

Improved Outcomes for Children Planning and Implementation Guide

NYC CHILDREN'S SERVICES
AGENCY PROGRAM ASSISTANCE

About the Guide

Over the past year Children's Services has engaged with foster care and preventive providers in a series of conversations regarding new practice approaches, their concerns, promising strategies for improvement, and lessons learned from the Improved Outcomes for Children Phase I and beyond. We have observed many fine practices and learned much from our dialogue with providers and our colleagues in Family Permanency Services and Family Support Services. This dialogue included discussions of innovative accountability measures, family-centered decision making, and critical thinking to improve key outcomes for children in foster care and families receiving preventive services. With these conversations in mind, Children's Services' Office of Agency Program Assistance has developed an IOC Planning and Implementation Guide for foster care and preventive service providers. The guide provides a conceptual framework for providers to know what to look for when implementing IOC and assessing service impact on children and families.

After a succinct review of strategic planning minutes, performance reviews and IOC implementation plans, APA has identified five key domains that impact IOC implementation and overall program functioning. The key domains identified are: Change Management, Organizational/Administrative Capacity, Continuous Quality Improvement/Self Evaluation, Safety and Risk Assessment/Decision Making, and Resource Allocation. We have provided general domain definitions and corresponding implementation and sustainability practices that may be helpful to providers. The following pages provide a detailed outline of these key areas to facilitate dialogue and promote ongoing assessment and sound decision making.

It should be noted that there certainly are other promising approaches and strategies beyond what Children's Services has outlined that can facilitate IOC implementation and foster programmatic success. It is our hope that this guide offers a general road map towards our collective goals and that the process spurs further thinking on how to work together to improve outcomes for children. Please contact your APA team if you want to discuss any of this further.

Change Management

The sound management of change is an imperative for leaders of this child welfare system. Agencies ready for organizational change share a genuine commitment to embracing new approaches and promising practices that drive programmatic success. Leadership understands that driving change entails engaging all stakeholders in the planning process, developing opportunities for strategic creativity and being responsive to the new demands and expectations that change entails. Agencies are willing to make changes at all levels of management in order to strengthen service provision.

Implementation Practices

Agency Leadership has:

- ⇒ Convened to review the purpose, scope, requirements and expectations for the IOC model and is committed to making the necessary organizational and structural changes for IOC implementation.
- ⇒ Engaged middle managers and line workers in the planning process in addition to having discussions with other agency stakeholders on how IOC will impact program operations.
- ⇒ Developed a feasible plan to guide staff in their work and decision making processes and has shown creativity and ingenuity in developing promising approaches/models that can help staff advance their work with children and families.

Sustainability Practices

Agency Leadership:

- ⇒ Frequently reviews the agency's current program model and decision making processes to ensure that it is effective and feasible.
- ⇒ Assesses, on an ongoing basis, the impact of the IOC model on children and families.
- ⇒ Uses feedback from key stakeholders to address challenges and opportunities.

Organizational/Administrative Capacity

Organizational/Administrative capacity is critical to the implementation of new strategies or policies. It entails thinking strategically - foreseeing organizational/administrative challenges and opportunities and being able to seize those opportunities to accommodate new expectations. Outcomes are aligned to the agency's training and allocation of personnel, policy and procedures development and data collection methods. In addition, it involves having a clear understanding of NYCCS/OCFS policies and systems and how these impact the agency and families served. It also includes the agency's ability to manage information.

Implementation Practices

Agency Leadership has:

- ⇒ Engaged key stakeholders including the board of directors, middle managers, and line workers around planning uniform business processes based on IOC requirements and expectations.
- ⇒ Assessed IOC's impact on staff workload including supervisors' workloads and has made changes as needed. This information is summarized in a detailed plan on staffing structure and delegation of responsibilities.
- ⇒ Evaluated the potential of hiring supportive staff or restructuring current staff roles.
- ⇒ Developed its own internal protocols process evaluations to drive case practice and overall service provision and has created processes on how the following case practices will be handled: Family team conferencing, FASP review and approval, safety and permanency assessments, case closures and supervisory practice.
- ⇒ Created its own systems for information and data management.

Sustainability Practices

Agency Leadership:

- ⇒ Continuously assesses the staffing structure, delegation of responsibilities and work overload.
- ⇒ Develops strategies for staff recruitment and retention.
- ⇒ Conducts criminal background checks for all hires and performance evaluations for line staff and managers at a minimum of once a year.
- ⇒ Applies OCFS/Children's Services standards to workload management including supervisor/case planner ratio benchmarks and case planner/case ratio benchmarks.
- ⇒ Evaluates internal policies and protocols for program administration and case practice.
- ⇒ Creates uniform decision-making structures across all programs as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- ⇒ Cultivates management information systems to ensure data accuracy and quality control.
- ⇒ Collaborates with key stakeholders in identifying promising administrative strategies for efficiency and effectiveness.
- ⇒ Uses feedback provided by families, staff, children's services and other stakeholders to strengthen service delivery.

Continuous Quality Improvement/Self Evaluation

A critical element in our work with children and families is the ongoing self evaluation of programmatic outcomes and service impact. CQI frameworks engage agencies in this learning process. While there is no single roadmap to implementing CQI, there is wide agreement that CQI is an ongoing process of identifying, describing and analyzing strengths and challenges and then testing, implementing, learning and revising solutions. Agencies involved in CQI are committed to self-evaluation and learning, are willing to take in constructive feedback, to be responsive to critical concerns pertaining to case practice, and to identify strategies that drive programmatic success.

