



## Data Capacity: What Is It and Does Our Family Treatment Court Team Have It?



PUTTING IDEAS INTO ACTION – KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION SERIES | OCTOBER 2021



Advancing the capacity of family treatment court teams to provide a comprehensive family-centered approach that improves child, parent, and family outcomes

## About the Prevention and Family Recovery Initiative

The Prevention and Family Recovery (PFR) initiative strived to advance the capacity of family treatment court (FTC) teams to implement and sustain a comprehensive family-centered approach for children, parents, and families affected by substance use disorders and child maltreatment.

Children and Family Futures (CFF), with support from the [Doris Duke Charitable Foundation](#) and [The Duke Endowment](#), worked intensively with eight diverse FTCs (two rounds of four grantees) to integrate and institutionalize evidence-based parenting and children's services into their larger FTC systems of care.

## About the PFR Knowledge Application Series

CFF produced a series of [five PFR briefs](#) in 2017 detailing cross-cutting lessons and experiences from the round 1 grantees. CFF designed the series to help the field replicate effective FTC practices. This latest *Putting Ideas into Action – Knowledge Application Series* highlights the round 2 grantees' progress and challenges. It also provides strategies for other FTC teams and stakeholders involved in designing, implementing, sustaining, and evaluating systems change initiatives that advance a family-centered approach.

### THE KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION SERIES INCLUDES THREE RESOURCES:

- 1 [Advancing a Family-Centered Approach: Lessons from the Prevention and Family Recovery \(PFR\) Initiative](#) updates the original nine PFR lessons published in 2017.
- 2 [Guiding Principles for Establishing a Family-Centered Approach in Family Treatment Courts and Beyond](#) expands on Lesson 7 by outlining 10 guiding principles that help operationalize a family-centered approach. This resource also includes key questions for each guiding principle that FTC teams can discuss to assess and build their family-centered capacity.
- 3 [Data Capacity: What Is It and Does Our Family Treatment Court Team Have It?](#) elaborates on Lesson 8 by describing how FTC teams can assess their cross-systems data capacity, use their data to improve their programs, and communicate their successes to various audiences.



For more information on the PFR initiative – including the grantees, the round 1 publications, and these latest round 2 resources – visit the [PFR home page](#) or [email CFF](#).

# Data Capacity: What Is It and Does Our Family Treatment Court Team Have It?

## Why Data Matters

The Prevention and Family Recovery (PFR) grantees' initiatives, like all large-scale collaborative efforts, require intensive time and resources. Ongoing performance monitoring and evaluation are essential to gauge whether the family treatment court (FTC) team is achieving its desired results and overall mission. Team members must share and use data across partner agencies to effectively meet the complex needs of families affected by substance use disorders and involved in the child welfare and court systems. Moreover, FTC teams need quality data to communicate the FTC's story and the program's positive effect on families and communities. In short, no FTC can grow and sustain itself, make the case for broader implementation of FTC best practices into other systems, and achieve larger systems

The PFR initiative strived to help grantees build and strengthen their capacity to collect and use data to drive informed decision-making on needed program, practice, policy, and systems improvements. This document draws on the experiences of the PFR grantees (see also Lesson 8 in *Advancing a Family-Centered Approach: Lessons from the PFR Initiative*), as well as other relevant literature in the field. Selected resources are provided at the end of the document.

change without strong data capacity (see next section, "What Do We Mean by Data Capacity?").

## DEFINING PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Performance monitoring and evaluation are two distinct yet complementary activities that should be integrated. Performance monitoring entails the team's regular review of data and continuous feedback to ensure the program is progressing toward its goals and operating effectively, efficiently, and according to best practices. Evaluation tends to involve more in-depth, rigorous study of process and outcomes data to determine whether the program is achieving its intended effect for families. Both tasks help improve performance and achieve results.

Still, many FTC teams do not take full advantage of existing and potential data to track progress, identify unmet needs and service gaps, and drive and sustain needed program and systems improvements. Team members may express the interest and desire to use data and may even see the value of data. However, FTC teams too often lack the

necessary individual and collective data skills, resources, and buy-in to generate timely, relevant, and actionable data. Additionally, the FTC team may struggle with obtaining the time and commitment of agency staff who collect and manage administrative data sets at the local, tribal, or state level—and who are vital to the team's data capacity building efforts.

## EVALUATIVE THINKING

Continued data capacity building efforts must help FTC teams incorporate and account for the inherent complexity of systems change.<sup>1</sup> Teams still must master fundamental performance monitoring and evaluation activities, such as how to collect, report, analyze, and use data. Yet, capacity building needs to push beyond these basics to instill team members with the skill and mindset of evaluative thinking to continually assess and effect systems change.

This type of critical thinking is “motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action.”<sup>2</sup>



- 1 For more insight on the challenges of evaluating systems change initiatives, refer to Preskill, H., Gopal, S., Mack, K. & Cook, J. (2014). *Evaluating complexity: Propositions for improving practice*. Boston, MA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 2 Buckley, J., Archibald, T., Hargraves, M., & Trochim, W. M. (2015). Defining and teaching evaluative thinking: Insights from research on critical thinking. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(3), 375–388. doi:10.1177/1098214015581706.



“FTC team,” the term used throughout this document, refers to all cross-systems professionals and agencies comprising the FTC collaborative that together serve families. It includes the core operational staff, program managers who are often part of the steering committee, and agency and court administrators who provide executive oversight and policy direction for the FTC. The team also includes the numerous community partners that provide essential services to children, parents, and family members involved in the FTC.

See the section, “[Building Blocks of Data Capacity](#),” for a more in-depth discussion on 10 specific components of data capacity.

Responsibility for data capacity does not fall on any one person on the FTC team—whether a judge, coordinator, agency director, evaluator, or other team member. Capacity must extend to the collective FTC team to achieve the collaborative’s desired goals. All team members across systems and disciplines, including participants and individuals with lived experience, play a role in building the team’s data capacity and focus on continuous learning and improvement. When data capacity is widely developed, the whole team can better use data to understand and act on the challenges facing families as well as the partnership’s successes.

