



Definitional Field Guide for AFCARS Elements Used in the CFSR Permanency Measures

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The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) developed and compiled the information for this Guide drawing from previous work published by its National Working Group to Improve Child Welfare Data (NWG). The NWG consists of all state public child welfare agencies and strives to improve the quality of their data to support child welfare policy.

The NWG guidance presented in this document draws from a multi-year effort by the NWG to promote consistency in child welfare data by providing and clarifying common definitions. A majority of state child welfare agencies participated in meetings to discuss the definitions, and all had the opportunity to provide feedback. In addition, several agency representatives and other child welfare professionals contributed significant time and effort to focused definitional workgroups.

The CFRC and the CWLA acknowledge all those who contributed to developing the NWG definitions. In particular, we thank the specific individuals who reviewed and commented on this Guide or provided other information for this project. They are:

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We also acknowledge the direction provided to states over the years by the Children's Bureau and the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT). Much of their work is referenced in the Guide. While not sanctioned by these agencies, the NWG definitions and guidance are based on their work.

Introduction

This Guide is intended to promote consistency in the data used to produce specific child welfare outcome measures as described in Chapter 1, *Consistency of Performance Measurement*. This Guide was sponsored by the Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) and compiled by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) based on previous work by the National Working Group to Improve Child Welfare Data (NWG).

The CFRC is an independent research organization created at the School of Social Work by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. It is dedicated to supporting and conducting research that contributes to keeping children safe, assuring permanent homes for children, and supporting child and family well-being. As one of its projects, the CFRC is committed to improving data submitted to the federal government through AFCARS and NCANDS data submissions. By sponsoring this Guide, the CFRC hopes to improve the reliability of these measures and, ultimately, improve data submissions to the federal government, and used by courts and child welfare systems to track outcomes for children.

The NWG is a state-driven effort to improve the quality and understanding of child welfare data. Facilitated by the non-profit CWLA, it consists of representatives from 51 state child welfare agencies. Working with these state representatives, the NWG developed common definitions and guidance related to reporting state data used in the outcome measures. NWG guidance represents a general consensus of state child welfare agencies, with input from other child welfare professionals. NWG guidance is developed in the context of existing federal policy and definitions. It aims to provide supplementary definitions and interpretations that fit within the federal guidance.

1. Consistency in Performance Measurement

1.1. *The CFSR Permanency Measures*

Using outcome measures to assess performance helps states identify program areas and practices that lead to successful outcomes for children as well as those areas needing improvement. By focusing a state's attention on these areas, outcome analysis can inform policy and practice changes at all levels of a state's child welfare agency, from detailed field work practices to legislative or policy reform. Additionally, when states are able to standardize the data used to calculate outcome measures, the results can be used to compare the effectiveness of programs across states and to track national trends.

To better serve all of these uses, the Children's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed data-based outcome measures to assess the performance of state child welfare agencies as part of its Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). For the second round of the CFSR, fifteen of these measures assess performance in achieving permanency for children in foster care and are known collectively as the permanency measures. These measures are calculated from data reported by individual states to the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS). These fifteen measures are defined in Chapter 4, *CFSR Permanency Measures*, later in this document.

The utility of these permanency measures depends on two key factors: the design of the system that produces the AFCARS report from state data and the consistency and correctness of the data from which the AFCARS reports are produced. Furthermore, the measures are used in both internal and external contexts, and for maximum utility, should be consistent within each context. For example, if the data collection practices and AFCARS reporting system design for a particular state are complete and internally consistent, then the resulting measures will be valuable indicators of that state's performance, independent of the corresponding measures reported by other states. However, internal consistency does not ensure that particular states' measures can be meaningfully compared to those of other states. For that, each state's data collection practices must result in data that is defined, collected, and reported consistently with that of other states.

1.2. *A Guide to Improve Consistency in AFCARS Data*

1.2.1. **Goal of This Guide**

The overall goal of this Guide is to support the production of accurate permanency measures that are both internally consistent and, given the wide variation in state policies and practices, as comparable as possible with other states' measures. To meet this goal, the Guide compiles a set of common definitions that may be used to inform development in three broad areas: information systems, field guidance, and policy and procedure.

The Guide is designed primarily to address the first of these areas, information systems, and specifically targets the process of translating (or mapping) data from a state's information system to meet the federal requirements for data reported to AFCARS. By considering the definitions in this Guide, states may also identify refinements to their system design for the collection, validation or storage of data that will improve consistency.

Secondarily, this Guide may also inform revisions to state policies or field guidance, such as training curriculum, that would improve the completeness and consistency of data collected for the permanency measures.

We hope that implementing the information in this Guide will help states improve the quality and consistency of their reported AFCARS data and, thus, of the outcome measures based on it.

1.2.2. Intended Audience

In light of its primary goal, the Guide is aimed at staff in child welfare agencies who define and program AFCARS foster care reports. However, the information it contains may be useful to others whose work influences the definition, collection, and reporting of the AFCARS data used in the permanency measures. Examples of staff who may use the Guide include:

- Business analysts who define (map) agency data to the AFCARS file
- Information technology staff who program the AFCARS report
- Business and system analysts who define requirements for or changes to a state's information system design
- Staff who develop training on data collection and entry for front-line workers
- Policy writers

1.2.3. Overview of Contents

The Guide summarizes federal and NWG guidance on reporting data for the nine AFCARS elements used in the permanency measures for which NWG guidance is available. Each chapter is briefly described below:

Consistency in Performance Measurement – describes the motivation for and content of the Guide

Where to Use This Guide – illustrates three uses for this Guide within the context of a state child welfare agency

How to Use This Guide – gives tips for navigating the information

CFSR Permanency Measures – describes the measures and lists the AFCARS elements used in each measure

Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element – compiles federal and NWG guidance for reporting nine of the AFCARS data elements used in the measures

Appendix A – provides definitions for additional terms used in the guidance

Appendix B – lists sources for additional information on the CFSR and AFCARS

1.3. Other Essentials for Mapping AFCARS Data

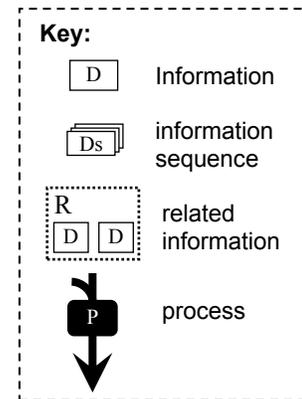
This Guide attempts to clarify the definitional requirements for selected AFCARS elements. The NWG definitions and guidance presented in this Guide build on federal definitions and guidance for AFCARS reporting and the CFSR measures, but the NWG's work is not authorized or approved by the Children's Bureau. The National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRC-CWDT) provides technical assistance to states on behalf of the Children's Bureau. **State child welfare agencies should continue to contact the Children's Bureau and the NRC-CWDT with questions about how to report their state's data to AFCARS.**

A successful AFCARS mapping also requires the participation of state agency staff who have a detailed knowledge of the state's policies, business practices, and information system design, and of analysts who can translate the generic federal and NWG guidance into the specific processes, language, fields and values used in a particular state.

2. Where to Use This Guide

To better understand the role of this Guide in developing information systems, field guidance and policies and procedures it is helpful to view the Guide in the context of the overall flow of information through a child welfare agency. The series of figures in this section builds this context. Together, they show the basic relationships between data definition and collection, the production of AFCARS files and CFSR measures, and the use of these measures for program improvement.

In these figures, hollow rectangles represent information, either observable data about child welfare practices or electronic data drawn from those practices. Filled rectangles with rounded corners represent processes that transform information from one form to another. Each process symbol includes an arrow or arrows that show the flow of information from input data to an output. Arrow heads indicate the direction information moves as it is processed. These process symbols can represent either manual or automated activities. A stack of hollow rectangles represents a sequence of information, meaning that more than one of the specified data input or output is used or produced by the related process. The stack symbol does not specify any particular number of inputs or outputs. A hollow, dotted rectangle enclosing other elements of the diagram represents the grouping of related information and processes into a larger concept.



Of course, real-life information flows are multi-directional with multiple feedback loops and include more components than a few diagrams can represent. The following figures show only selected components that are most relevant to using this Guide.

Figure 1 shows the general flow of a single state’s child welfare information through the activities of producing a single, semi-annual AFCARS report for that state. This series of steps is followed at least twice a year to produce the state’s federal AFCARS submission; it may be executed more frequently to support state-internal management reporting. The idea of a state information system is explicitly represented as a dotted rectangle enclosing the process for collecting child welfare data, the storage system for that data, and the process for generating semi-annual AFCARS reports.

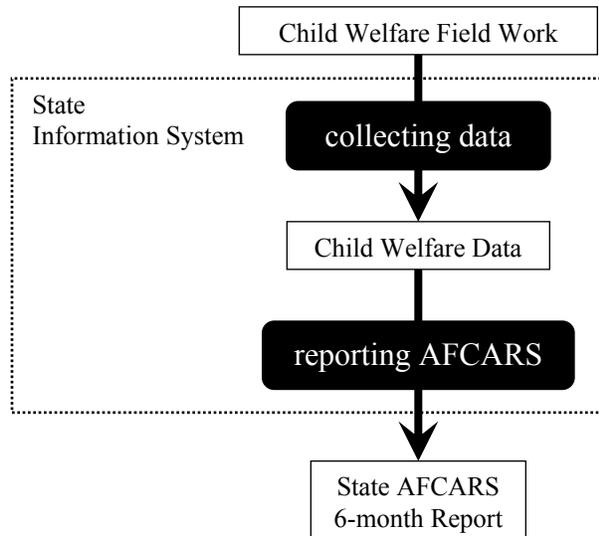


Figure 1: State information system includes collecting data and reporting AFCARS.

Figure 2 gives a simple representation of the Children’s Bureau’s process for calculating CFSR measures for a particular state from a sequence of that state’s semi-annual AFCARS reports. This highlights the significance of a state’s semi-annual AFCARS report as the key input for calculating the permanency measures. Thus this Field Guide’s primary goal of helping states improve the accuracy and consistency of their permanency measure calculations is targeted at helping to improve individual state’s AFCARS reporting.

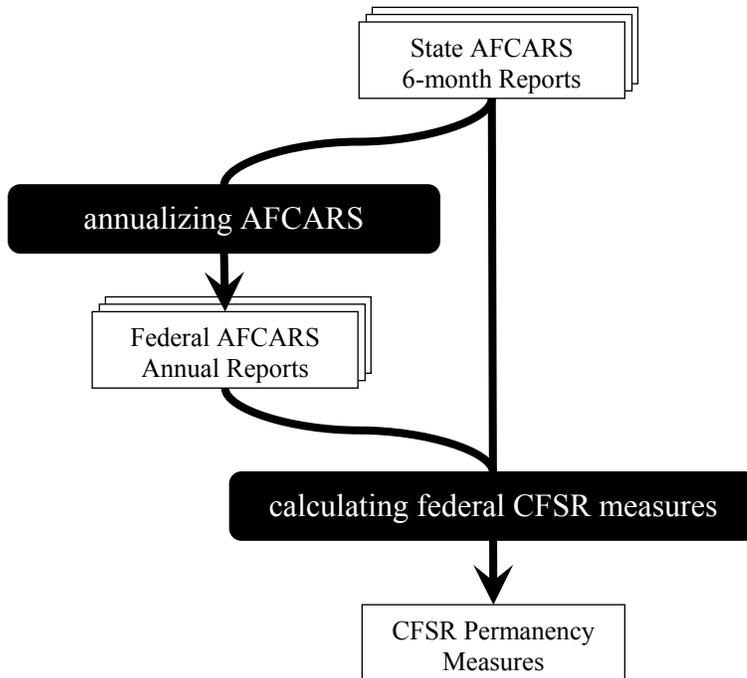


Figure 2: Calculating permanency measures from a sequence of AFCARS reports.

