary. For instance, if a particular solution from the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) does not lead to improved permanency outcomes, the CQI team may suggest modifications to the implementation or propose another RCA-informed solution. It is important to examine unsuccessful solutions to understand their impact.

During this step, be alert to unintended negative consequences in other areas of the CQI system. Mitigate these outcomes as the CQI team seeks and analyzes feedback. For example, while implementing CQI activities to improve permanency outcomes, there may be an unintended increase in the length of stay for children placed out of home due to the complexity of their issues.

Transparency is valuable to building trust with system partners. It is important to ensure that partners are informed of progress. Some counties use platforms such as Tableau, Business Intelligence, or SafeMeasures to share data.

It is critical for counties to assess if they reached their objectives and served the needs of the community. This can be performed by measuring and documenting whether the goals defined in Step 3 were achieved, not met, or surpassed when all available data is collectively reviewed at the end of the time period. If goals are not met, the CQI process would return to Step 1 to determine why the solution did not have the intended effect and revise the intervention as needed.

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