## What Do We Mean by Data Capacity?

The PFR initiative generally refers to “data capacity” as an FTC team’s ability to engage in both performance monitoring and evaluation on a regular and sustained basis. Data capacity includes:

- ▶ Having the necessary values, knowledge, skills, and resources to access, understand, and use data
- ▶ Continuous learning along with program, practice, policy, and systems improvements to serve families more effectively
- ▶ The ability to develop data-driven messaging that compels diverse audiences, within and outside the FTC, to support the program and take action to improve outcomes for families

## Building Data Capacity is a Developmental Process

Building robust data capacity that evolves from one agency or system to the collective FTC team requires a developmental approach. The transition from *collecting* data to *sharing* data to *using* data to achieve desired outcomes, drive systems change, and secure resources for lasting sustainability takes significant time, commitment, and perseverance. The shift does not happen overnight. It is a long-term learning and growing process that develops along a five-stage continuum, as the graphic on the next page outlines. Importantly, the process is dynamic and requires an ongoing feedback loop, even as teams reach the more advanced stages.

	STAGE 1: COURT- FOCUSED DATA IDENTIFICATION	STAGE 2: CROSS- SYSTEMS DATA AWARENESS & INITIAL DATA SHARING	STAGE 3: DATA-INFORMED TEAM & FORMAL DATA SHARING	STAGE 4: DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAM MANAGEMENT	STAGE 5: DATA-DRIVEN SYSTEMS CHANGE
Data Knowledge and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited knowledge of other partner agency's data systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team begins to review available data across key partner systems</li> <li>Team begins to identify key demographics needed to assess equity in services and outcomes</li> <li>Participants and their families are considered essential partners in all data-related efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team has increased understanding of data and how measures are defined and calculated</li> <li>Team agrees on shared outcomes to monitor and assess progress</li> <li>Team agrees on key family, community, and system characteristics to assess equity in services and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All team members and partners have shared language and mindset about the importance of data</li> <li>Team agrees on targets for shared outcomes</li> <li>Team agrees on importance of monitoring scale of FTC program (i.e., number of families served) in relation to larger system need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability of Stage 4 activities</li> <li>Full leadership buy-in and investment in sustaining performance monitoring and evaluation, and advancing data capacity</li> </ul>
Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collection of limited data points, often manually or in basic spreadsheets</li> <li>Data collection typically inconsistent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular (i.e., identified time or program intervals) data collection and reporting; includes court data and may include data from other systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Routine and standardized cross-agency and cross-systems data collection methods and agreements in place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustained routine and standardized cross-systems data collection and reporting</li> <li>Obtained baseline program data and/or contextual county or state data on shared outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability of Stage 4 activities</li> <li>Able to obtain comparison group and cost data</li> </ul>
Data Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little or no accessibility or sharing of data across systems</li> <li>Ad hoc, non-standardized reporting from other partners</li> <li>Standardized client consents typically inconsistent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of standardized reporting among partners</li> <li>Data and information sharing limited in scope and duration; typically "one way" versus reciprocal</li> <li>Individual-level data on children, parents, and family members are not yet matched across systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal data sharing agreements and related documentation in place</li> <li>Agreements and documentation established with participants' input</li> <li>Discussion of shared outcomes and data among higher governance levels (e.g., steering and executive oversight committees)</li> <li>Data accessible in a timely manner to those who need it</li> <li>Individual-level data can be matched across courts, child welfare, substance use disorder treatment, and other key partner systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular discussion and sharing of data among team members at all levels (moves beyond higher governance levels)</li> <li>Data dashboard or similar mechanism developed to communicate progress on priority measures to team and leadership</li> <li>Data matching is used to assess services compared to another group, as well as monitor performance across systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainability of Stage 4 activities</li> <li>Results shared more broadly with other key stakeholders and decision makers</li> </ul>
Data Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Court data used primarily for descriptive purposes only (e.g., participant numbers and demographics)</li> <li>Basic descriptive data used for required or ad hoc reports to court administration or funders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data and information used for participant case management rather than performance monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued use of data for participant case management</li> <li>Use data to identify emerging and unmet needs of children, parents, and family members involved in multiple systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use data to drive FTC program and practice improvements (limited to context of FTC program)</li> <li>Use established baselines and targets to measure FTC progress on shared outcomes</li> <li>Use data to develop strategies to achieve and increase the FTC's capacity to serve more families</li> <li>Actively use data for problem-solving and critical decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular performance monitoring embedded into standard FTC and partner agency processes and budgets</li> <li>Sustainable infrastructure developed to engage in more rigorous evaluation (e.g., quasi-experimental and multiyear studies, cost analyses)</li> <li>Use and communicate data to inform policy and systems improvements that move beyond the scope of the FTC program to affect other family-serving systems</li> <li>Results used to secure resources to expand, enhance, and sustain FTC effective practices</li> </ul>

The pace at which an FTC team moves along the data capacity continuum depends on its own unique situation. Each site generally starts in a fundamentally different place. Some teams may initially struggle with basic data collection and reporting, while others dive right into cost studies and comparison group analyses. Some may track data manually while others work with advanced, customized web-based data systems. (See [Lesson 8](#) for more information on grantees' experiences.) Data capacity building hinges on the needs, priorities, goals, and challenges of all partners, as well as the initiative's changing political, economic, and institutional context.

"Data collection was certainly not where it is today. Initially, we did not have a database for the [FTC] program and were not receiving data from [child welfare]. We struggled in being able to tell the whole story of the [FTC]. Now our data helps us in making programmatic decisions, as we can more fully integrate [FTC] program and [child welfare] data to tell our families' stories."

—Grantee team member

## COMMON CHALLENGES TO DATA CAPACITY BUILDING

Building robust data capacity is not easy. PFR grantees found it even harder while simultaneously making major program enhancements to advance a family-centered approach. Although each FTC team will face unique, site-specific barriers along the way, they can anticipate some common roadblocks. (See also [Lesson 8](#) for additional information.)