Figure 3 sets the overall context for information system development and shows where this Guide can be used in developing the components of a system that impact AFCARS data. Refining these components is expected to be the primary use for this Guide. *Note that this diagram also shows that there are AFCARS report elements that this Guide does not address.*

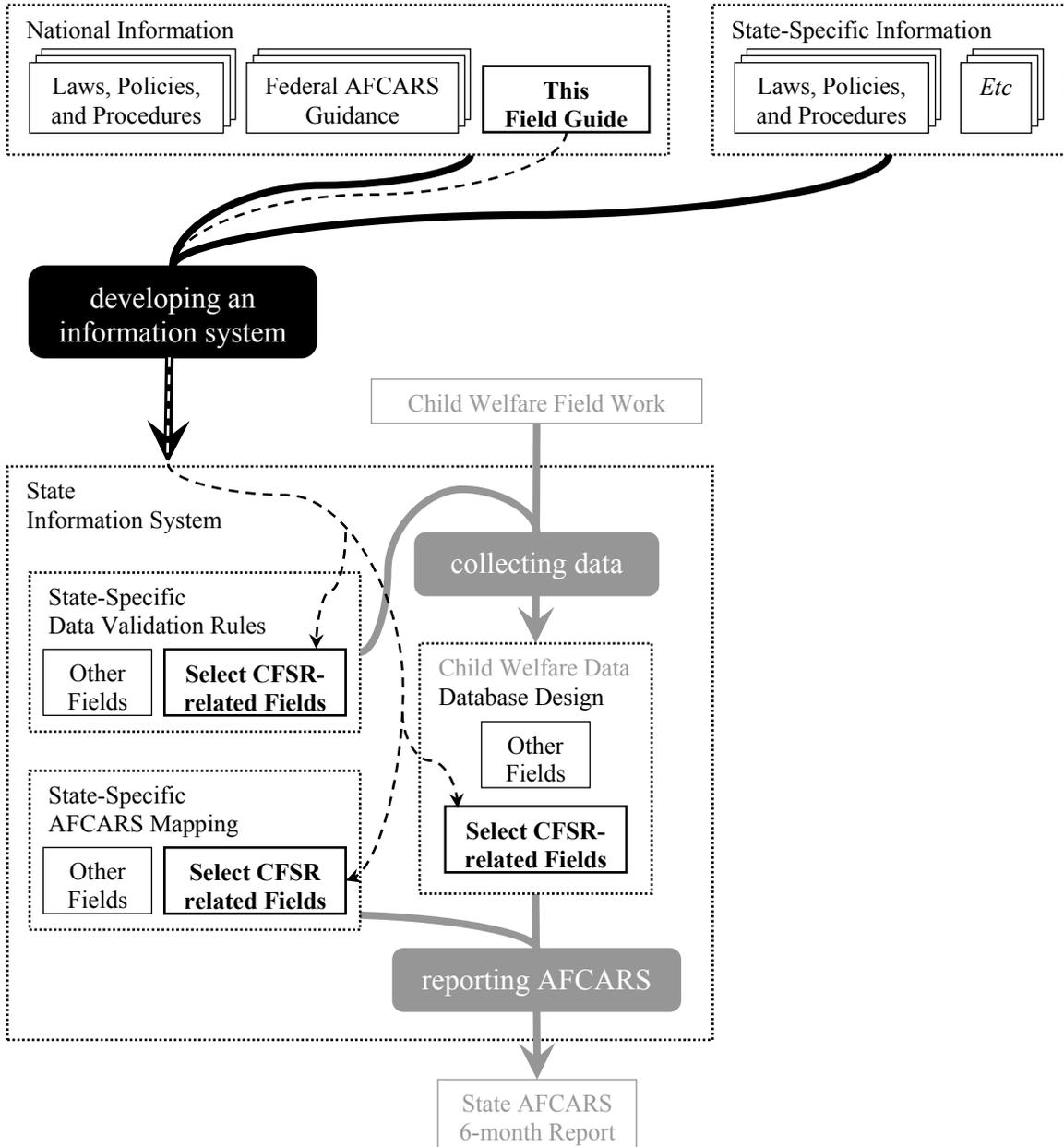


Figure 3: Specific uses of this Field Guide in developing a state information system.

Figure 4 illustrates one secondary use of this Guide, to help improve the quality of child welfare data collected in state information systems. The most important factor determining data quality is the thoroughness and consistency of the data entered by field staff as they record the results of their work. In turn the most important influence on the quality of their data entry is the training and guidance these staff receive. The two types of information shown inside the State-Specific Child Welfare Guidance system are just examples of the many types of information a state can develop to improve data quality and consistency.

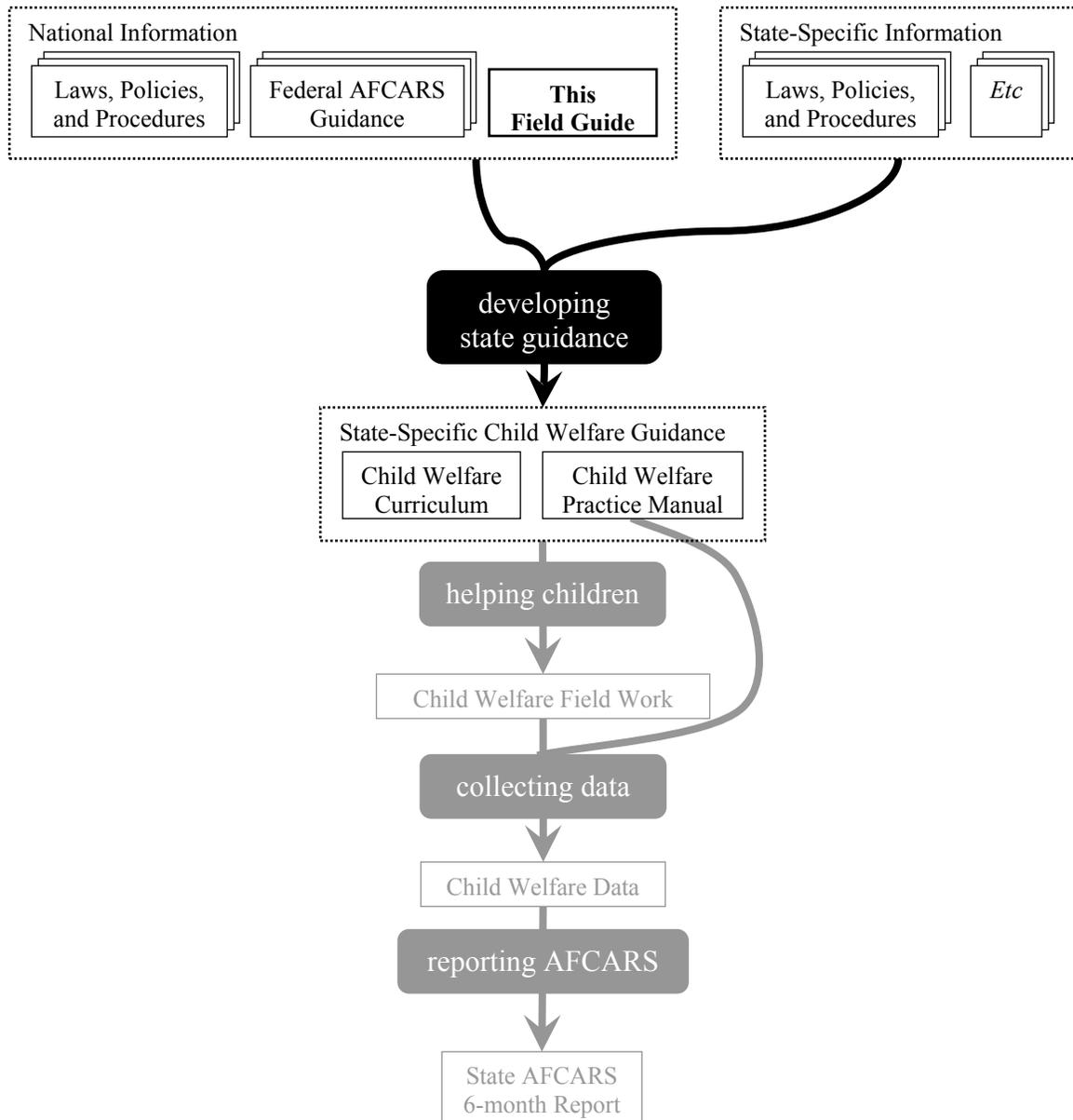


Figure 4: Developing state-specific child welfare practice guidance.

Figure 5 shows that this Guide can also help states with developing or improving policy and procedure.

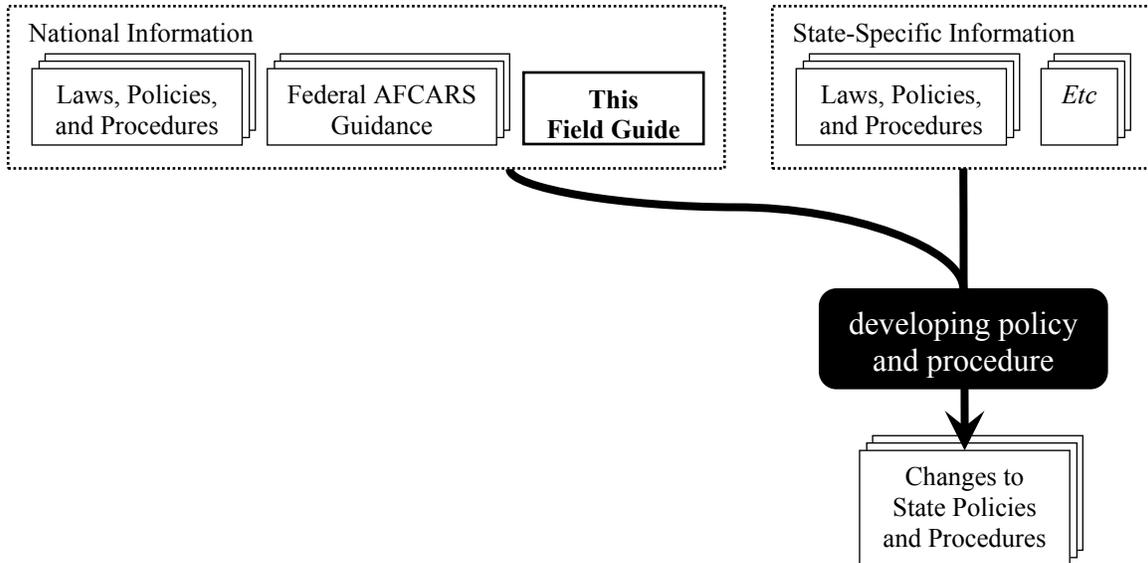


Figure 5: Improving state policy and procedure.

2.1. Placing this Guide in Context

While it is easy to think of a state’s AFCARS reports as the starting point for producing CFSR permanency measures, the information flow really begins much earlier. Individual state laws, policies and procedures impact how closely an agency’s data fits into federal definitions and guidance. Training programs impact the consistency with which front-line workers collect and enter data. The design of a state’s information system also impacts the ability of a state to produce nationally comparable AFCARS reports.

Figure 6 summarizes how this Field Guide, related information, and three distinct development processes lead to the development of a state information system, state child welfare practice guidance, and changes to state policy and procedure. Together, these three development processes determine the quality and comparability of a state’s CFSR outcome measures by creating and improving the three “systems”: state policy and procedure; state child welfare practice guidance; and the state’s information system.

Figure 7 summarizes how the resulting three systems are used together to produce outcome measures that are useful for the individual state and comparable with other states’ outcome measures.

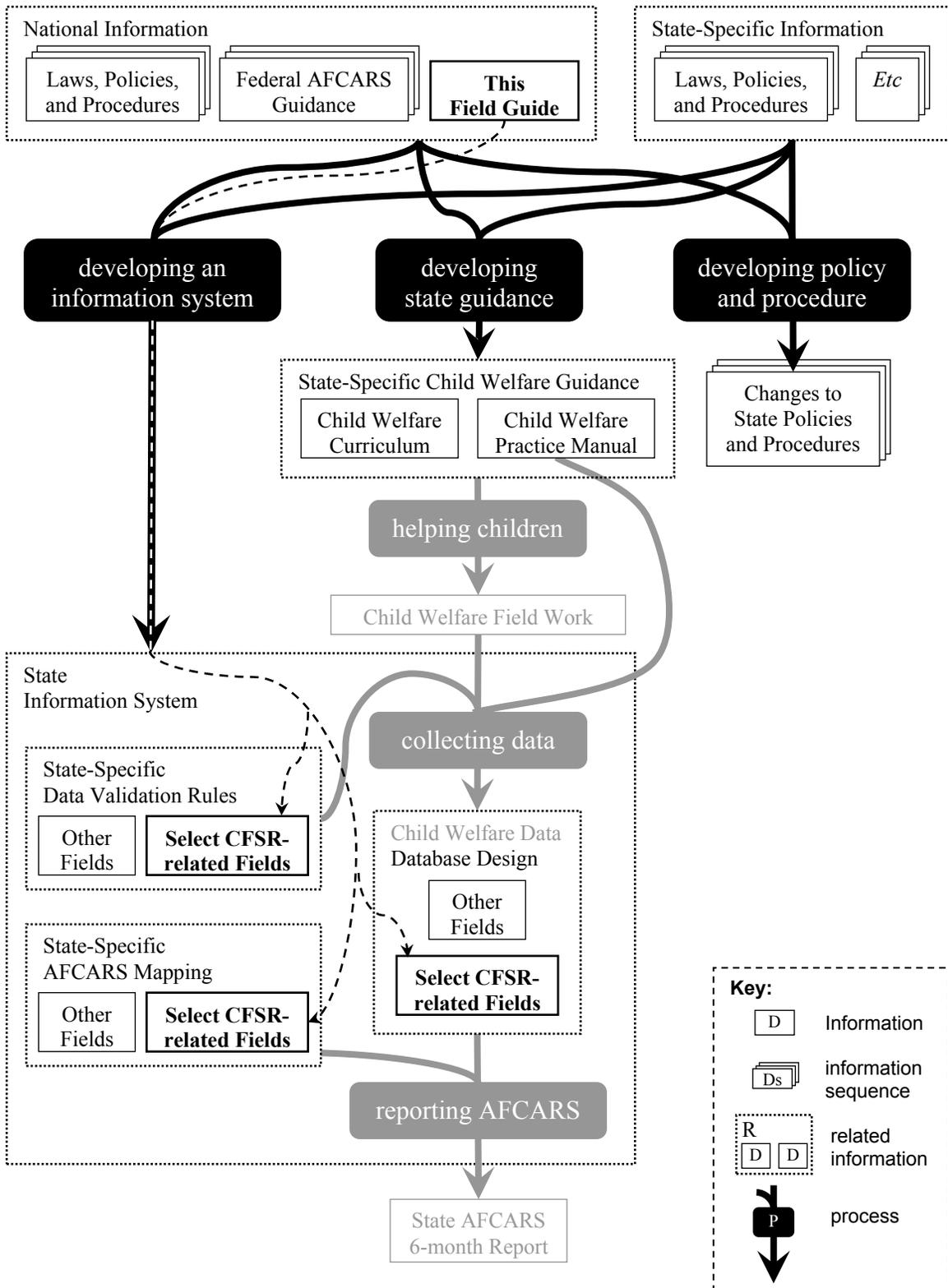


Figure 6: Summary of specific uses of this Field Guide.