Implementation Practices

Agency Leadership has:

- ⇒ A functioning QA/QI Department and/or a system for regularly assessing program practice and outcomes performance.

Sustainability Practices

Agency Leadership:

- ⇒ Has QA/QI systems in place to monitor key areas of service delivery such as family team conferences, case closures and rate of permanency, FASP quality, progress note quality, service planning, and staff supervision.

CQI Implementation Practices (continued)

- ⇒ Developed CQI monitoring process to assess the following areas:
 - Quality and scheduling and attendance of family team conferences.
 - Quality of case closures (PPRS) or permanency plans (foster care).
 - Appropriate approval of FASPs and FASP quality as it relates to assessment, service planning, goals, and linkage to progress notes.
 - Progress note quality – i.e., ongoing safety/risk assessments, addressing emerging issues, case planner interventions and case planner follow up.
 - Quality supervision including individual supervision and monthly review of cases.
- ⇒ Developed strategies based on this self-evaluation to strengthen practice.

CQI Sustainability Practices (continued)

- ⇒ Engages in periodic internal reviews of critical performance indicators to identify strengths and gaps in service delivery.
- ⇒ Generates and reviews data around overall case trends, length of service, SCR reporting, and overall provider case practice to inform practice.
- ⇒ Uses timeframes and case conferencing to drive assessment and service planning.
- ⇒ Collaborates and shares information on of promising practices for QA/QI and self evaluation with other agencies.
- ⇒ Develops a consistent process of assessing, planning, implementing and re-assessing to drive improvements.
- ⇒ Repeats process of evaluating strategies to drive outcomes.

Safety and Risk Assessment/Decision Making

In the interest of ensuring the safety and well-being of our children and families, provider agencies are expected to monitor safety and risk throughout the life of a case for all children and families served. This domain focuses on the agency's sense of urgency, prioritization and decision making when ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families. Agencies that conduct quality safety assessments have a clear understanding of safety/risk factors and continuously guide program staff in their ongoing safety and risk assessments of families through supervision and case-specific discussion. Further, they take proactive actions to address safety concerns and minimize risk.

Implementation Practices

- Agency Leadership has:
- ⇒ Implemented sound, strategic and immediate decision making processes to address safety and risk factors appropriately.
 - ⇒ Developed a clear plan on how they will monitor the quality of safety and risk assessments, and the action decisions based on these assessments, as part of their CQI process.
 - ⇒ Identified, if any, gaps around safety/risk training for staff and has scheduled these sessions.
 - ⇒ Recognized that home visits, including unannounced visits, are a central component of an agency's practice around case work contacts with children and families and monitors compliance as part of their CQI process.
 - ⇒ Shared policies with staff around documentation including cases where resistant families and children have not been seen and how to show diligent efforts to engage families in services.

Sustainability Practices

- Agency Leadership:
- ⇒ Schedules annual refreshers for all staff around safety and risk assessment.
 - ⇒ Develops supervisors who provide the following in regular supervision with case planners:
 - Understanding of the difference between safety and risk.
 - Guidance around conducting/documenting quality safety/risk assessments.
 - Guidance on how to identify and implement immediate interventions to address safety/risk factors given a case's presenting problems or case current circumstances.
 - Use of time to effectively drive change.

Resource Allocation

In light of the recent economic downturn, service providers have shared real concerns pertaining to the diminishing funding streams and community resources to help support children and families. Such economic constraints challenge us to revisit our program structures and be innovative in identifying strategies that strengthen service quality within the resource constraints. This domain focuses on the agency's need and access to technical, educational, spatial, financial and human resources. It also assesses the agency's efforts to identify such needs and work with key stakeholders to implement feasible strategies to serve children and families. Agencies with resource capabilities are creative in identifying resources in the communities they serve, are continuously partnering with other agencies and supports and are innovative in utilizing existing resources effectively to better serve children and families.

Implementation Practices

Agency Leadership:

- ⇒ Engaged in ongoing assessments of the agency's staffing, space and financial needs as they relate to the provision of services needed by families.
- ⇒ Ensures that annual investments of flexible dollars are effective and makes adjustments to maximize effectiveness as needed first and ongoing.
- ⇒ Participates in CPI and other collaborative efforts to share and identify resources that better serve children and families.
- ⇒ Collaborates with other service providers, Children's Services, community based organizations, mental health providers, schools, housing assistance, law enforcement agencies, and medical providers around sharing of promising practices and resources.
- ⇒ Partakes in the ongoing development and implementation of innovative resource strategies/partnerships.

Sustainability Practices

Agency Leadership:

- ⇒ Makes realistic assessments of the following areas as they apply to the implementation of IOC:
 - Human resource needs and staff workload changes.
 - Technical resource needs including training, guidance on policies and protocols, and computer applications including Connections, PROMIS, CCRS and Data Warehouse.
 - Spatial resources.
 - Financial resources.
- ⇒ Identifies key community linkages and external supports and community partnerships that will help link families to services.
- ⇒ Uses CPIs and/or other agency partnerships to share resources and develop innovative strategies for service delivery.

Five Key Principles of New York City Children's Services

- No child we come into contact with will be left to struggle alone with abuse or neglect.
- No family who needs and wants to help to keep their children safe will be left without the help it needs.
- Every child we come into contact with will get the help (s)he needs to be healthy and achieve his/her full educational and developmental potential.
- No child in our care will leave us without a caring, committed, permanent family.
- Every team member at Children's Services and each of our partner agencies can expect guidance, respect, and emotional support to achieve our goals. Every child, family, community member, and foster parent we come into contact with will be treated with the same concern and respect.