- ▶ **Limited financial resources** to invest in building and sustaining a robust data infrastructure
- ▶ **Lack of cross-systems leadership or political will** to promote data capacity building as a shared priority
- ▶ **Limited or insufficient staff capacity** to collect, analyze, understand, and use data in decision-making and continuous quality improvement
- ▶ **Pervasive staff turnover** at leadership and frontline levels that disrupts timely, consistent, and quality data collection, use, and decision-making
- ▶ **Lack of a centralized data system** that includes and links essential data from all partners to provide a complete picture of whole families
- ▶ **Lack of standardized data across partner agencies** on the same child, parent, or family each agency jointly serves
- ▶ **Issues with timely access to quality and relevant administrative data** from existing state and county substance use disorder treatment and child welfare administrative datasets to measure FTC priority outcomes
- ▶ **Difficulty in obtaining appropriate comparison group** data to sufficiently evaluate differences in the FTC program's child, parent, and family outcomes
- ▶ **Inconsistent sharing and discussion of data** due to real and perceived barriers such as inadequate time and opportunities to collectively discuss data, confidentiality concerns, turf issues, and fear that information will be used in a harmful way
- ▶ **The complexity of evaluating larger systems change**, which is harder to track and evaluate than tangible events like reunification and substance use disorder treatment completion

## Building Blocks of Data Capacity

All PFR grantees' experiences underscore that moving to the more mature stages of data capacity is difficult, even for the most advanced sites (see also [Lesson 8](#) in addition to the round 1 [PFR case studies](#) and [PFR Brief 5](#)).

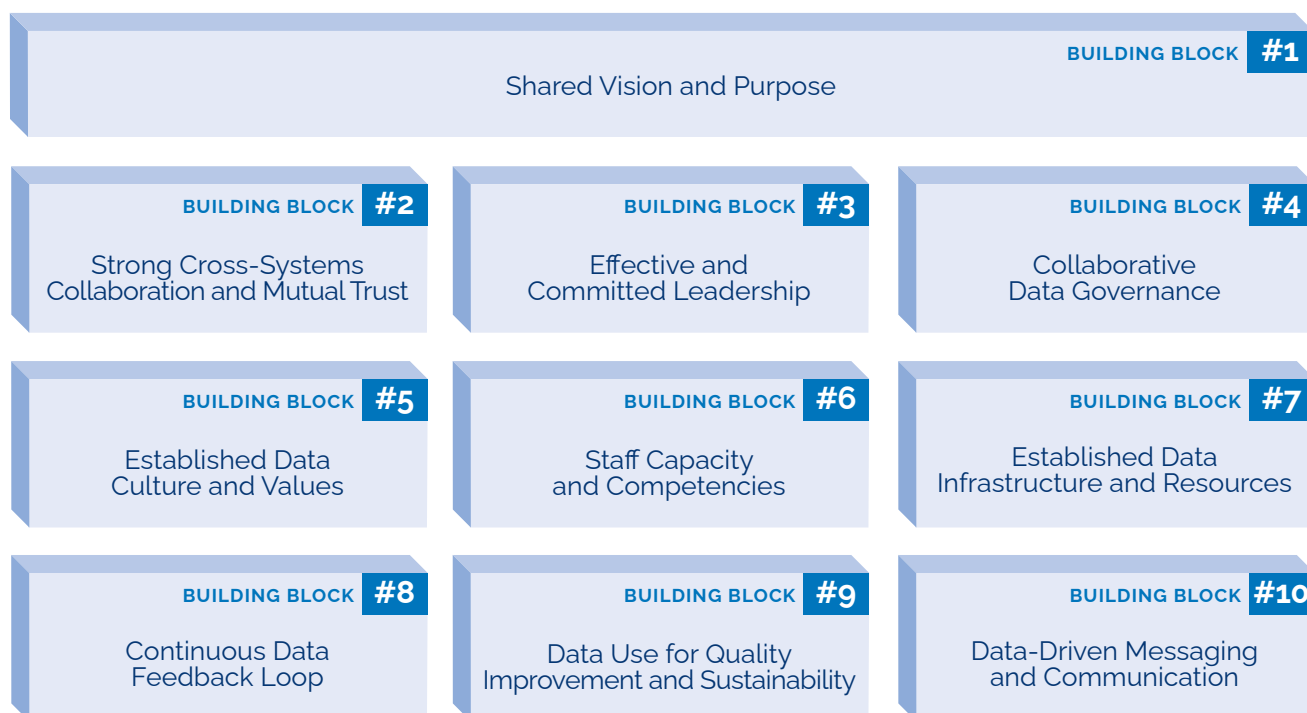
This section outlines 10 building blocks identified through work with the PFR grantees. They provide direction for FTC teams to strengthen their data capacity and progress along the five-stage continuum. It is important to recognize that the pace of growth will differ by site. Moreover, FTC teams should not expect to tackle all building blocks at once. Sites may choose to focus on a particular building block to get started.

To develop an appropriate and feasible data capacity building plan, teams need to first

assess their current capacity. To assist teams with this process, each building block is briefly described, followed by selected self-assessment statements an FTC team can discuss to understand their team's strengths, challenges, and priority areas for improvement. Each building block also includes selected tips to help with concrete next steps.

FTC teams should approach these discussions as a group given the collaborative nature of building data capacity. Include direct service providers, program staff, agency leadership, attorneys, data analysts, evaluators, and participants in the conversations. Additionally, as data capacity shifts due to changing priorities or emerging challenges, the team should periodically reassess its progress.

### BUILDING BLOCKS AT-A-GLANCE







## Building Block #1:

### Shared Vision and Purpose

Building data capacity requires that, first and foremost, all FTC team members have a shared vision and unified purpose on why the team needs data to support the FTC's overall mission and goals. Clear objectives help teams determine what kinds of data are needed while also creating buy-in among team members, participants, and other key stakeholders.

"At this point, everybody who's on the [FTC] team is well aware and is on board that we need to be measuring and gathering as many data points as we can along the way."

—Grantee team member



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- ▶ Discussed why robust data capacity is essential to better serve families and improve family outcomes
- ▶ Agreed on what data to collect and how
- ▶ Developed clear value and purpose statements for data collection, sharing, and use among partners
- ▶ Established a shared understanding for how data can help each partner achieve their respective agency goals as well as realize the FTC team's shared mission



### TIP: DEVELOP DATA VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS<sup>3</sup>

A **data vision statement** should be high-level, aspirational, and consistent with the FTC's overall vision. It should convey why the team values data. For example: "The FTC team is a learning collaborative that engages in data-driven decision making as standard practice to improve overall family well-being and functioning."

A more concrete **data mission statement** communicates what the team is going to accomplish and how. It supports the data vision statement and ties into the FTC team's overall mission. For example: "The FTC team uses an integrated, cross-systems database to regularly provide all key stakeholders with quality process and outcomes data to make continuous program, practice, policy, and systems improvements that result in positive and equitable outcomes for families."