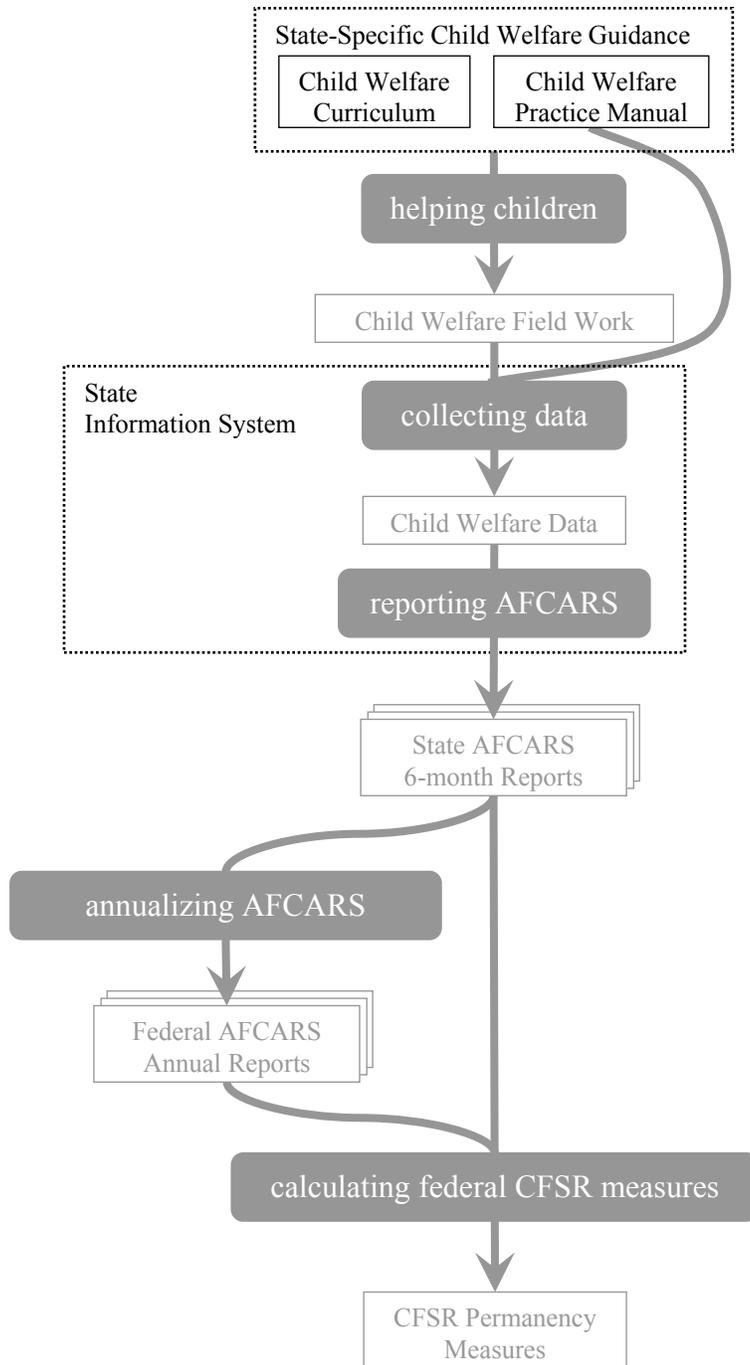


Figure 7: Role of state systems in producing CFSR permanency measures.

Ultimately, each state’s outcome measures can be used to evaluate the success of its child welfare programs and, if needed, to inform changes to the policies and procedures driving those programs that improve outcomes. Figure 8 diagrams the role of CFSR permanency measures in this overall feedback cycle.

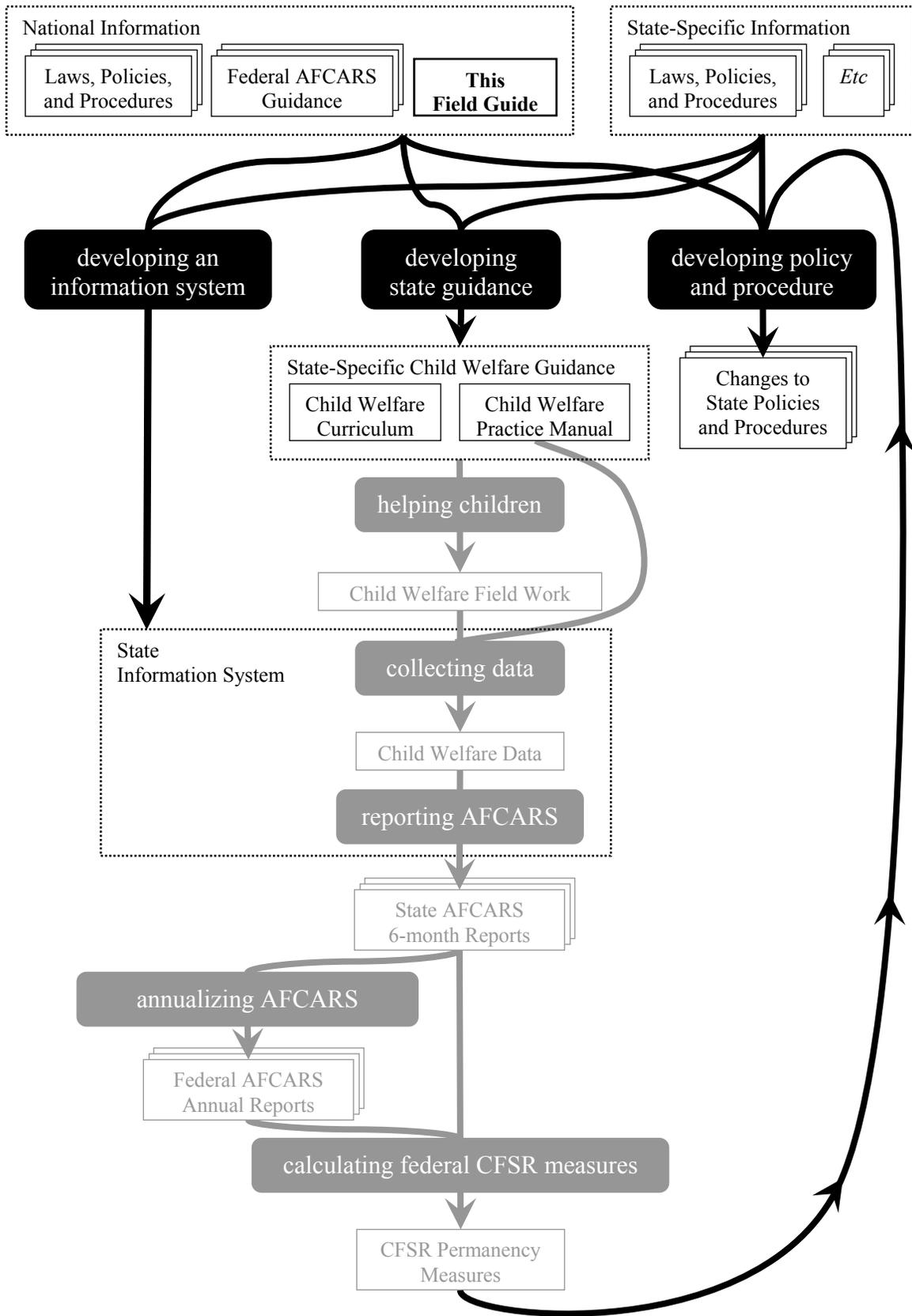


Figure 8: The role of CFSR permanency measures in program improvement.

3. How to Use This Guide

As noted in the Introduction, descriptions of the outcome measures addressed by this Guide are found in Chapter 4, *CFSR Permanency Measures*. That chapter includes a table listing the AFCARS elements used to calculate each measure.

Information on reporting the nine AFCARS elements used in these measures for which NWG guidance is available is found in Chapter 5, *Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element*. That chapter divides the AFCARS elements into three topics, removal, placement, and discharge. Each topic begins with definitions and guidance related to the overall topic and continues with specific guidance for each element in that topic. The guidance for each element includes a table of the measures in which it is used.

3.1. Reporting AFCARS Elements

Information in this Guide may be used to inform AFCARS reporting without any need to reference information on the CFSR measures.

For guidance on reporting a specific element to AFCARS:

1. Turn to Chapter 5, *Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element*.
2. Read the general information at the beginning of this chapter and identify which topic the element is in.
3. Read the general information for that topic
4. Read the specific information for the element
5. Combine this information with knowledge of state specific policies, practices and information systems to identify the correct data to report.

3.2. Relating AFCARS Elements and CFSR Measures

Relationships between the AFCARS elements and the measures may be identified from two directions, from AFCARS element to relevant CFSR measures or from CFSR measure to relevant AFCARS elements.

To find out which measures will be impacted by the data reported for that element:

1. Turn to the specific information for that element in Chapter 5, *Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element*.
2. See the table, *Dependent CFSR Measures*, at the beginning of the information for the element to identify the related measures
3. Optionally, turn to Chapter 4, *CFSR Permanency Measures*, and read the definitions for these measures.

Perhaps you've already calculated a measure and want to explore data issues that may have impacted the result. In this case:

1. Turn to Chapter 4, *CFSR Permanency Measures*.
2. From the Quick Reference Table at the end of this chapter, identify the non-italicized elements that are used to calculate the measure.
3. Turn to Chapter 5, *Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element*.
4. On the first page, find which topic each element is in.
5. For each element, complete the following steps:
 - a. Read the general information for its topic
 - b. Read the specific information for the element
 - c. Combine this information with knowledge of state specific policies, practices and information systems to identify changes that may be needed to improve the data in the measures.

As you use the Guide, refer to Appendix A for definitions of additional terms used in the guidance. For sources of additional information on the CFSR and AFCARS, refer to Appendix B.

4. CFSR Permanency Measures

Round two of the federal CFSR includes 15 permanency measures that are calculated from AFCARS data. These measures help evaluate four areas of performance: timeliness and permanency of reunification; timeliness of adoptions; achieving permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time; and placement stability. The measures are listed below, followed by a table associating each measure with the AFCARS elements used in its calculation. The text of the measures is taken from the Corrected Federal Register Announcement (US DHHS, n.d., b) and the descriptive titles are from the 2006 State Data Profile Toolkit (NRC-CWDT, 2006).

For directions and guidance on calculating these measures and information on their use in the CFSR, readers should refer to documentation provided by the Children's Bureau and the NRC-CWDT. See Appendix B.

*Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification**

- **C1.1 Exits to reunification in less than 12 months:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the target 12-month period, and who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percent was reunified in less than 12 months from the date of latest removal from home? (This measure includes the trial home visit adjustment**.)
- **C1.2 Exits to reunification, median stay:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-month target period, and who had been in care for 8 days or longer, what was the median length of stay in months from the date of the latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification? (This measure includes the trial home visit adjustment.**)
- **C1.3 Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months:** Of all children who entered foster care for the first time in the 6-month period just prior to the target 12-month period, and who remained in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percent was discharged from foster care to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of latest removal from home? (This measure includes the trial home visit adjustment**.)
- **??C1.4??Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the target 12-month period, what percent re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge?

*For these measures a child is considered reunified if he or she has a reason for discharge of either reunification with parents or primary caretakers or living with other relatives.

**Each of the three timeliness-of-reunification measures includes a 'trial home visit adjustment'. This adjustment applies to children who were discharged with a reason of either reunification with parents or primary caretakers or living with other relatives and who, at the time of discharge, were reported with a current placement setting of trial home visit and had been in that setting for more than 30 days. For these children, length

of stay in foster care is calculated as the number of days from the date of latest removal to the date of placement in the trial home visit, plus 30 days.

Timeliness of Adoptions

- **C2.1 Exits to adoption in less than 24 months:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the 12-month target period, what percent were discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home?
- **C2.2 Exits to adoption, median length of stay:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption during the 12-month target period, what was the median length of stay in foster care in months from the date of the latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption?
- **C2.3 Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year:** Of all children in foster care on the first day of the 12-month target period who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, what percent were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption by the last day of the 12-month target period?

The denominator for this measure excludes children who, by the last day of the 12-month target period, are discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of reunification with parents or primary caretaker(s), living with other relatives, or guardianship.

- **C2.4 Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months*:** Of all children in foster care on the first day of the 12-month target period who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer, and who were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percent became legally free for adoption during the first 6-months of the 12-month target period?

The denominator for this measure excludes any child who did not become legally free during the first 6 months of the target year, but who, during that 6-month period, is discharged from foster care with a discharge reason of reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with other relatives or guardianship.

- **C2.5 Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months*:** Of all children who became legally free for adoption during the 12 months prior to the target 12-month period, what percent were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months from the date of becoming legally free?

*A child is considered legally free for adoption if there is a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father. In this case, the latest parental rights termination date is the date the child became legally free. Note that within AFCARS, if a parent is deceased, the date of death is reported as the parental rights termination date.

Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time

- **C3.1 Exits to permanency prior to 18th birthday for children in care for 24 + months:** Of all children who were in foster care for 24 [continuous] months or longer on the first day of the 12-month target period, what percent were discharged to a permanent home by the last day of the 12-month period and prior to their 18th birthday?*
- **C3.2 Exits to permanency for children with TPR:** Of all children who were discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period, and who were legally free for adoption (i.e., there is a parental rights termination date for both parents) at the time of discharge, what percent was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday?*
- **C3.3 Children Emancipated Who Were in Foster Care for 3 Years or More:** Of all children who either (1) were, prior to age 18, discharged from foster care during the 12-month target period with a discharge reason of emancipation, or (2) reached their 18th birthday while in foster care but had not yet been discharged from foster care, what percent were in foster care for 3 years or longer?

