



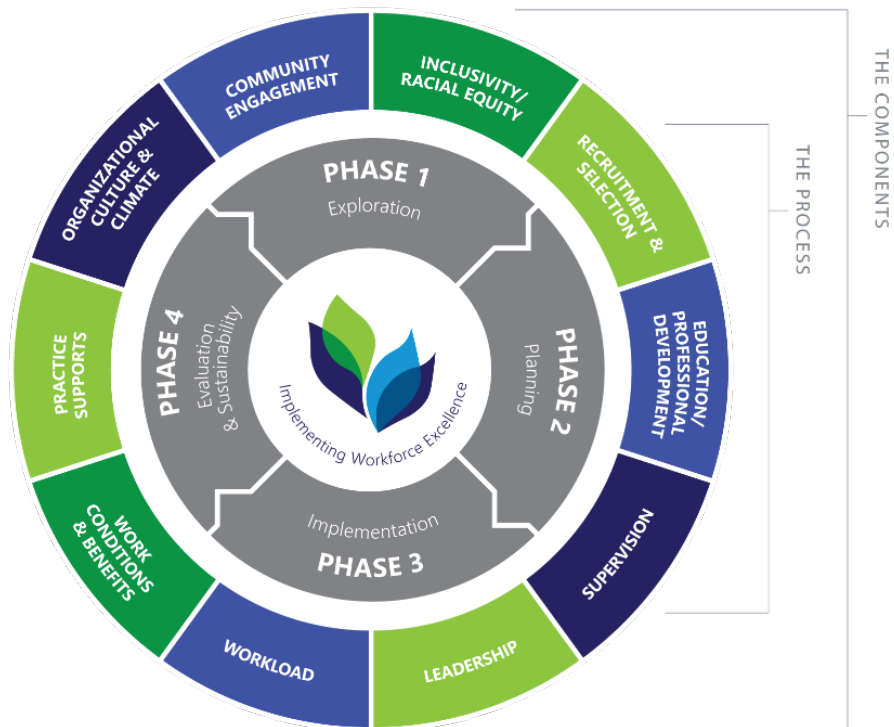
The Workforce Development Framework

Introduction

The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute’s (NCWWI) Workforce Development Framework (WDF) can guide agency leaders in the improvement of the health of their child welfare workforce. The WDF explains the key elements of an effective workforce and provides evidence-informed strategies to develop each one. The WDF’s inner circle describes the *Process* for assessing organizational workforce gaps and implementing workforce strategies, while the outer circle identifies the *Components*. Together, the *Process* and *Components* compose the WDF developed by NCWWI. Child welfare programs¹ can use this framework to develop a comprehensive approach to improving the health of their workforce.

Implementing Workforce Excellence is at the heart of the WDF diagram and signifies the importance of the process and the organization’s ultimate goal. The *Process* and *Components* support the agency’s achievement of this primary goal.

The WDF includes a number of strategies and solutions to



¹ The term “child welfare programs” includes public, private, and tribal child welfare organizations.



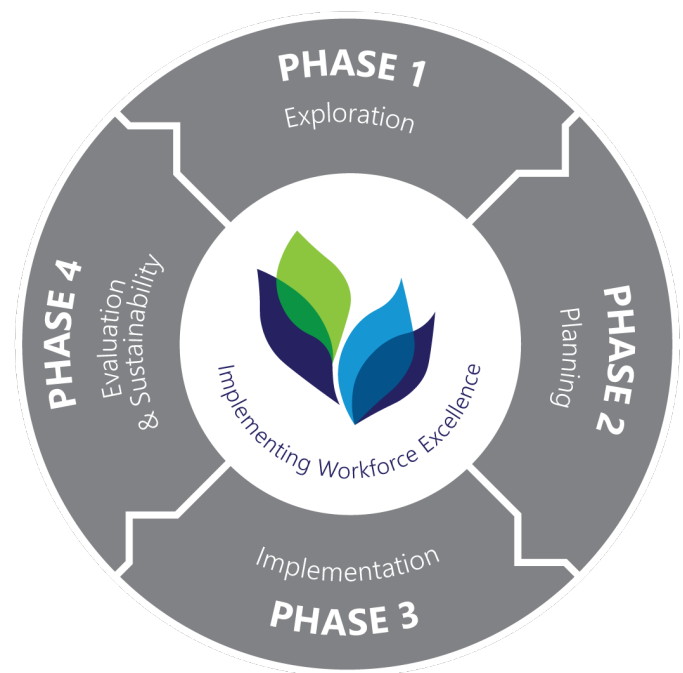
strengthen the workforce for each WDF component. Leaders may choose to implement or adapt evidence-based or promising practices—or design their own interventions that fit the structure and culture of their program.