Together, the data vision and mission statements can unify the FTC team's efforts, while providing clarity of purpose and direction. They set an overall tone and expectation that the team values and invests in strong data capacity. The FTC team should strive to involve participants as active partners in the statement-building process.

<sup>3</sup> Peters, R. (2020). How to write your data vision and mission statements. Westborough, MA: Heller Search Associates.



## Building Block #2:

### Strong Cross-Systems Collaboration and Mutual Trust

Building data capacity across *multiple* agencies is more complex than within a single agency due to different expectations, levels of trust, communication structures, funding requirements, and legal restrictions. As such, data capacity building efforts are as much relational as they are technical. Trusting interagency, collaborative relationships and effective communication are thus essential as data flows at the speed of trust.<sup>4</sup>



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- ▶ Openly and fully discussed all partners' priorities, expectations, concerns, and motivations about data capacity building to help build trust
- ▶ Secured the buy-in and commitment of staff and leadership at all levels and across all systems
- ▶ Developed a sense of shared ownership and accountability in building and sustaining the team's data capacity
- ▶ Developed processes to ensure the inclusion of all team members—particularly frontline staff—in all data-related activities (planning, collecting, reporting, discussing, using)
- ▶ Incorporated the input and experiences of participants and their families in data-related activities, especially in developing consents to share and use data (both with participants and between agencies)
- ▶ Included representation from all partner systems in data-related meetings



### TIPS FOR BUILDING TRUST

- ▶ Convene a team retreat or strategic planning session on data capacity building. Use an objective third party to spark honest discussions about team members' past experiences, concerns, and challenges with data and information sharing, while developing collaborative strategies to manage those issues.
- ▶ Conduct focus groups or interviews with participants to better understand how they view confidentiality and consent processes, identify participant-level barriers to information sharing (e.g., stigma, fear of having their children removed), and explain and obtain feedback on "safe" data sharing strategies.
- ▶ Identify what related data collection, performance monitoring, and evaluation efforts exist among partner agencies that may support or compete with the FTC team's efforts. Determine existing and potential opportunities to complement rather than duplicate data capacity building efforts.
- ▶ Develop a concrete statement or memorandum of understanding regarding equitable data-driven decision making among partners.
- ▶ Develop a formal process for partners to review products that highlight shared outcomes before results are disseminated to wider audiences.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the popular adage, "Change moves at the speed of trust," coined by Stephen M.R. Covey in his 2006 book, *Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*.



## Building Block #3:

### Effective and Committed Leadership

Effective outcomes-focused leadership that champions whole team buy-in and sustained resources for data collection, analysis, and use remains critical. The full commitment and support of judicial and senior leadership across all partner agencies, as well as informal leaders among frontline program and data staff, help teams move beyond the early stages of data capacity development. Among round 2 PFR grantees, FTC judges played a crucial role by pushing data-driven decision making and emphasizing that building data capacity is worth the effort it demands.

“The most important thing that happened to us [was] for me personally to understand why we need data and how we can use it to better our program or eliminate things that aren't working. If I understand it, then I'm pushing it. Even after the grant, I'll still be pushing it.”

—Grantee FTC leadership



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team has leadership that:

- ▶ Demonstrates a positive attitude toward data and promotes the importance of robust data capacity and data-driven decision making to other key stakeholders
- ▶ Listens and responds to team members' and partners' feedback (positive and negative) about data capacity building efforts
- ▶ Uses data to strengthen and expand collaborative relationships and mobilize resources to develop and sustain the FTC's program and service capacity



- ▶ Promotes the use of data to ensure equitable access to services and improved outcomes for all families regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, or other demographic characteristics
- ▶ Holds team members and partners accountable for fulfilling agreed-upon roles and responsibilities regarding data collection, reporting, analysis, and use



## TIPS TO STRENGTHEN AND CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP

- ▶ Identify formal and informal leaders (existing and potential) who demonstrate interest in the FTC's processes and outcomes. Seek out opportunities to develop their leadership skills and engage in data-informed conversations with them.
- ▶ Identify opportunities to nurture the leadership specifically of agency data analysts to advance data sharing and other data capacity building efforts. Consider, for example:
  - Developing a cross-agency data workgroup in which data analysts can share their expertise about the data with other team members and provide feedback on how the data can advance the FTC's goals and objectives
  - Conducting an FTC team in-service session in which partner agency data managers and analysts can educate other FTC team members about the potential and limitations of data across systems
- ▶ Formalize your leadership meeting agendas to include explicit opportunities for data sharing and discussion. Encourage leaders to interact with the data and invite experts from their respective fields to present to other leaders.
- ▶ Provide a scenario with a common data-related barrier that FTCs face. Pose questions and suggestions for how leadership can effectively intervene to help resolve the issue.







## Building Block #4:

### Collaborative Data Governance

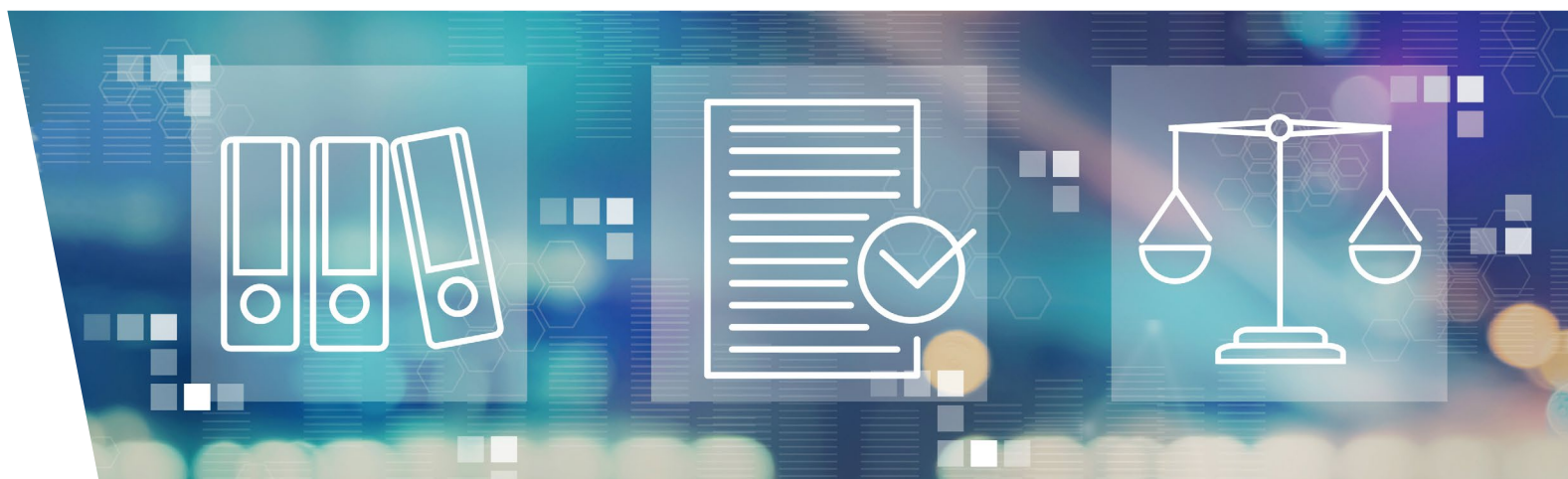
Data governance refers to having clear and documented policies and procedures that manage what data are collected and how they are collected, reported, shared, and used. Data governance advances the accuracy, accessibility, and reliability of data. Diverse team members and stakeholders (not just one partner) should collaboratively develop explicit (not implicit) cross-systems data governance. Collaborative data governance helps build trust among partners at all levels (executive oversight, steering committee, core operations, work groups, and auxiliary supports).