*A child is considered as discharged to a permanent home if the discharge reason reported to AFCARS is reunification with parents or primary caretakers, living with other relatives, adoption, or guardianship.

Placement Stability

- **C4.1 Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months:** Of all children who were served in foster care during the 12-month target period, and who were in foster care [during the most recent foster care episode] for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?
- **C4.2 Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months:** Of all children who were served in foster care during the 12-month target period, and who were in foster care [during the most recent foster care episode] for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?
- **C4.3 Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months:** Of all children who were served in foster care during the 12-month target period, and who were in foster care [during the most recent foster care episode] for at least 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings?

4.1. Quick Reference Table: CFSR Permanency Measures to AFCARS Elements

This table lists the AFCARS elements used to calculate each measure. The next chapter of this Guide focuses on the nine elements for which the NWG has produced related guidance. To identify NWG guidance on reporting data for a particular measure, find the measure in the table below. Note the AFCARS elements used in its calculation and read the guidance for each non-italicized element in Chapter 5, *Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element*. Elements in italics have not been addressed by the NWG and are not included in this Guide. For all elements, also refer to official direction from the Children’s Bureau and the NRC-CWDT. (See Appendix B.)

A few AFCARS fields used in generating the CFSR measures are not listed separately in this table. They include identification codes such as State (#1), Local Agency FIPS Code (#3), and Record Number (#4). Child’s Date of Birth (#6) is used in extracting the data files used for the measures, in addition to the specific measures where it’s noted.

CFSR Permanency Measures to AFCARS Elements

Topic/Measure	AFCARS Elements
Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exits to reunification in less than 12 months • Exits to reunification, median stay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Current Placement Setting (#41) - Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting (#23) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Number of Removals from Home to Date (#19) - Date of First Removal from Home (#18) - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Current Placement Setting (#41) - Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting (#23) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode (#20)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Number of Removals from Home to Date (#19) - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode (#20) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - Reason for Discharge (#58)

Topic/Measure	AFCARS Elements
Timeliness of Adoptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exits to adoption in less than 24 months • Exits to adoption, median length of stay • Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Mother</i> (#47) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Father</i> (#48)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Mother</i> (#47) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Father</i> (#48)
Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exits to permanency prior to 18th birthday for children in care 24+ months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - <i>Child's Date of Birth</i> (#6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exits to permanency for children with TPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - <i>Child's Date of Birth</i> (#6) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Mother</i> (#47) - <i>Parental Rights Termination: Father</i> (#48)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Number of Removals from Home to Date (#19) - Date of First Removal from Home (#18) - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Reason for Discharge (#58) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56) - Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode (#20) - <i>Child's Date of Birth</i> (#6)
Placement Stability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months • Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months • Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21) - Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting (#23) - Number of Previous Placement Settings During this Removal Episode (#24) - Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56)

5. Definitions and Guidance by AFCARS Element

CWLA's NWG has developed guidance related to nine of the AFCARS elements used to calculate the outcome measures listed in Chapter 4, *CFSR Permanency Measures*. For each of these elements, this chapter summarizes federal and NWG definitions and NWG guidance.

The elements are grouped by three major topics, removal, placement, and discharge, as shown below.

Removal

Total Number of Removals from Home to Date (#19)
Date of First Removal from Home (#18)
Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21)

Placement

Current Placement Setting (#41)
Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting (#23)
Number of Previous Placements Settings During this Removal Episode (#24)

Discharge

Reason for Discharge (#58)
Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56)
Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode (#20)

Each topic begins with definitions and guidance related to the overall topic and continues with specific guidance for each element in that topic. The specific information includes:

- a list of measures in which the element is used
- the federal definition of the element and any clarifying guidance
- any related NWG definitions and guidance
- an NWG statement of how to report the element
- for most elements, a table summarizing some aspect of the guidance

For information on reporting a specific element, read both the general information for its topic and the specific information for the element.

Federal definitions and clarifications presented in this chapter are from the Child Welfare Policy Manual (CWPM) (US DHHS, n.d., a) and the AFCARS User's Guide beginning on Tab 4 of the AFCARS Toolkit (NRC-CWDT, 2003).

Readers preparing AFCARS files should also refer to the AFCARS Toolkit (NRC-CWDT, 2003) and resources on the Children's Bureau website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/index.htm#afcars> for links to information on the missing, out-of-range, or internal consistency checks that apply to each element.

NWG guidance is developed in the context of existing federal policy and definitions. It aims to provide supplementary definitions and interpretations that fit within the federal guidance. The NWG definitions and guidance presented in this Guide are not authorized, approved or required by the Children's Bureau. **State child welfare agencies should continue to contact the Children's Bureau and the NRC-CWDT with questions about how to report their state's data to AFCARS.**

5.1. Removal

Federal Definition and Clarification

The CWPM provides the following definition of removal:

“A Removal is either the physical act of a child being taken from his or her normal place of residence, by court order or a voluntary placement agreement and placed in a substitute care setting, or the removal of custody from the parent or relative guardian pursuant to a court order or voluntary placement agreement which permits the child to remain in a substitute care setting....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 4)

The following bullets paraphrase related clarification and then quote the federal source.

- Children who are first placed in a juvenile justice setting are not reported to AFCARS as a removal until (unless) a court order giving the IV-E/IV-B agency placement and care authority is granted.

“Children who are removed from their home and initially placed in a juvenile justice facility are not to be included in AFCARS reporting.

For children already in a juvenile justice facility with respect to whom a subsequent court order is signed giving placement, care or supervision to the title IV-E/IV-B agency, the date of the court order will be used as the date of removal from the home....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

- Children who run away prior to placement in the first foster care setting are considered part of the AFCARS population.

“...The State should report to AFCARS children who are under the placement and care responsibility of the title IV-E agency but who ran away prior to the child’s placement in a foster care setting....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 24)

- Children in a trial home visit that has lasted more than six months with no end date specified who are placed back into a substitute care setting are considered removals.

“The return [from a trial home visit which extends beyond six months and where the child is considered discharged] to a group home or any other substitute care setting will represent a removal and the removal is the start of a new episode.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 1)

NWG Guidance

The following NWG guidance on removal is adapted from the NWG publication, *Permanency of Reunification: Definitions for Foster Care Entry and Re-entry* (CWLA, January 2007). See this publication for a more complete discussion of definitions and guidance on removal. NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children's Bureau.

The NWG identified six scenarios that define a removal, or entry into foster care, for AFCARS purposes. These are detailed later in this section in the tables accompanying each removal element to which they apply.

In defining these scenarios, the NWG applied the following additional information:

- For AFCARS purposes, a child who has been placed outside his or her own home for at least 24 hours is considered to be in foster care and reportable to AFCARS. This 24-hour rule applies to the total time the child is placed in a substitute care setting or in initial runaway status while under the authority of the agency, not to the length of an individual placement. A child who is placed outside his or her home for less than 24 hours is not considered to have been removed from the home.
- A child whose first placement is detention, a camp, or hospitalization for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis, or for whom the agency gains authority while the child is in one of those settings is not considered an entry to foster care (removal from home) until the agency moves the child into another setting such as foster home, group home, residential treatment, etc. Note that this rule does not apply to children whose first setting is hospitalization for chronic, long-term psychiatric treatment, who are considered entries when they are placed in that setting or when the agency gains authority while the child is in that setting.
- Children for whom an agency has court-ordered supervision but not the authority for physical placement are not considered to be removed from the home. Such a child is only reported as removed if and when the agency receives placement authority. Once placement authority ends the child is considered discharged even if supervision continues. Any subsequent placement constitutes a new removal from home.

Also see Appendix A for definitions of the following terms:

Episode [removal episode or foster care episode]

Placement and care authority

Substitute care setting

Supervision

Temporary protective custody

Trial home visit

Voluntary placement

Recording Removal in Information Systems

In states' information systems, fields labeled as a removal date or reported as a removal date for non-AFCARS purposes may not match the guidance for removal dates given in this Guide. In particular, the definition of removal used to determine eligibility under Title IV-E differs from the AFCARS guidance on removal reflected in the NWG's work. While the Title IV-E and AFCARS removal dates are usually the same, they may differ if the child's initial placement is a hospital, camp, or detention. Generally, related IV-E findings will be made from the date the agency removes the child regardless of the child's initial placement. However, for AFCARS, a child whose initial setting is a hospital, camp, or detention is not considered to be removed until he or she is placed in another substitute care setting.

The definitions in this Guide apply to the date that is extracted for reporting removal information to AFCARS, regardless of how it is represented in a state's system or when title IV-E related findings, such as "contrary to the child's welfare" and "reasonable efforts to prevent removal" are made by the court. State information systems need to be able to document and report dates and legal information related to both AFCARS and IV-E.

5.1.1. Total Number of Removals from Home to Date

AFCARS Foster Care Element: #19

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months
Achieving Permanency	Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more

Federal Definition

“The number of times the child was removed from home, including the current removal.”
(NRC-CWDT, 2003)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

- If a child comes into care through temporary protective custody or a voluntary placement agreement, and that ends but the child remains in care pursuant to a court order, the child is not discharged and just one removal episode is counted.
- For children under the child welfare agency’s court-ordered supervision, count one removal for each period for which the agency was granted the authority for physical placement. If there are no periods for which the agency has been granted placement authority, the child is not considered removed and should not be reported.

For AFCARS reporting and the CFSR measures, a removal from home (entry into foster care) occurs when the conditions in one of the scenarios described in the table below are met.

For each child, count the number of times the child has been removed from home and report the total as the Total Number of Removals from Home to Date. Start the count with the child’s first removal from home and include each subsequent removal through the end of the AFCARS period being reported.

**Total Number of Removals from Home to Date (#19)
Summary of NWG Guidance on Identifying a Removal**

Removal Scenario		
All of the following are true	AND	One of the following scenarios occurs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child is in substitute care or an initial status of runaway for at least 24 hours while under the agency's authority - the child is not in detention, a camp, or hospitalized for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis 	AND	1. the agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has or gains placement and care authority; and - removes the child from home; and - places the child in a substitute care setting
		2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency gains placement and care authority of a child who is already in a substitute care setting; and - the child remains in substitute care
		3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency gains placement and care authority; following receipt of this authority, the child's initial case status is out of home - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting
		4. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has placement and care authority following receipt of this authority, the child's initial case status was in home - the agency decides to place the child in substitute care (change status to out of home) - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting
OR		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child is in a substitute care setting for at least 24 hours while under the agency's authority 	AND	5. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has or gains placement and care authority of a child whose initial setting is detention, camp, or hospitalization for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis - the agency moves the child from one of these settings to a substitute care setting
		6. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has placement and care authority - the child has been placed in a trial home visit for > 6 months - no end date for the trial home visit has been specified - the agency ends the trial home visit and places the child in a substitute care setting

5.1.2. Date of First Removal from Home

AFCARS Foster Care Element: #18

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months
Achieving Permanency	Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more

Federal Definition and Clarification

“Month, day and year the child was removed from home for the first time for purpose of placement in a foster care setting. If the current removal is the first removal, enter the date of the current removal. (Note: For children who have exited foster care, “current” refers to the most recent removal episode and the most recent placement setting.)” (NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

“This information is required by the regulations at appendix A to 45 CFR 1355 and should exist in the case record or a court record. As is the case for all missing data, if the date of the child’s first removal from home is not available, the date should be left blank.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 7)

“For children already in a juvenile justice facility with respect to whom a subsequent court order is signed giving placement, care or supervision to the title IV-E/IV-B agency, the date of the court order will be used as the date of removal from the home....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

For AFCARS reporting and the CFSR measures, a child’s first removal (entry into foster care) occurs when the conditions in one of the scenarios described in the following table are met.

For each child, identify the scenario that describes the first time the child was removed from the home and report the date of first removal as indicated. States are advised to contact the Children’s Bureau to verify reporting of the removal date when the child’s initial setting is runaway.

Note: The table for this element describes five removal scenarios. A sixth scenario, related to re-entry from a trial home visit, is not included as it would not apply to the first removal from home.

**Date of First Removal from Home (#18)
Summary of NWG Guidance**

Removal Scenario			Date of First Removal is:
All of the following are true	AND	One of the following scenarios occurs:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has no removals prior to the one whose date is being reported in this field - the child is in substitute care or an initial status of runaway for at least 24 hours while under the agency's authority - the child is not in detention, a camp, or hospitalized for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis 	AND	1. the agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has or gains placement and care authority; and - removes the child from home for the first time; and - places the child in a substitute care setting 	the date the child is first placed in a substitute care setting other than detention
		2. - the agency gains placement and care authority of a child who is already in a substitute care setting; and - the child remains in substitute care	the date the agency gained placement and care authority
		3. - the agency gains placement and care authority; -the child's case status is out of home - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting	the date the agency gained placement and care authority
		4. - the agency has placement and care authority - following receipt of this authority, the child's initial case status was in home - the agency decides to place the child in substitute care - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting	the date the agency decided to change the child's status from in home to out of home ¹
OR			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has no removals prior to the one whose date is being reported in this field the agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has or gains placement and care authority of a child whose initial setting is detention, camp, or hospitalization for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis - moves the child from one of these settings to a substitute care setting 	AND	5. the agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has or gains placement and care authority of a child whose initial setting is detention, camp, or hospitalization for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis - moves the child from one of these settings to a substitute care setting 	the date the agency moves the child to a substitute care setting ¹

¹ States are advised to contact the Children's Bureau or NRC-CWDT to verify reporting of the removal date when the child's initial setting is runaway.

5.1.3. Date of Latest Removal from Home

AFCARS Foster Care Element #21

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Exits to reunification in less than 12 months Exits to reunification, median stay Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months
Adoption	Exits to adoption in less than 24 months Exits to adoption, median length of stay Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months
Achieving Permanency	Exits to permanency prior to 18 th birthday for children in care 24+ months Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more
Placement Stability	Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months

Federal Definition

“Month, day and year the child was last removed from his/her home for the purpose of being placed in foster care. This would be the date for the current episode or, if the child has exited foster care, the date of removal for the most recent removal.” (NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

“For children already in a juvenile justice facility with respect to whom a subsequent court order is signed giving placement, care or supervision to the title IV-E/IV-B agency, the date of the court order will be used as the date of removal from the home....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

For AFCARS reporting and the CFSR measures, the latest removal (entry into foster care) occurs when the conditions in one of the scenarios described in the following table are met.

For each child, identify the scenario that applies and report the date of latest removal as indicated. States are advised to contact the Children's Bureau to verify reporting of the removal date when the child's initial setting is runaway.

**Date of Latest Removal from Home (#21)
Summary of NWG Guidance**

		Removal Scenario	Date of Latest Removal is:
All of the following are true	AND	One of the following scenarios occurs:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has no subsequent removals from home - the child is in substitute care or an initial status of runaway for at least 24 hours while under the agency's authority - the child is not in detention, a camp, or hospitalized for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis 	AND	1. the agency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has or gains placement and care authority; and - removes the child from home; and - places the child in a substitute care setting 	the date the child is placed in the first substitute care setting other than detention
		2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency gains placement and care authority of a child who is already in a substitute care setting; and - the child remains in substitute care 	the date the agency gained placement and care authority
		3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency gains placement and care authority; - following receipt of this authority, the child's initial case status is out of home - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting 	the date the agency gained placement and care authority
		4. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has placement and care authority - following receipt of this authority, the child's initial case status was in home - the agency decides to place the child in substitute care (change status to out of home) - the child runs away prior to the first placement in substitute care setting 	the date the agency decided to change the child's status from in home to out of home ¹
OR			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has no subsequent removals from home - the child is in a substitute care setting for at least 24 hours while under the agency's authority 	AND	5. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has or gains placement and care authority of a child whose initial setting is detention, camp, or hospitalization for medical treatment or acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis² - the agency moves the child from one of these settings to a substitute care setting 	the date the agency moves the child to a substitute care setting ¹
		6. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency has placement and care authority - the child has been placed in a trial home visit for > 6 months - no end date for the trial home visit has been specified - the agency ends the trial home visit and places the child in a substitute care setting 	the date the agency places the child back into substitute care

¹ States are advised to contact the Children's Bureau or NRC-CWDT to verify reporting of the removal date when the child's initial setting is runaway.

5.2. Placement

Placement issues have generated a large amount of guidance from both the Children's Bureau and the NWG. Rather than quoting the complete guidance, this section includes some paraphrased summaries with references to original sources.

Federal Definition

"Placement occurs after removal and is the physical setting in which a child finds himself or herself, that is, the resultant foster care setting. A new Placement setting results when the foster care setting changes, for example, when a child moves from one foster family home to another or to a group home or institution." (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 7)

"...there are certain temporary living conditions that are not placements, but rather represent a temporary absence from the child's ongoing foster care placement...[These are]

- Visitation with a sibling, relative, or other caretaker (i.e., preplacement visits with a subsequent foster care provider or preadoptive parents)
- Hospitalization for medical treatment, acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis
- Respite care
- Day or summer camps
- Trial home visits
- Runaway episodes"

(CWPM, AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 21)

Summary of Federal Clarification

- The following events are not considered a change in placement and, except as noted, do not impact reporting for the fields addressed in this Guide.
 - A foster family moves and their foster child moves with them. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 19)
 - A child in foster care moves within a child care institution at a single location (e.g., from one building, dorm, cottage, or wing to another within the institution) It doesn't matter whether the move is due to a change in the level of care or not. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 25)
 - A substitute care provider's status changes (for example, to a different licensing status). However, if the new status changes the value for Current Placement Setting (for example from foster family home to pre-adoptive home), report the new value for that field. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 1 and 17)

NWG Guidance

NWG definitions and guidance on placement are discussed in its publications, *Placement Stability Definitions* (CWLA 2004) and *Placement Change Definitions Implementation Guide* (CWLA, 2006). NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

- The term “placement” designates the physical location that a child normally calls “home”. It does not necessarily refer to the place where a child sleeps on a given night. As such, under certain circumstances a child’s short-term absence from a placement may represent a break—a temporary living condition—not a new placement. (CWLA, 2004) (See the list of temporary living conditions under Federal Definition above.)
- NWG definitions for each of the temporary living conditions are summarized in the table at the end of the section for the element, *Number of Previous Placements Settings During this Removal Episode*.

Also see Appendix A for definitions of the following terms:

Episode [removal episode or foster care episode]

Finalized adoption

Foster care

Juvenile justice facility

Placement and care authority

Return home on a trial basis

Substitute care setting

Supervision

Temporary living conditions

Trial home visit

5.2.1. Current Placement Setting

AFCARS Foster Care Element #41

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Exits to reunification in less than 12 months Exits to reunification, median stay Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months

Federal Definition

“Identify the type of setting in which the child currently lives.

Allowable values:

- 1 = Pre-adoptive Home ...
- 2 = Foster Family Home (Relative) ...
- 3 = Foster Family Home (Non-Relative) ...
- 4 = Group Home ...
- 5 = Institution ...
- 6 = Supervised Independent Living ...
- 7 = Runaway ...
- 8 = Trial Home Visit ...”

(NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Federal definitions of these values and clarification for this element are summarized in the table below.

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

Report the placement setting the child was in at the end of the reporting period. If the child was not in foster care at that time, report his or her setting at the time of the most recent discharge prior to the end of the reporting period.

The general rules are:

- Code an unlicensed home or facility as the type of setting it most closely resembles [even if the definition specifies ‘licensed’]. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 15)

- Code an emergency shelter as the type of setting it most closely resembles. For example, institution, group home, or a relative or non-relative foster family home. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 4)
- If a change in provider status changes the value for this element (e.g. from foster family home to pre-adoptive home or from group home to institution), report the new value. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 1 and 17)

For more specific rules, refer to the following table for detailed guidance on reporting the values for this element.

**Current Placement Setting (#41)
Summary of Guidance on Selecting a Placement Setting Value**

AFCARS Setting	Guidance	Value Reported is:
Pre-Adoptive Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a home in which the family intends to adopt the child (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - a home in which the family has been approved to adopt the child (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5) - the family may or may not be receiving a foster care payment or an adoption subsidy on behalf of the child (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - a child is considered in foster care until the adoption has been finalized, that is, a judge has signed the adoption decree. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5) 	1
Foster Family Home (Relative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a licensed or unlicensed home of the child’s relatives regarded by the State as a foster care living arrangement for the child (NRC-CWDT, 2003) 	2
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a licensed or approved foster home; includes receiving homes (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5) - includes any unlicensed homes that most closely resemble this category (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 15) 	3
Group Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a licensed or approved home providing 24-hour care for children in a small group setting that generally has from seven to twelve children (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - houses fewer than 12 children; distinguished from institutions by size (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 6) 	4

AFCARS Setting	Guidance	Value Reported is:
Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a child care facility operated by a public or private agency and providing 24-hour care and/or treatment for children who require separation from their own homes and group living experience (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - includes child care institutions; residential treatment facilities; maternity homes; etc. (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - include children in a foster care setting who move to a juvenile justice facility and are expected to return to foster care (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 12) - provides care for more than 12 children; distinguished from group homes by size (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 6) 	5
Supervised Independent Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an alternative transitional living arrangement where the child is under the supervision [placement and care authority] of the agency but without 24-hour adult supervision, is receiving financial support from the child welfare agency, and is in a setting which provides the opportunity for increased responsibility for self care (NRC-CWDT, 2003) 	6
Runaway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has run away from the foster care setting (NRC-CWDT, 2003) - includes children under the placement and care responsibility of the title VI-E agency who run away [at the beginning of a removal episode] prior to their first placement (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 24) - runaway is not considered a placement but is reported in this field to show the physical setting of the child (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 9) - if the child returns to the same placement setting he or she was in, prior to running away report the value of the setting the child was in prior to running away (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 11) 	7

AFCARS Setting	Guidance	Value Reported is:
<p>Trial Home Visit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child has been in a foster care placement, but has been returned to the parent or principal caretaker while the state agency maintains legal authority for placement and care (CWLA, 2007)* - this status generally occurs for a limited and specified period of time as designated by the court or child welfare agency (CWLA, 2007)* - if a time period is not specified the child should be identified as having been returned home [discharged] at the point at which the trial home visit exceeds six months (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5) - trial home visit is not considered a placement but is reported in this field to show the physical setting of the child (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7 Q. 9) - if the child returns to the same placement setting he or she was in, prior to the trial home visit report the value of the setting the child was in prior to the trial home visit (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 11) <p>*This NWG language for trial home visit is given to promote consistency in reporting. The federal definition for this value is “A Trial Home Visit occurs when the child has been in a foster care placement, but, under continuing State agency supervision, is then returned to the principal caretaker for a limited and specified period of time....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5)</p>	<p>8</p>

5.2.2. Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting

AFCARS Foster Care Element #23

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Exits to reunification in less than 12 months Exits to reunification, median stay Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months
Placement Stability	Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months

Federal Definition and Clarification

“Month, day and year the child moved into the current foster home, facility, residence, shelter, institution, etc. for purposes of continued foster care.” (NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Summary of Clarification

- For children whose current placement setting is runaway, report the date the child ran away. (This rule includes runaway settings where children under the placement and care responsibility of the IV-E agency ran away prior to their first placement in the removal episode.) (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 23 and 24)
- For children whose current placement setting is trial home visit, report the date the child was placed in the trial home visit. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 23)
- A change in provider status (for example, a change from family foster home to pre-adoptive home or a facility’s change in licensing type) is not considered a new placement and does not change the Date of Placement in Current Foster Care Setting. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 1 and 17)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

For each child report the date the child was placed in the setting reported in Current Placement Setting (#41).

5.2.3. Number of Previous Placements Settings During this Removal Episode

AFCARS Foster Care Element #24

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Placement Stability	Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months

Federal Definition and Clarification

“Enter the number of places the child has lived, including the current setting, during the current removal episode. Do not include trial home visits as a placement setting.” (NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

- “When answering the question, "Number of Previous Placement Settings During This Removal Episode", include the current placement setting.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 12)
- “Foster care element 24 is meant to gather information on how many times the agency found it necessary to move the child while in foster care. Therefore, the number of previous placement settings during the removal episode must reflect all placement moves including the current placement and placements into a previous foster care setting, regardless of whether the child was previously placed in that setting. The exception to this policy is with regard to a child who returns to the same foster care setting following a temporary absence that is specifically excluded from the calculation of previous placement settings.” [See next bullet.] (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 22)
- “In general, the State is required to count a placement that lasts more than 24 hours while the child is in foster care under the placement, care or supervision responsibility of the State agency. See 45 CFR 1355.40 and CWPM 1.2B.7 and 1.3. This includes moves that may be made on an emergency or unplanned basis, such as shelter care placements, treatment facility placements, and certain placements for juvenile justice purposes. See CWPM 1.3. However, there are certain temporary living conditions that are not placements, but rather represent a temporary absence from the child's ongoing foster care placement. As such, the State must exclude the following temporary absences from the calculation of the number of previous placement settings for foster care element 24.

- Visitation with a sibling, relative, or other caretaker (i.e., preplacement visits with a subsequent foster care provider or preadoptive parents)
- Hospitalization for medical treatment, acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis
- Respite care
- Day or summer camps
- Trial home visits
- Runaway episodes”

(CWPM, AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 21)

NWG Note: In this context, “a placement that lasts more than 24 hours” is believed to refer to the length of time the child welfare agency has placement authority of the child, not to the length of an individual placement setting. See NWG Guidance below.

Summary of Additional Clarification

- If a child moves from one foster family home to a different foster family home, one placement is counted for each home. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 18)
- For children in a foster care setting who move to a juvenile justice facility and are expected to return to foster care, count the move to the juvenile justice facility as a placement change. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)
- Settings of trial home visit and runaway are not included in the placement count. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 9, 10 and 23)
- If a child’s current placement setting is Runaway and this runaway event occurred at the beginning of a removal episode prior to the first placement, report a placement count of zero. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 24)
- If, at the end of a runaway or trial home visit, the child returns to the same placement setting he or she ran away from or left for the trial home visit, do not change the placement count. If the child returns to a different setting, increase the placement count by one [to count the new foster care setting]. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 8 and 11)
- A change in provider status (for example, a change from family foster home to pre-adoptive home or a facility’s change in licensing type) is not considered a new placement and does not change the placement count. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 1 and 17)
- If the child remains with the same foster family, it is not considered a new placement if the family moves. (See CWPM: 1.2B.7, Question 19)
- Moves within an institution at a single location, for example between buildings or levels of care, are not included in the placement count. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 25).

- Children under the placement and care authority of the State child welfare agency are reported to AFCARS even if their care is being handled by a tribal court or contracted to a private agency. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Questions 5 and 7.)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children's Bureau.