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

General data management – assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- ▶ data-related activities rather than relying on informal or good faith agreements based on personal relationships
  - ▶ Obtained the appropriate consents from participants and their family members receiving services to share their data, as appropriate, for individual case management as well as FTC performance monitoring
  - ▶ Established formal agreements among all partners for how team members may share and use family-specific information with one another that respect the rights and consents of participants and their family members receiving services
  - ▶ Adopted common data standards, definitions, and language across partner agencies
  - ▶ Established protocols to periodically revisit the type and level of information collected; processes for collecting, analyzing, and applying the data; and specifications of the data system to determine if modifications or upgrades are needed
  - ▶ Implemented ongoing oversight and regular monitoring of all data-related activities
- ▶ Developed a clear understanding of what, how, when, and by whom data are collected, analyzed, shared, and used for decision making
  - ▶ Established formal agreements outlining roles, responsibilities, and rights for various





Equitable and ethical practice – assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- ▶ Ensured data governance reflects equity and inclusion
- ▶ Developed policies to use data in ethical and responsible ways, as the team intended
- ▶ Eliminated bias in how information is collected and analyzed while minimizing risks the data may pose to certain groups of people
- ▶ Ensured historically marginalized groups can access data (as appropriate) and have the power to influence how others use data to set priorities and allocate resources



## TIPS FOR STRONG DATA GOVERNANCE

- ▶ **Review existing data sharing agreements** to ensure they cover key components including:

- Partner agencies involved
- Purpose and rationale for data sharing
- Data requested
- Terms and methods of sharing (e.g., frequency and duration)
- Data management (e.g., retention, maintenance, destruction)
- Confidentiality and security requirements
- Roles and responsibilities of participating agencies
- Review of analyzed data prior to release or publication (if applicable)
- Protocol for reporting any issues or violations
- Agency contacts

(See the [Resources](#) section at the end of this document for selected reports that provide more information on developing data sharing agreements.)

- ▶ **Develop a data dictionary** or handbook to document the meaning, definitions, and specifications of each data point collected, and how the FTC's selected performance measures are calculated. Regularly update

documentation to reflect changes in staffing, data systems, and collected data. The data dictionary should include information such as:

- Name and definition of the data element (or variable)
- Value labels and description
- Primary source for the data element (e.g., existing administrative dataset, staffing sheets, intake documents, community providers)
- Location of the data element (e.g., state/county agency database, FTC's own database, other community partner's database, case files)
- Staff member and agency responsible for collecting and entering this data
- How and when the data element is collected and entered
- Who can access the data and how
- How the data is used and by whom

- ▶ **Regularly disseminate "missing data" reports** to team members, particularly agency leaders and supervisors. Such reports help identify data entry errors, promote timely data collection and entry, and highlight key missing information.



## Building Block #5:

### Established Data Culture and Values

Data capacity is much more than the team having the necessary technical skills. Teams also need a shared mindset about the importance of using data to achieve the FTC's mission and drive decision-making. In short, staff weave data into the FTC team's culture and value system. Collecting, sharing, and using data are integrated as core program operations rather than approached as an ad hoc or special effort. Establishing a strong data culture and values is fundamental to securing adequate staffing and financial resources (Building Block #6 and Building Block #7).

Instilling data as part of a team's value system does not happen overnight or even over the course of a three-year grant period. Cross-systems, multidisciplinary FTC teams need an extensive capacity-building period to learn how to interpret and work with data while fostering an environment of continuous learning.



## Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team:

- ▶ Considers data capacity building a definitive priority integral to achieving the FTC's mission, vision, and goals
- ▶ Acknowledges regular performance monitoring as a standard best practice for continuous program improvement rather than
  - An exercise in amassing data for data's sake
  - A time-limited grant requirement to achieve compliance
  - A mechanism to make snap judgments about funding, services, or other program operations
- ▶ Seeks out new sources of information and types of data to effectively respond to new and emerging challenges and issues
- ▶ Clearly promotes the value of including participants and their families as active partners in data-related activities
- ▶ Embraces data as a tool to identify issues of disproportionality, unequal access, and disparate outcomes—and drive needed changes to ensure equitable outcomes for all families



### TIP: CONDUCT A BARRIER-BUSTING EXERCISE

Have the team identify any existing systems barriers or contextual factors, such as competing value systems or lack of political will, that may hinder data capacity building efforts—either now or later. Once team members agree on a list, design strategies to break down barriers to establishing a robust data culture.

#### Recommended Reading:

- ▶ Diaz, A., Rowshankish, K., & Saleh, T. (2018). Why data culture matters. McKinsey Quarterly. Number 3.
- ▶ Education Insights (n.d.). *For good measure: A guide for building strong data culture in schools*. Available at: <https://www.edelements.com/data-culture-guide>



## Building Block #6:

### Staff Capacity and Competencies

All FTC team members at the program, management, and leadership levels should have a basic understanding of performance monitoring and evaluation (e.g., data elements, outcome definitions). Beyond that, they need sufficient staff time, technical skills, expertise, and training to manage and carry out all performance monitoring and evaluation tasks (including collecting, analyzing, and translating data into action). Moreover, staff need adequate training and support to handle data responsibly while actively working to foster a sense of trust in data, manage bias, and respond to inequity.



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team:

- ▶ Has thoroughly discussed the time and level of effort needed (i.e., conducted a

resource assessment) for data and program staff to collect, enter, manage, and analyze all the data the team has agreed to track

- ▶ Has the technical skills to identify relevant data sources, select appropriate indicators, and use existing data systems and tools to collect all needed data
- ▶ Has adequate and knowledgeable staff to calculate the team's agreed-upon process and outcome measures
- ▶ Confidently interprets data results, which includes understanding data limitations and clearly defining implications for program and policy changes
- ▶ Understands how to use data responsibly and ethically while following all applicable confidentiality requirements
- ▶ Has dedicated in-house evaluators or data analysts as members of the core team, or connections to outside evaluators, to conduct regular performance monitoring and evaluation

"I finally get that [the data] really help us to make decisions and to tell our story."

– Grantee team member





## TIP: MAKE SURE YOUR EVALUATOR OR DATA ANALYST IS A GOOD FIT

FTC teams can benefit greatly by including an experienced evaluator or data analyst on the team. They help increase data sharing and quality, while also making data relevant to other team members, agency partners, and community stakeholders. However, the evaluator or data analyst must be the right fit. Look for individuals who:

- ▶ Are fully committed to and able to dedicate adequate time to the FTC's data capacity building efforts
- ▶ Have a thorough understanding of FTC, child welfare, and other key partner agency program operations and services
- ▶ Understand key FTC program and target population issues and incorporate that knowledge in the FTC's performance monitoring and evaluation
- ▶ Recognize how an FTC's family-centered approach, practices, and desired outcomes differ from those of an individual-focused adult drug court
- ▶ Have effective communication, coordination, and mutual trust with program staff
- ▶ Value the insights, expertise, and perspectives of all team members, including families
- ▶ Fully comprehend the team's priority outcomes
- ▶ Can present data that resonates with the FTC team and other key stakeholders
- ▶ Participate as an active and engaged collaborative team member, rather than work solely as an outside consultant
- ▶ Have experience developing data collection tools and collecting data using a variety of methods, such as focus groups, interviews, surveys, observations, and document reviews







## Building Block #7: Established Data Infrastructure and Resources

In addition to an ingrained data culture (**Building Block #5**) as well as adequate staffing capacity and competencies (**Building Block #6**), FTC teams need sufficient and sustainable financial, physical, and related resources (e.g., data systems, data management software) to build and maintain capacity. Do not underestimate the ongoing time and financial investment needed to establish a solid data infrastructure and grow capacity. Partners should discuss the required costs and investments, as well as feasible shared commitments, early and often.



## Identifying Priority Action Areas

**Financial resources** – assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- Secured adequate financial resources, including diverse and dedicated funding (versus project funding), to sustain ongoing data collection, sharing, and continuous quality improvement efforts

- Formalized partner agency commitments (financial and other resources) in writing
- Included the costs of regular performance monitoring and evaluation in the annual budgets of the FTC and partner agencies

**Data systems** – assess the extent to which your FTC team has:

- Implemented an automated data system that tracks the team's shared outcomes measures at the individual family level (versus in the aggregate)
- Developed the ability to track all critical data points as a child, parent, and family moves through the court, child welfare, substance use disorder treatment, and other major service systems
- Developed the capacity to match and link data across systems to provide a holistic picture of children, parents, and families that all key partners serve
- Documented the technical limitations and shortcomings of current data systems, as well as the feasibility and implications of modifying or enhancing them







## TIP: CONDUCT DATA MAPPING

Understanding each agency's data system(s), how much team members can access and use available data, and what data gaps exist are all crucial to determining the feasibility of data collection, sharing, and integration. Data mapping should be a collaborative process with all team members and partners. It will likely entail a series of conversations to document:

- ▶ What relevant data and information each partner agency's data system(s) currently provide on children, parents, and families
- ▶ Where these data are stored
- ▶ Accessibility of the data—either:
  - open (shared freely and openly at the aggregate or individual level)
  - restricted (shared under specific circumstances with protections in place)
  - unavailable (not shared for confidentiality, quality, or other reasons)
- ▶ Reliability, validity, timeliness, and completeness of the data

- ▶ What common data elements exist across systems
- ▶ Whether each system can identify the same families involved in other systems (e.g., with common identifiers or a special project code)
- ▶ How data are shared (or not) among agencies
- ▶ Availability and accessibility of the specific data elements needed to calculate the team's priority outcomes
- ▶ Any additional technical limitations and advantages of existing data systems

As part of the mapping process, discuss challenges with current available data and whether there is missing information that would help meet families' needs. Some existing data might prove vital to the FTC team for its performance monitoring and evaluation efforts. Other data may be interesting but not necessary. To help the FTC team distinguish “need-to-have” data from “nice-to-have” data, stay focused on the FTC's mission, goals, and shared outcomes.





## Building Block #8:

### Continuous Data Feedback Loop

Routine sharing and discussion of data at multiple levels—across and within the FTC team—allow all partners to learn from each other, collaborate on shared priorities, solve problems, and improve practices. All stakeholders—executives, program directors, direct service providers, frontline workers, attorneys, data analysts, and participants—should participate. Obtaining the diverse perspectives of individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences strengthens the data's credibility and relevance. It also increases support for continued data capacity building.



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team has regular review mechanisms and feedback loops that:

- ▶ Make real-time data widely available to team members to use as a regular part of FTC program operations
- ▶ Promote consistent discussions about data rather than just during major issues or crises
- ▶ Encourage team members to ask questions and think critically about how to use data to improve their work
- ▶ Involve staff from all levels and across systems to help decide what data to collect, what the results mean, and how the FTC team can improve its performance
- ▶ Inform project leadership and governance (e.g., steering and executive oversight committees) as well as external stakeholders about ongoing results and their implications for informed decision making
- ▶ Share data with program participants and families while engaging them in the FTC's performance monitoring and learning



### TIPS FOR OBTAINING ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

- ▶ When having focused conversations about the FTC's performance measures, allow time to involve the team and stakeholders in these areas:
  - **Understanding.** Ask: Do you understand each measure? What do the data show? Could you explain it? Do you have any questions?
  - **Reaction.** Ask: What surprises you? What concerns you? Is this an important indicator for your work?
  - **Interpretation.** Ask: Is this the result we want? What are our strengths and opportunities to improve? Are there contextual factors or competing priorities affecting our efforts?
- **Decisions.** Ask: Is this performance measure meaningful for our program or jurisdiction? Is this something our FTC team can influence? Is this a higher or lower priority indicator, compared to other measures?
- ▶ Consider convening a Data Walk to share data with diverse stakeholders and provide a platform for collaboration. For more information, read the Urban Institute's report, [Data Walks: An Innovative Way to Share Data with Communities](#).