The NWG offers the following additional clarifications on placements of less than 24 hours, temporary living conditions (TLCs), and concurrent placements:

- Individual guidance received by some states and technical assistance presentations have clarified that states must count all placement changes, including those placements, such as one night stays, that last less than 24 hours. States with questions on reporting placements of less than 24 hours should contact the Children's Bureau or the NRC-CWDT.
- The primary differences between placements and temporary living conditions are the combination of the length of separation and the intent to return to the ongoing placement. (CWLA, 2004)
- Most TLCs are services that require 24-hour care (not necessarily all night awake care) and that represent a temporary absence from the child's ongoing foster care placement. These 24-hour care services are time limited, specific in purpose, and not counted as placement settings for the purpose of the federal placement stability outcome measure[s]. (CWLA, 2004).
- With the exception of trial home visits and runaways, TLCs should be brief in nature, generally lasting less than 30 days. A high mean number of days spent in TLCs or many TLCs lasting 30 days or more indicates that these conditions may not be identified accurately. For guidance on differentiating placements and TLCs, refer to the last table for this element and the Placement Change Definitions Implementation Guide (CWLA, 2006).
- Some states record concurrent placements (for example when a child is in residential treatment during the week and in a relative home on weekends). If one of the concurrent placements is a TLC, then exclude it from the placement count. If both placements are types that should be counted according to federal guidance, contact the Children's Bureau or NRC-CWDT to determine the best way to count the placements. (CWLA, 2006)

A complete discussion of definitions related to placement, temporary living conditions and placement stability can be found in the NWG's publication, Placement Stability Definitions (CWLA 2004).

For in-depth guidance on identifying and counting placements, refer to the NWG's publication, Placement Change Definitions Implementation Guide (CWLA, 2006). This publication illustrates major reporting issues through detailed discussions of ten scenarios and includes instructions for defining and identifying each temporary living condition (TLC). It is available at http://ndas.cwla.org/research_info/nwg/.

Note that NWG guidance is not federally required, but all definitions are compatible with federal guidelines. States should contact the Children's Bureau or the NRC-CWDT for technical assistance with AFCARS reporting.

The Counting Process

The process for counting placements can be briefly described as follows: (based on CWLA, 2006)

- For all children in the AFCARS population in care during the reporting period
- Query for all placements during the most recent removal episode
- Exclude the following:
 - Any placements with the placement types representing “temporary living conditions” (see federal guidance above or table below)
 - The return from a temporary living condition to the ongoing placement if it is not already excluded (e.g. when a child goes from Jones to respite to Jones, Jones counts as one placement)
 - Status changes (see table below)
- Sum the number of remaining placements for each child

To count placements correctly, the date of latest removal and date of discharge must be reported accurately. Refer to the information on these elements elsewhere in this chapter.

The 98% Rule

Infinite possible placement scenarios may occur in foster care. As you translate your State's foster placements into a placement count for each child in AFCARS, work toward a goal of consistency in *almost all* cases. Apply a “98%” rule in meeting the definitions. While it is not necessary to meet this number statistically, the number helps us conceptualize what we mean by “*almost all* cases”. Focus on what happens *most* of the time and avoid getting stuck on the details that are rare exceptions. Review how your state's policies compare to the standard definitions. Use quality assurance checks to make sure that the data support conformity with the standard definitions. (CWLA, 2006)

Reporting Element #24

For each child count the number of placements that occurred from the Date of Latest Removal from Home through the Date of Discharge from Foster Care or the end of the reporting period if the date of discharge is blank.

NWG guidance on what circumstances to count and not count as a placement is given below. References to federal guidance are given. The content for numbered notes within the guidance appears after the Do Not Count list. This guidance is followed by an NWG matrix to help differentiate TLCs from placements, which is taken from Placement Stability Definitions (CWLA, 2004).

Count

- Except as noted, all placements¹, regardless of length, made while the child is in foster care for more than 24 hours under the placement and care authority of the IV-B/IV-E agency.
 - Includes one night stays.
 - Excludes placements in detention of less than 24 hours and temporary living conditions.
- The Current Placement Setting (#41), excluding runaway and trial home visit, as well as previous settings. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 12)
- Changes in foster care setting (e.g. when a child moves from one foster family home to another or to a group home or institution). (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 7)
- Placements made on an emergency or unplanned basis, such as:
 - Shelter care placements
 - Treatment facility placements
 - Certain placements for juvenile justice purposes (see next bullet)(See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 21)
- The child's move from a foster care setting to a juvenile justice facility if the child is expected to return to a foster care setting. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Q. 12)
- Detention stays that last more than 24 hours.²
- Placements into a previous foster care setting (home A to B to A; home A to B to C to A), unless the interim living arrangement represents a temporary living condition. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 22)
- New placements after a trial home visit or runaway episode (e.g. Foster home A to Runaway to Foster home B counts as 2 placements) (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 8, 9 and 23)
- Placements made by a private agency or tribe if the child was under the authority of the IV-B/IV-E agency. Includes placements made by private agencies contracted by

the state to provide foster care to children under the state agency's authority. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Q. 5 and 7)

Do Not Count

- Temporary living conditions:
 - Visitation with a sibling, relative, or other caretaker (i.e., preplacement visits with a subsequent foster care provider or preadoptive parents)
 - Hospitalization for medical treatment, acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis
 - Respite care
 - Day or summer camps
 - Trial home visits
 - Runaway episodes

(See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 21)
- Trial home visits, even when the child returns to a different placement setting (the new placement is counted, but not the trial home visit) (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 8, 9 and 23)
- Runaway episodes, even when the child returns to a different placement setting. (The new placement is counted, but not the runaway episode.) (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 8, 9, 10, 11 and 23)
 - If the Current Placement Setting (#41) is a runaway that began at the beginning of a removal episode prior to the first placement, report a placement count of zero. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 24)
- Changes in status of the placement (substitute care provider), as long as the child remains with the same provider. (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 1, 17 and 19.) Status changes include:
 - Change in type of home: e.g. provider changes from foster family to pre-adoptive family (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 1)
 - Licensing change: e.g. an unlicensed relative home becomes licensed (See CWPM AFCARS 1.2B.7, Q. 17)
 - Address change: e.g. foster family moves (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 19)
 - Home composition/address change: e.g. two single foster parents move in together
 - Providers merge: e.g. two providers merge and the child remains in the same location with the same caregivers
 - Other status changes: e.g. family changes status from county foster home to private agency foster home (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 17)
- Moves within an institution at a single location (e.g. child moves from one building to another or from one level of care to another). (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 25)

- Juvenile justice placements made while the youth is not part of the AFCARS population³
- Placements in detention that last 24 hours or less²

Note that placements in detention, camp or a hospital that occur prior to the first foster setting placement in a new removal episode are not considered part of the removal episode and are not counted. See the guidance on removal elsewhere in this chapter.

Reference Notes for ‘Count’ and ‘Do Not Count’

¹States with questions on reporting placements of less than 24 hours should contact the Children’s Bureau or the NRC-CWDT.

²Contact the Children’s Bureau or NRC-CWDT for technical assistance on whether detention placements of 24 hours or less should be counted.

³Federal guidance specifies:

“Children who are removed from their home and initially placed in a juvenile justice facility are not to be included in AFCARS reporting....[If] a subsequent court order is signed giving placement, care or supervision to the title IV-E/IV-B agency, the date of the court order will be used as the date of removal from the home....

Children in a foster care setting who are moved to a juvenile justice facility and who become the responsibility of another agency should not be included in the AFCARS reporting population. The date the court order was signed will serve as the date of discharge from foster care and the reason for discharge would be reported as transfer to another agency. “

(CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12.)

Under the first set of circumstances, the count of placements begins once the Title IV-E/IV-B agency places the child. Under the second set of circumstances, the placement count ends once the court order is signed and the child considered discharge from AFCARS.

Differentiating TLCs from Placements

The following information and table are provided to help differentiate TLCs from placements. They are taken from Placement Stability Definitions (CWLA, 2004).

The National Working Group interpretation of the federal guidance on temporary living conditions (TLCs) can be summarized with the following general rules. Please see the matrix for information about each TLC.

1. Federal guidance is clear that **trial home visits** and **runaway episodes** are **not counted as placements**. No interpretation is needed here.
2. When a child spends a brief time in one of the identified TLCs and **returns to the same placement**, these are **not counted as placements**. The NWG did not define “brief” for most of the TLCs as long as the child returns to the same placement. However, a time limit was identified for hospitalization for acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis; this generally lasts for very brief periods, such as 5 days, although an upward limit of 30 days is used for the rare circumstances in which stabilization or diagnosis may take longer. This should not be confused with treatment, which should be counted according to federal guidance. Also, none of the TLCs should be confused with emergency or unplanned placements, which must be counted according to federal guidance.
3. When a child spends a brief time in one of the potential TLCs but **returns to a different placement**, there are some circumstances when it may need to be counted as a placement. The matrix outlines these circumstances.
4. When a child is in one of the potential TLCs and the **next placement has not been recorded**, the data should be reviewed once the stay **exceeds 30 days**. Such a review allows the state to verify that the plan is for the child to go back to the same placement, or to see if a placement should be recorded (if data has been omitted or the situation does not fit the TLC definition). The exception is that trial home visits and runaway episodes do not need to be reviewed for this purpose, as they are not counted as placements regardless of timeframe.
5. Federal guidance indicates that detention should be counted as a placement. This guidance should be followed. For the future, CWLA and the NWG will recommend that the federal government NOT count detention as a placement if it lasts for 30 days or less.

Please note that some of the temporary living conditions may not be captured in the child welfare agencies’ data systems since they are not considered placements.

**National Working Group to Improve Child Welfare Data
Matrix to Differentiate Temporary Living Conditions from Placements Consistently**

According to federal guidance, there are certain temporary living conditions that should not be counted as placements for AFCARS Foster Care Element #24, which is used in the federal outcome measure on placement stability. The National Working Group (NWG) provides the following guidelines to help states differentiate temporary living conditions (not counted) from placements (counted) for the purpose of reporting this data. The NWG matrix and definitions represent a general consensus of state child welfare agencies, with input from other child welfare professionals. The parameters defined here have been developed in the context of the federal guidance to help states interpret the guidance and voluntarily report the data more consistently. The definitions also provide a reference point that states may use to explain how their data diverge. This work is *not federally sanctioned or required*. Please note: Some of the temporary living conditions may not be captured in the child welfare agencies' data systems since they are not considered placements.

Temporary Living Condition / Purpose	Timeframe	Scenario After being in the TLC ("B") for identified timeframe, the child goes to:	Number of placements	Similar Situations That May Be Placements
<p>Visitation with sibling, relative or other caretaker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sibling - Relative, or - Other caretaker (i.e. preplacement visits with a subsequent foster care provider or preadoptive parents) • To provide continuity of family relationships and connections for children in care <p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visitation may not be captured in the data system. - Trial home visits are distinct from visitation, and are defined later in this document. 	<p>Generally several days (e.g. weekend) or several weeks.</p> <hr/> <p>No time limit if the purpose is met <u>and</u> the child returns to the same placement.</p> <hr/> <p><=30 days if returns to different placement</p>	<p>same placement (A-B-A)</p> <hr/> <p>different placement (A-B-C)</p>	<p>1</p> <hr/> <p>2</p>	<p>Placements with relatives or use of relatives or others as emergency or unplanned placements are not considered "visitation." If the visitation becomes an emergency or unplanned placement (e.g. the visit is extended while identifying a new placement), then it must be counted according to federal guidance.</p> <hr/> <p>When the "visitation" lasts more than 30 days and is followed by a different placement, it should be counted as a placement to help ensure that visitation is not confused with relative care or emergency or unplanned placements.</p>
<p>Hospitalization for Medical Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-psychiatric inpatient medical facility • To treat a medical condition 	<p>No time limit if the purpose is met <u>and</u> the child returns to the same placement.</p> <hr/> <p><=30 days if returns to a different placement*</p>	<p>same placement (A-B-A)</p> <hr/> <p>different placement (A-B-C)</p>	<p>1</p> <hr/> <p>2</p>	<p>In general, hospitalization is not counted whether the child returns to the same or different placement.</p> <p>However, there may be atypical circumstances in which a child is placed in a medical facility for long-term care and the foster parent does not have a continued role in the child's care.</p> <p>*When a child returns to a different placement after long-term treatment (more than 30 days) <u>and</u> the foster parents did not have a role in the child's care while in the hospital setting, this should be counted as a placement.</p>

Temporary Living Condition / Purpose	Timeframe	Scenario After being in the TLC ("B") for identified timeframe, the child goes to:	Number of placements	Similar Situations That May Be Placements
Hospitalization for Acute Psychiatric Episodes or Diagnosis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief Stabilization and/or diagnosis To eliminate the need for long term psychiatric or mental health hospitalizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not include treatment or assessment centers used when children come into care 	Generally lasts for no more than 5 days, sometimes up to 21 days or more. The NWG allows up to 30 days for rare circumstances, as long as the purpose is met.	same placement (A-B-A)	1	Hospitalization for the treatment of a psychiatric condition (e.g. in-patient substance abuse treatment, residential treatment facility, etc.) should be counted as a placement.
	<=30 days whether returns to same or different placement	different placement (A-B-C)	2	The NWG considers any psychiatric hospitalization lasting longer than 30 days a placement, whether or not the child returns to the same placement.
Respite Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief To give relief to the caregiver family from the daily routine of providing care. Child generally returns to the same placement 	Generally lasts for several days (e.g. a weekend), but on occasion may occur for longer periods (e.g. for a month).	same placement (A-B-A)	1	The use of respite providers as emergency or unplanned placements must be counted as placements. For instance, if a child is placed with a respite provider in order to arrange a new placement, this does not meet the purpose of respite care and must be counted as a placement. Also, a child placed in a respite home may no longer be in "respite care" once the stay is extended to arrange a new placement.
	No time limit if the purpose is met <u>and</u> the child returns to the same placement. <=30 days if returns to a different placement	different placement (A-B-C)	2	In rare circumstances the child may need to return to a different placement. If the intent was to provide respite when the child entered the respite home and the timeframe is not extended, and the timeframe does not exceed 30 days, it may still be considered a TLC and excluded from the placement count.
Day or Summer Camp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved day or summer camp program, or other approved overnight camp that occurs during another time of year Does not include correctional camps or treatment camps <p>Note: Camp may not be captured in the data system.</p>	Generally lasts for one week, and sometimes for longer periods (e.g. two to three weeks).	same placement (A-B-A)	1	Correctional camps and treatment camps are counted as placements.
	No time limit if the purpose is met <u>and</u> the child returns to the same placement. <= 30 if return to a different placement	different placement (A-B-C)	2	When "camp" lasts more than 30 days and the child returns to a different placement, this may be considered a placement (a total of 3 placements).