## Building Block #9:

### Data Use for Quality Improvement and Sustainability

Collecting data is one thing. Applying that data and making systems and funding changes is another matter. Still, it is critical to the more advanced stages of data capacity. FTC teams must actively and systematically use data to drive decision making, inform practice, strengthen operations, monitor fidelity, and achieve other continuous quality improvements, while also securing new or redirected resources to sustain better outcomes. The FTC's data should be relevant and actionable, enabling the team to make evidence-informed decisions in a timely manner to serve families more effectively and sustain best practices over time.

~~~~~

All PFR grantees used their data to improve participant referrals, engagement, and retention (see [Lesson 4](#)). In addition, Jefferson and Mecklenburg counties eliminated jail as a response because their data showed it did not result in better outcomes for parents.

~~~~~

"Pulling our baselines and looking at our baselines over a significant period of time and setting our target goals was really good for our team. It really made us go back to those basics about 'What are we trying to achieve?'"

—Grantee team member



## Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team:

- ▶ Makes decisions based on objective, factual data rather than subjective or anecdotal information, or "gut instinct"

- ▶ Routinely uses data to identify gaps in services and processes, understand what is working and not working and why, and drive timely program modifications

- ▶ Obtains, analyzes, and discusses data to answer key questions before making major decisions or changes
- ▶ Uses data to set priorities and enhance decision-making to resolve inequities in service access and outcomes
- ▶ Uses appropriate measures to evaluate and advance a family-centered approach and measure family well-being and success as defined by the team and key stakeholders
- ▶ Reassesses the data it collects (or does not collect) and the measures it tracks (or does not track) periodically (e.g., at least annually)
- ▶ Conducts periodic drop-off analyses to provide a dynamic view of where participants and their families disengage as they move through the systems (from identification to screening and assessment to referral to engagement to retention)
- ▶ Uses baseline program data (and other county or state contextual data, as applicable) to identify and set targets on agreed-upon priority measures,<sup>5</sup> as well as determine who is accessing services to assess disparities in outcomes
- ▶ Uses data dashboards (see Tip) or data snapshots<sup>6</sup> to monitor and communicate the FTC team's progress



### TIP: DEVELOP A DATA DASHBOARD

A data dashboard helps the FTC team gauge its progress in achieving a shared mission. A data dashboard typically:

- ▶ Focuses on a critical set of agreed-upon, longer-term outcomes, such as reduced length of stay for children in out-of-home care, sustained recovery for parents with substance use disorders, and improved family functioning and well-being
- ▶ Provides a bigger-picture view of families and systems
- ▶ Tracks performance against baselines and established targets
- ▶ Is reviewed by the FTC team, leadership, and key stakeholders regularly

To get started, discuss:

- ▶ Five to seven priority shared outcomes the FTC team would want to include on a dashboard
- ▶ Where those data will come from and who will be responsible for collecting them
- ▶ The right type of visual for your dashboard (e.g., bar charts, line charts, tables)
- ▶ Venues for dissemination and discussion (e.g., steering committee meetings, staff trainings)
- ▶ Goals for how the FTC team, stakeholders, and any other identified target audiences will use the data (e.g., what decisions the data will inform)
- ▶ Strategies for obtaining target audience feedback on the dashboard and any needed content or design modifications

<sup>5</sup> For more information on conducting a drop-off analysis, creating a baselines/targets worksheet, and related resources, contact Children and Family Futures ([contact@cffutures.org](mailto:contact@cffutures.org)).

<sup>6</sup> A data snapshot typically focuses on short-term process measures (e.g., numbers of FTC referrals, enrollments, and discharges) that provide an operational view of the FTC program. A data snapshot helps alert the core team to point-in-time issues that require prompt attention (e.g., a sudden drop in referrals). The core team uses and discusses the data snapshot regularly (e.g., monthly).





## Building Block #10:

### Data-Driven Messaging and Communication

A final critical building block of data capacity is effective, data-driven messaging that tells the story of families in the FTC program and conveys its effectiveness. This building block is essential to the FTC's sustainability and growth. Data-driven messaging can elevate the FTC's efforts and help team members, agency leadership, policymakers, funders, and other key stakeholders better understand the experiences and progress of the families served. It conveys the value of the program in a way that justifies sustained support and resources while inspiring broader systems change.



### Identifying Priority Action Areas

Assess the extent to which your FTC team:

- ▶ Confidently employs data to define community issues (e.g., prevalence of parental substance use disorders in the child welfare population, disparate outcomes for families of color) to key stakeholders and decision makers
- ▶ Develops and communicates compelling stories that resonate with target audiences
- ▶ Weaves together various data points (e.g., individual or program-level data, aggregate or population-level data, and qualitative data) to convey a picture of progress and change
- ▶ Uses quantitative and qualitative data to show why families need the FTC's services, and how the program strengthens families and improves short- and long-term outcomes
- ▶ Provides appropriate data (e.g., cost data) to keep agency leadership apprised of FTC

"Last year's elevator speech is not this year's. We have to keep updating that. What data are relevant to a parent attorney versus a Guardian ad Litem versus a county commissioner – they're not the same thing. Understanding the population and how to choose which data are most relevant to what audience [is key]."

—Grantee team member

program performance, make the case for sustainability, and institutionalize changes in agency and system practices

- ▶ Explains the implications of the data and outlines what policy, program, systems, and funding actions the target audience(s) should take

Remember that parents and families are a key audience for the FTC's results. PFR grantees emphasized the importance of being able to offer families relevant data to help them engage in the FTC program and understand the entire process. In one site, parent attorneys inform prospective participants upfront on three aspects of the FTC program: They are more likely to get their children back faster, close their case with their children at home, and less likely to return to foster care.



"Having data has allowed me to push back on the narrative of removing kids and terminating parental rights and say, 'We can build strong, healthy families. We can heal as a community, and I have the numbers to prove it.'"

–Grantee FTC leadership



## TIP: GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT EFFECTIVELY

FTC teams invest significant time and resources into building their capacity to collect and use data to continuously improve their programs, advance a comprehensive family-centered approach, and obtain new or redirect existing resources to sustain practice changes. Teams need to also make a deliberate effort to showcase their results. Consider these key steps when developing a communication plan:

- 1 **Identify the FTC team's desired communication goals** and expectations for how the target audience should use the data. This might include recruiting families, securing financial resources for sustainability, and effecting larger systems change that benefits all families.
- 2 **Know your audiences.** Their needs, interests, timelines, and current priorities, as well as how they plan to use the information, will shape how teams interpret and present data. Invest time upfront connecting with your target audiences to learn what results at the family, community, and systems levels they would find most relevant and actionable.
- 3 **Select the most appropriate method for communicating data.** Data results, on their own, do not tell target audiences what to do.

The team will need to tailor its messaging, with the underlying goal of spurring the target audience into action. They will also need to choose the most effective visual, audio, and written techniques for conveying complex information in a convincing manner.

- 4 **Think quality over quantity.** Smaller amounts of quality, actionable data are better than large amounts of bad data.
- 5 **Adopt the mantra: "No data without stories, no stories without data."** Combining quantitative and qualitative data (or stories) is important when discussing complex systems-change initiatives. Quantitative data describes what, when, how many, or how much. It can demonstrate the number (i.e., scale) and demographics of the families served. Qualitative information explains the "how" or "why" and shows how the FTC program affects families. Qualitative data gives voice to families, especially those historically marginalized, which can help change the mindsets of both systems and individuals. Collect a diverse array of stories that may appeal to all types of stakeholders.

These considerations are intended only as a starting point. There are also several other useful FTC resources provided at the end of this brief.



## Resources

Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. (n.d.). [Quality framework for integrated data systems](#). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Ahonen, P., Keene, K., & Geary, E. (2020). [Communication guide for TTCW grantees: What to consider when sharing program accomplishments](#). OPRE Report #2021-14. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). [Planning tool kit: Data governance for two-generation programs](#). Baltimore, MD: Author.

Atukpawu-Tipton, G., Higman, S., & Morrison, C. (2020). [Qualitative evaluation](#). OPRE Report #2020-136. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Cummings, K., Graham, J. C., Veele, S., & Ybarra, V. (2021). [Using data in DCYF to advance racial equity](#). Spokane, WA: Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families – Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability.

Edmonds, L., Minson, C., & Hariharan, A. (2021). [Centering racial equity in measurement and evaluation: Emerging lessons and guidance from human service nonprofits](#). Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Fruchterman, J. (2016, Summer). [Using data for action and impact](#). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

Hawn Nelson, A., Jenkins, D., Zanti, S., Katz, M., Burnett, T., Culhane, D., Barghaus, K., et al. (2020). [Introduction to data sharing and integration](#). Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy. University of Pennsylvania.

Hendey, L. Pettit, K.L.S., Cowan, J., & Gaddy, M. (2020). [Investing in data capacity for community change](#). Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

James Bell Associates. (2013). [Reporting and presenting evaluation findings](#). Arlington, VA: Author.

Rohacek, M. (2017). [Research and evaluation capacity: Self-assessment tool and discussion guide for CCDF lead agencies](#). OPRE Report #2017-63. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Saltmarshe, E. (2018). [Using story to change systems](#). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

Shaw, S.H., Lin, V., & Maxwell, K. L. (2018). [Guidelines for developing data sharing agreements to use state administrative data for early care and education research](#). OPRE Research Brief #2018-67. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Social Solutions. (2017). *Combining stories and data to better prove your impact: A nonprofit fundraising guide*. Austin, TX: Author.

Tomasko, L., Theodos, B., Eldridge, M., & Park, J. (2021). *Strategies for advancing impact investing through public policy: A guide for advocates and field leaders*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Urban Institute. (n.d.). *Elevate Data for Equity Initiative*. Washington, DC: Author.

Urban Institute & The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2021, May 27). *Using evidence for impact: Data, research, and evaluation* [Webinar].

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2018). *Data sharing: Courts and child welfare*. Washington, DC: Author.

Wiseman, J. (2020). *Silo busting: The challenges and success factors for sharing intergovernmental data*. Washington, DC: IBM Center for the Business of Government.





## Children and Family Futures

Strengthening Partnerships, Improving Family Outcomes

Children and Family Futures (CFF) is a national nonprofit organization based in Lake Forest, California that focuses on the intersections among child welfare, mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and court systems. CFF has over two decades of experience in practice, policy, and evaluation arenas to support tribes, states, regions, and communities in their efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. We believe parents with mental health and substance use disorders should maintain hope of achieving recovery and family stability so they can care for their children. While no single system or agency working by itself can help parents achieve that goal, we recognize that recovery happens within the context of the family and that professionals from a variety of agencies and systems must work together to meet the needs of families.

Children and Family Futures provides a full range of consulting, technical assistance, strategic planning, and evaluation services for substance use disorder treatment, child welfare, courts, and the communities they serve. To learn more about CFF, visit [www.cffutures.org](http://www.cffutures.org).

**The mission of Children and Family Futures is to prevent child abuse and neglect while improving safety, permanency, well-being, and recovery outcomes with equity for all children, parents, and families affected by trauma, substance use, and mental disorders.**



The mission of the [Doris Duke Charitable Foundation](http://www.dorisduke.org) is to improve the quality of people's lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation,

child well-being, and medical research, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke's properties. The mission of the foundation's Child Well-being Program is to promote children's healthy development and protect them from abuse and neglect. To that end, DDCF takes a funding approach that centers on intergenerational work that bolsters culturally, geographically, and locally relevant programs with and for communities to foster the long-term well-being of families. To learn more, visit [www.ddcf.org](http://www.ddcf.org).

THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

Based in Charlotte and established in 1924 by industrialist and philanthropist James B. Duke, [The Duke Endowment](http://www.dukeendowment.org) is a private foundation that strengthens communities in North Carolina and South Carolina by nurturing children, promoting health, educating minds, and enriching spirits. Since its founding, The Duke Endowment has distributed more than \$4 billion in grants. The Endowment shares a name with Duke University and Duke Energy, but all are separate organizations. To learn more about the Endowment, visit [www.dukeendowment.org](http://www.dukeendowment.org).