Temporary Living Condition / Purpose	Timeframe	Scenario	Number of placements	Similar Situations That May Be Placements
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Purpose		After being in the TLC ("B") for identified timeframe, the child goes to:	place-ments	
Trial Home Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child in foster care returned to principal caretaker under continuing State agency supervision Limited and specified period of time, Or If time period not specified, child should be identified as returned home after six months 	No time limit (as long as the child remains in AFCARS populations)	same placement (A-B-A)	1	Federal guidance is clear that Trial Home Visits should not be counted as placements for FC Element #24. They are, however, recorded in Current Placement Setting, when applicable.
		different placement (A-B-C)	2	
Runaway Episodes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has run away from foster care setting 	No time limit (as long as the child remains in AFCARS populations)	same placement (A-B-A)	1	Federal guidance is clear that Runaway Episodes should not be counted as placements for FC Element #24. They are, however, recorded in Current Placement Setting, when applicable.
		different placement (A-B-C)	2	

Note: Although **trial home visits** and **runaway episodes** are not counted as placements according to federal guidance, they may provide important information regarding the stability of children in foster care. The NWG recommends that states monitor and analyze data separately about runaway episodes and failed trial reunifications (trial home visits where child returns to placement instead of remaining with principal caretaker and ending custody).

Source: Placement Stability Definitions (CLWA, 2004).

5.3. Discharge

Federal Definition and Clarification

The CWPM provides the following definition of discharge:

“A Discharge represents that point in time when the child is no longer in foster care under the care and responsibility or supervision of the State agency. For AFCARS purposes, situations in which the State retains supervision of a child and the child returns home on a trial basis, for an unspecified period of time, are considered a discharge from foster care after a six-month period.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 4)

Additional guidance offers the following clarifications.

- Children placed for more than six months in a trial home visit for which no end date is specified should be reported as discharged.

“Any child who is returned home on a trial home visit, for a specifically limited period of time and for whom the State agency continues to maintain placement and care responsibility or supervision should be included in AFCARS. If a child is returned home on a trial basis with no specific time period indicated, and the State agency maintains placement and care responsibility or supervision, he or she should be indicated as in foster care for a period of up to six months. After six months such child should be indicated as discharged from foster care and returned home and should not be included in subsequent AFCARS reports unless the child is returned to foster care.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 11)

- Children in a foster care setting who move to a juvenile justice facility and become the responsibility of another agency should be reported to AFCARS as discharged.

“Children in a foster care setting who are moved to a juvenile justice facility and who become the responsibility of another agency should not be included in the AFCARS reporting population. The date the court order was signed will serve as the date of discharge from foster care and the reason for discharge would be reported as transfer to another agency.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

- States that report to AFCARS juvenile justice children who receive IV-e foster care maintenance payments, may choose to report these children as discharged if they move to an unallowable facility and are not expected to return to foster care.

“Question: A State title IV-E agency has an agreement in effect pursuant to section 472(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Social Security Act with the State juvenile justice agency. As such, the State reports to AFCARS children who are in the placement and care responsibility of the State juvenile justice agency and receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments in a foster family home or child care institution.

When such a child is no longer receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments because the child is placed in an unallowable facility (e.g., in detention), should the State stop reporting the child to AFCARS?

Answer: It depends. Children in foster care who are placed in a juvenile justice facility and who are expected to be returned to a foster care setting should continue to be included in the AFCARS reporting population (see Child Welfare Policy Manual Section 1.3 QA# 12) ...If, however, the State does not expect the child to return to a foster care setting, the State may enter the child as discharged (foster care element #56) as of the date the child left the foster family home or child care institution and indicate the reason for discharge (foster care element #58).” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8)

NWG Guidance

The following NWG guidance is adapted from the NWG publication, Reunification Definitions, (CWLA, February 2007). See this publication for a more complete discussion of definitions and guidance on discharge. NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

Typically, a discharge has occurred when:

- the child is no longer in foster care
- the state no longer has legal authority for placement and care of the child
- the child welfare agency no longer has authority for the child’s physical placement
- a court order, temporary protective custody or voluntary placement agreement would be required for the agency to remove the child from home and make a subsequent placement

A discharge also occurs when the following three conditions are met:

- the agency has placement and care authority
- the child is placed in a trial home visit for which no end date has been specified
- the visit exceeds 6 months

In this scenario, a specified end date for a trial home visit has been interpreted broadly to include, for example, a scheduled court hearing or a next review date specified in state policy. States should contact the Children’s Bureau or the NRC-CWDT for guidance on determining if a trial home visit has a specified end date.

For discharges to adoption, in some states, the agency’s authority is considered to end and the child is discharged when the adoptive parents are granted full legal parental rights and obligations (the adoption is finalized), even when this occurs prior to a court order releasing state custody.

Additional Clarifications:

- In states where legal custody may not be taken by the court, the court orders the agency to have “physical custody” of the child for the purpose of a foster care placement. When the court orders the end of “physical custody,” the agency no longer has the authority over the child’s physical placement. In these states, the child is considered discharged when the physical custody order ends. Any subsequent placement constitutes a removal from the child’s home even when the court continues an order for agency supervision.
- In some states the court may order supervision to continue after the state’s authority for placement and care ends (e.g. end of legal custody). In this circumstance, the child is still considered discharged at the time placement and care authority ends, since a court order, temporary protective custody or voluntary placement agreement would be required to remove the child from home.
- If a child comes into care through temporary protective custody or a voluntary placement agreement, and that ends but a court order has been obtained under which the child continues under the placement and care authority of the child welfare agency, the end of the temporary protective custody or voluntary placement is not considered a discharge and just one removal episode is counted.

Also see Appendix A for definitions of the following terms:

Episode [removal episode or foster care episode]
Finalized adoption
Foster care
Living with other relatives
Placement and care authority
Return home on a trial basis
Reunification with parents or primary caretakers
Temporary protective custody
Trial home visit
Voluntary placement

5.3.1. Reason for Discharge

AFCARS Foster Care Element #58

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Exits to reunification in less than 12 months Exits to reunification, median stay Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months
Adoption	Exits to adoption in less than 24 months Exits to adoption, median length of stay Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months
Achieving Permanency	Exits to permanency prior to 18 th birthday for children in care 24+ months Exits to permanency for children with TPR Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more
Placement Stability	Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months

Federal Definition and Clarification

“Enter data only for children who have exited foster care during the reporting period.

Allowable Values:

- 1 = Reunification With Parents or Primary Caretaker(s)—The child was returned to his or her parents or to the principal caretaker(s)’ home.
- 2 = Living With Other Relatives—The child went to live with a relative other than the one from whose home he or she was removed.
- 3 = Adoption—The child was legally adopted.
- 4 = Emancipation—The child reached majority according to State law by virtue of age, marriage, etc.
- 5 = Guardianship—Permanent custody of the child was awarded to an individual.
- 6 = Transfer to Another Agency—Responsibility for the care of the child was awarded to another agency—either in or outside of the State.
- 7 = Runaway—The child ran away from the foster care placement.

8 = Death of Child—The child died while in foster care.”

(NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

“Children in a foster care setting who are moved to a juvenile justice facility and who become the responsibility of another agency should not be included in the AFCARS reporting population...[for these children] the reason for discharge would be reported as transfer to another agency.” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

- The NWG defines the reason for discharge as the outcome or explanation for a child’s exit from care, including reunification, living with other relatives, adoption, guardianship, emancipation, transfer to another agency, death of the child and, in some states, runaway.
- The reason reported for this element and the date of discharge reported for element #56 refer to the same discharge event.
- In some circumstances, children who reach the age of majority while under the placement and care authority of the child welfare agency should continue to be reported to AFCARS. States are advised to contact the Children’s Bureau or NRC-CWDT for assistance in determining when these children should be reported as discharged.

For each child discharged from foster care during the AFCARS reporting period, report the appropriate reason for discharge. Refer to the following table for a summary of guidance on reason for discharge. This table shows the reason for discharge for some specific discharge scenarios but does not attempt to describe all possible scenarios.

Note: The CFSR measures count children as reunified if they are discharged for a reason of either reunification with parents or primary caretaker(s) or living with other relatives (US DHHS, n.d., b). NWG definitions for these two reasons are given in Appendix A and incorporated into the table below.

Reason for Discharge (#58)
Summary of Guidance For Selected Discharge Scenarios
 (NWG guidance unless noted)

Discharge Reason	Use when a child is discharged and...	Value Reported is:
Reunification with Parents or Primary Caretaker(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - released to birth parent(s) (whether or not the child lived with this parent at the time of removal) ; or - released to parent(s) who had adopted the child prior to removal (whether or not the child lived with this parent at the time of removal); or - released to step-parent, relative, legal guardian or other primary caretaker from whom the child was removed <p><i>Note: For AFCARS purposes, a child on a trial home visit for which no end date has been specified is considered discharged and released at the point the visit exceeds 6 months.</i></p>	1
Living With Other Relatives	- released to a step-parent or non-parental relative who was not the primary caretaker at the time of removal (excluding adoptions and guardianships)	2
Adoption	- his or her post-removal adoption by a relative or non-relative has been finalized (i.e. the adoptive parents are granted full legal parental rights and obligations)	3
Emancipation	- has reached majority according to State law by virtue of age, marriage, etc (NRC-CWDT, 2003)	4
Guardianship	- a non-parental relative or a non-relative has been awarded permanent custody of the child (excluding adoptions)	5
Transfer to Another Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsibility for the care of the child is awarded to another agency—either in or outside the State (NRC-CWDT, 2003), including the following specific scenarios: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child moves from foster care to a juvenile justice facility and becomes the responsibility of another agency (See CWPM: AFCARS 1.3, Question 12) - the child is a juvenile justice child reported under a IV-e agreement who moved to a locked facility and is not expected to return to a foster care setting (Note: States may choose whether to report such a child as discharged. See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8.) 	6
Runaway	- the child welfare agency is released from placement and care authority of a child who has runaway	7
Death of Child	- the child died while in foster care (NRC-CWDT, 2003)	8

5.3.2. Date of Discharge from Foster Care

AFCARS Foster Care Element #56

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Exits to reunification in less than 12 months Exits to reunification, median stay Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months
Adoption	Exits to adoption in less than 24 months Exits to adoption, median length of stay Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months
Achieving Permanency	Exits to permanency prior to 18 th birthday for children in care 24+ months Exits to permanency for children with TPR Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more
Placement Stability	Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months

Federal Definition and Clarification

“Enter data only for children who have exited foster care during the reporting period.

Enter the month, day and year the child was discharged from foster care. If the child has not been discharged from care, leave blank.”

(NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

“Children in a foster care setting who are moved to a juvenile justice facility and who become the responsibility of another agency should not be included in the AFCARS reporting population. The date the court order was signed will serve as the date of discharge from foster care....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

“Question:[For states in which] the State reports to AFCARS children who are in the placement and care responsibility of the State juvenile justice agency and receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments in a foster family home or child care institution. When such a child is no longer receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments because the child is placed in an unallowable facility (e.g., in detention), should the State stop reporting the child to AFCARS?

Answer:If,...the State does not expect the child to return to a foster care setting, the State may enter the child as discharged (foster care element #56) as of the date the child

left the foster family home or child care institution....”(CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

Children may have more than one removal episode and/or discharge in an AFCARS reporting period. For each child discharged from foster care during the reporting period who is not in foster care at the end of the period, report the date of discharge from the most recent removal episode. If the child exited during the reporting period but at the end of the period was in foster care (in a subsequent removal episode), leave this field blank.

Unless otherwise specified, report the date the agency’s authority for placement and care of the child ends.

The date reported for this element and the discharge reason reported for element #58 refer to the same discharge event.

In some circumstances, children who reach the age of majority while under the placement and care authority of the child welfare agency should continue to be reported to AFCARS. States are advised to contact the Children’s Bureau or NRC-CWDT for assistance in determining when these children should be reported as discharged.

Refer to the following table for a summary of NWG and federal guidance on reporting the date of discharge in certain situations.

Date of Discharge from Foster Care (#56)
Summary of Guidance on Date of Discharge for Selected Discharge Scenarios
 (based on federal guidance as noted)

Discharge Scenario		Date of Discharge is:
Adoption	- a child's post-removal adoption by a relative or non-relative has been finalized	- the date the adoptive parents are granted full legal parental rights and obligations and the agency's custody of the child ends - if these actions occur on different dates, use the earlier of the two dates, unless the agency's responsibility clearly extends to the later date - according to an NWG survey, most states report the date the judge signs the adoption decree
Reunification from Trial Home Visit	- a trial home visit lasting no more than 6 months ends in a discharge; or - a trial home visit for which an end date of more than 6 months was specified ends in a discharge	the date the trial home visit ended
	- the agency has placement and care authority, and the child is placed in a trial home visit for which no end date has been specified, and the visit exceeds 6 months	the date the trial home visit exceeds 6 months (CWPM:AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5)
Transfer to Juvenile Justice	- a child moves from foster care to a juvenile justice facility and becomes the responsibility of another agency	the date the court order transferring responsibility was signed (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Q. 12)
Juvenile Justice Child Moves	- a juvenile justice child reported under a IV-e agreement moves to a locked facility and is not expected to return to a foster care setting (Note: States may choose whether to report such a child as discharged. See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8.)	the date the child left the foster care setting (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Q. 8)

5.3.3. Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode

AFCARS Foster Care Element #20

Dependent CFSR Measures	
Reunification	Entry cohort reunification in less than 12 months Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months
Achieving Permanency	Children emancipated who were in foster care for 3 years or more

Federal Definition and Clarification

“For children with prior removals, enter the month, day and year they were discharged from care for the episode immediately prior to the current episode. For children with no prior removals, leave blank.” (NRC-CWDT, 2003)

Clarification

“Children in a foster care setting who are moved to a juvenile justice facility and who become the responsibility of another agency should not be included in the AFCARS reporting population. The date the court order was signed will serve as the date of discharge from foster care....” (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 12)

“Question:[For states in which] the State reports to AFCARS children who are in the placement and care responsibility of the State juvenile justice agency and receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments in a foster family home or child care institution. When such a child is no longer receiving title IV-E foster care maintenance payments because the child is placed in an unallowable facility (e.g., in detention), should the State stop reporting the child to AFCARS?”

Answer:If, ...the State does not expect the child to return to a foster care setting, the State may enter the child as discharged (foster care element #56) as of the date the child left the foster family home or child care institution.... “ (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8). “In those cases...if the State does not expect the child to return to a foster care setting after the locked placement, the State may choose to record the move to a locked faculty [sic] as a discharge.” (US DHHS, 2007)

NWG Guidance

NWG guidance is developed within the context of existing federal policy and guidance from the Children’s Bureau.

For children with prior removal episodes, enter the date they were discharged from care for the episode immediately prior to the current episode. For children with no prior removals, leave blank. Note that this field is reported for all children who have been

discharged from at least one removal episode prior to the current removal episode. The prior discharge reported may have occurred prior to or within the current reporting period.

Unless otherwise specified, report the date the agency's authority for placement and care of the child ended.

Refer to the following table for a summary of NWG and federal guidance on reporting the date of discharge in certain situations.

Date Child Was Discharged from Last Foster Care Episode (#20)
Summary of Guidance on Date of Last Discharge for Selected Discharge Scenarios
 (based on federal guidance as noted)

Discharge Scenario		Date of Last Discharge is:
Adoption	- a child’s post-removal adoption by a relative or non-relative has been finalized	- the date the adoptive parents are granted full legal parental rights and obligations and the agency's custody of the child ends - if these actions occur on different dates, use the earlier of the two dates, unless the agency's responsibility clearly extends to the later date - according to an NWG survey, most states report the date the judge signs the adoption decree
Reunification from Trial Home Visit	- a trial home visit lasting no more than 6 months ends in a discharge; or - a trial home visit for which an end date of more than 6 months was specified ends in a discharge	the date the trial home visit ended
	- the agency has placement and care authority, and the child is placed in a trial home visit for which no end date has been specified, and the visit exceeds 6 months	the date the trial home visit had lasted 6 months (CWPM:AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Q. 5)
Transfer to Juvenile Justice	- a child moves from foster care to a juvenile justice facility and becomes the responsibility of another agency	the date the court order transferring responsibility was signed (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Q. 12)
Juvenile Justice Child Moves	- a juvenile justice child reported under a IV-e agreement moves to a locked facility and is not expected to return to a foster care setting (Note: States may choose whether to report such a child as discharged. See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 8.)	the date the child left the foster care setting (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Q. 8)

Appendix A: Definitions of Related Terms

The following definitions are provided to clarify terms that appear in many of the definitions presented in the Guide. These are NWG definitions unless otherwise noted.

Episode [also known as a removal episode or foster care episode] – An Episode is a removal with one or more placement settings. A previous episode is one that has been completed by a discharge. A current episode is a removal and one or more placement settings without a discharge. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.3, Question 4)

Finalized adoption – An adoption is finalized when the adoptive parents are granted full legal parental rights and obligations. Typically, this is on the date the judge signs the adoption decree, but practice may vary from state to state.

Foster care –

1. (federal) Foster care is defined in 45CFR 1355.20 and 1355.40. Section 1355.20 gives the general definition of foster care as 24 hour substitute care for all children placed away from their parent(s) or guardian(s) and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. Section 1355.40 (a)(2), defines the foster care population for AFCARS reporting purposes. Each State's data transmission must include all children in foster care, as defined in section 1355.20, for whom the State title IV-B/IV-E agency has responsibility for placement, care or supervision. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 1)
NWG note: In some states the court may order supervision to continue after the state's authority for placement and care ends (e.g. the end of legal custody). In an NWG survey on reunification, 10 states have these supervision only cases, and most report them as discharged once parents get legal custody.

2. (NWG) Describing a comprehensive definition of foster care is outside the scope of the NWG's work. In the context of this document, a child is considered to be in foster care if he or she meets the criteria for inclusion in the AFCARS foster care population. A child enters foster care when these criteria are met (date of removal) and exits foster care when these criteria no longer apply (date of discharge). For any individual state, several factors influence which children are included in AFCARS. States should consult with the Children's Bureau or the NRC-CWDT for guidance on defining the AFCARS foster care population.

Juvenile Justice Facility – An institutional facility that houses juvenile delinquent children or youth, such as detention centers and locked facilities.

Living with other relatives: (Reason for Discharge, AFCARS foster care element #58, value = 2) The child went to live with a relative other than the one from whose home he or she was removed and the child has been discharged from foster care.

- This value does not include cases in which a foster child is discharged to a relative who adopts the child or obtains legal guardianship, which should be reported with a value of *adoption* or *guardianship*, respectively.

- *Relative other than the one from whose home he or she was removed* includes step-parents and other relatives who were not the principal caregivers at the time of removal. It does not include birth parents or finalized adoptive parents.
- *Discharged* means the child welfare agency no longer has legal authority for the placement and care of the child (a court order, temporary protective custody or voluntary placement agreement would be required to remove the child from home.) When children are discharged to *living with other relatives*, the relative gets legal custody of the child or the parent has legal custody while the relative physically cares for the child. If the child is living with relatives under state placement and custody, the child should be reported as in care.

Placement and care authority – An agency **gains** the authority for placement and care of a child in one of the following ways:

- a voluntary placement agreement is executed by the parent(s)/caregiver(s) and the child welfare agency
- the child is taken into temporary protective custody (initiated prior to court involvement)
- the child welfare agency gains temporary custody (short or long term) of the child, as granted by the court
- the child welfare agency gains placement and care responsibility for the child in order to provide specific services (e.g. residential treatment), although the parent retains legal custody

The state's authority for placement and care of the child **ends** in one of the following ways (e.g. depending on how the child entered care):

- a voluntary placement agreement ends and the child exits care to his or her permanent setting (e.g. the child returns to family)
- temporary protective custody (initiated prior to court involvement) or temporary custody (granted by the court for a limited time) expires and the court does not order the child into state (or local) custody, so the child returns to family; or
- the state's legal custody of the child ends pursuant to a court order, so the child welfare agency no longer has authority over the child's physical placement

- the responsibility of the child welfare agency to provide specific services to a child in the legal custody of a parent ends

In states where legal custody may not be taken by the court, the court orders the agency to have “physical custody” of the child for the purpose of a foster care placement. When the court orders the end of “physical custody,” the agency no longer has the authority over the child’s physical placement. In these states, the child agency’s placement and care authority ends and the child is considered discharged when the physical custody order ends. Any subsequent placement constitutes a removal from the child’s home even when the court continues an order for agency supervision.

Return home on a trial basis – the physical return of the child from a foster care placement to live with his or her parents or with the primary caretaker from whom the child was removed while the child welfare agency retains legal authority for the placement and care (e.g. legal custody) of the child, with the plan that the child will be legally reunified with the family after a time period in the home, if the trial period (the timeframe designated by the court or child welfare agency) is successful.

Reunification with parents or primary caretaker(s): (Reason for Discharge, AFCARS foster care element #58, value = 1) The child was returned to his or her parents or to the principal caretaker(s)’ home.

- *Returned* means the child was discharged, so the state no longer has legal authority for the placement and care of the child (a court order, temporary protective custody or voluntary placement agreement would be required to remove the child from home), or the child has been home on a trial basis (*trial home visit*) for more than six months and the timeframe for the trial home visit is unspecified.
- *Parent(s)* includes birth parents and finalized adoptive parents, whether or not they were the caregiver at the time of removal.
- *Principal caretaker(s)* includes any of the following who were the primary caretakers for the child at the time of removal: step-parents, relatives, legal guardians and other primary caregivers from whom the child was removed.

Substitute care setting – A setting providing 24-hour care that is outside the child’s home and is reportable as an AFCARS placement setting, excluding trial home visit and runaway. (AFCARS placement settings of trial home visit and runaway are considered temporary living conditions (TLC). See the CWPM and NWG’s Placement Change Definitions Implementation Guide for more information on TLCs.)

Substitute care settings include, but are not limited to, pre-adoptive homes, licensed and unlicensed relative homes, licensed non-relative homes, emergency homes, group homes, child care institutions, residential treatment facilities, maternity homes, and supervised independent living. In some circumstances, placements in detention are considered a substitute care setting and reported to AFCARS. However, if the child’s first setting is

detention the child is not considered an entry to foster care or reported to AFCARS until he or she is moved to another type of substitute care setting.

Supervision – The CWPM (AFCARS, 1.3, Question 1) directs that “Each State's data transmission must include all children in foster care, as defined in section 1355.20, for whom the State title IV-B/IV-E agency has responsibility for placement, care or supervision.” In this context, the term supervision implies that the state has placement authority. In some states, the term supervision is used to represent a status ordered by the court that does not include placement authority. For the purpose of AFCARS, only children for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care authority are reported.

Temporary living conditions – According to federal guidance, the following are temporary living conditions (TLCs) that represent a temporary absence from the child’s ongoing foster care placement and must be excluded from the count of placements (See CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 31.)

- Visitation with sibling, relative, other caretaker
- Hospitalization for medical treatment
- Hospitalization for acute psychiatric episodes or diagnosis
- Respite care
- Day or summer camps
- Trial home visits
- Runaway episodes

Most TLCs are services that require 24-hour care (not necessarily all night awake care) and that represent a temporary absence from the child’s ongoing foster care placement. These 24-hour care services are time limited, specific in purpose, and not counted as placement settings for the purpose of the federal placement stability outcome measure (CWLA, 2004).

Temporary protective custody – A status in which a child in imminent danger, or a child who has been abandoned, is removed from home and placed in the care of the child welfare agency for a brief period (< 24 hours to 96 hours, depending on the state) without the authority of the court. Depending on the state, law enforcement officers, child protective services workers, physicians or others have authority to remove a child. Some child welfare agencies may not remove a child, but are responsible for caring for the child while she or he is in protective custody status. When temporary protective custody expires, the child returns home unless a court hearing is held in which the judge determines that the child should remain in care.

Trial home visit –

1. (federal) A trial home visit occurs when the child has been in a foster care placement, but, under continuing State agency supervision, is then returned to the principal caretaker for a limited and specified period of time. If a time period is not specified the child

should be identified as having been returned home at the point at which the trial home visit exceeds six months. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.2B.7, Question 5)

Any child who is returned home on a trial home visit, for a specifically limited period of time and for whom the State agency continues to maintain placement and care responsibility or supervision should be included in AFCARS. If a child is returned home on a trial basis with no specific time period indicated, and the State agency maintains placement and care responsibility or supervision, he or she should be indicated as in foster care for a period of up to six months. After six months such child should be indicated as discharged from foster care and returned home and should not be included in subsequent AFCARS reports unless the child is returned to foster care. (CWPM: AFCARS, 1.3, Question 11)

2. (NWG) A status in which a child has been in a foster care placement, but has been returned to the parent or principal caretaker while the state agency maintains legal authority for placement and care. This status generally occurs for a limited and specified period of time as designated by the court or child welfare agency. If a time period is not specified and the trial home visit lasts at least six months, the child should be identified as having been discharged from AFCARS and returned home at the point at which the trial home visit exceeds six months.

A child who has returned home while the state agency maintains legal authority for placement and care should be included in AFCARS as being in foster care with a current placement setting of Trial Home Visit. However, if a child is returned home on a trial basis with no specific time period designated, and the state agency maintains legal authority for his or her placement and care, the child should be reported as in foster care for a period of up to six months. After six months such child should be reported as discharged from foster care and returned home and should not be included in subsequent AFCARS reports unless he or she is returned to foster care.

Voluntary placement – A status in which a child is removed from home and temporarily placed in the care of the child welfare agency for a specified period of time initiated by and/or with the consent of the child’s parent or guardian. If the child is in placement for six months, the agency must petition the court (PL 96-272). Voluntary placements generally occur when the parent or guardian is unable to provide care for the children (e.g. due to medical issues or family emergencies). The child is not in the legal custody of the child welfare agency, but the agency gains temporary placement and care responsibility until the agreement ends.

Appendix B: Sources of Additional Information

For information on AFCARS or the CFSR, including directions for calculating CFSR outcome measures, readers should refer to documentation provided by the Children's Bureau and the NRC-CWDT. See the links at the following sites:

AFCARS

Children's Bureau

Federal & State Reporting Systems, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/index.htm#afcars>

NRC-CWDT

AFCARS Tool Kit. Available online at http://www.nrcwdt.org/ta/ttt/notebook/ttt_notebook.html.

CFSR

Children's Bureau

Child Welfare Monitoring, Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr>

NRC-CWDT

2006 State Data Profile Toolkit. Available online at http://www.nrcwdt.org/cfsr/cfsr_toolkit.html.

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