Workforce Development: The *Process*

NCWWI defines workforce development as an interconnected set of solutions that prepares a skilled workforce to effectively meet the needs of children and families. The NCWWI model builds on implementation science frameworks from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN)² and the Permanency Innovations Initiative³ and describes a phased approach for implementing workforce change.

Child welfare leaders operate in an ever-changing “white-water” environment, requiring adaptive policy and practice approaches to meet the complex needs of children, youth, and families in communities. Leaders must use data to assess their current and future workforce needs. The WDF can help them consider the needs of their workforce holistically and implement strategies that fit their organization.

The *Process* involves four phases that together become a continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle. As programs move



² Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature* (FMHI Publication #231). Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network. Retrieved from <http://ctndisseminationslibrary.org/PDF/nirnmonograph.pdf>

³ Permanency Innovations Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project & Permanency Innovations Initiative Evaluation Team. (2013). *The PII approach: Building implementation and evaluation capacity in child welfare* (Rev. ed). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, and Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation.



through each phase, they may go back to a previous phase or work on phases simultaneously as they proceed toward desired ongoing improvements.

PHASE 1 – Exploration

During Phase I, the program explores the current situation to get an in-depth understanding of strengths, needs, and challenges affecting the workforce. This phase starts with the formation of an implementation team (or another name as appropriate) to guide the workforce development efforts. The program conducts a comprehensive organizational assessment to identify the infrastructure, operations, resources, environment, and workplace culture and climate factors influencing the well-being and functioning of the workforce. Sources may include:

- Information about current workforce demographics, turnover and staff mobility, caseload, and staff workload
- Exploration of data monitoring, tracking and reporting systems, and the accessibility of workforce data to guide decision-making
- Program structure, policies and practices, resources, and operations
- Feedback from staff, stakeholders, providers, and families about agency climate, culture, supports, and effectiveness through surveys and interviews
- Information about community demographics, available service array, and political or social changes that may impact children and families

The *Exploration* stage leads to an understanding of current and future workforce needs and analysis of workforce gaps to identify primary and secondary outcomes to address during implementation.

PHASE 2 – Planning

Program leaders who take the time to fully understand the root causes of agency gaps can select or adapt more effective solutions. An inclusive planning process involving staff at all agency levels ensures the selection of strategies and corresponding adaptations that fit the needs of the workforce, as well as the clients they serve.

During *Planning*, program leaders consider their workforce gaps across the WDF components and select and/or adapt strategies to address them. As part of the process, staff develop a Pathway to Change, linking the vision to the resources and actions that will get the program to the desired outcomes.



All strategies combine into one comprehensive plan, specifying overall objectives, concrete tasks, persons responsible, necessary resources, indicators, and time frames for completion. The plan also describes the approach to continuous quality improvement and evaluation to assess benchmark results and make adjustments as needed.

NCWWI recommends that programs use a coordinated teaming approach so that staff from all levels of the agency help to conceptualize, implement, evaluate, and adapt the workforce development approach. Agencies may choose to have different levels of teams. Top-level leadership should guide and oversee efforts and ensure that implementation drivers,⁴ such as policies, staffing resources, training, and facilitative supervision, happen. Other teams involving managers, supervisors, and frontline staff should operationalize and implement strategies, as well as provide feedback to the organization about the approach's effectiveness and appropriate adaptations as needed.

Strong communication plans during this phase will help to ensure all staff understand and buy into the workforce development efforts.

PHASE 3 – Implementation

During the *Implementation* phase, teams prepare for the upcoming changes and operationalize the planned workforce strategies. Teams will meet regularly to monitor progress for implementing the comprehensive plan. At this point, program leaders can identify adaptive challenges (those with no clear or easy solutions) and engage in conversations with staff about values, anxiety, potential loss, and uncertainty about the change. As needed, the teams may: offer support or other incentives to increase participation; address organizational structure and policy issues; and recognize and celebrate project progress.

Communication efforts during this phase focus on connecting with all staff about what to expect, how this will affect their jobs, and the anticipated effectiveness of the efforts. Programs should approach communication across the agency in a clear and consistent manner, as well as deliver that communication in ways that reach all targeted audiences. For example, relying only on email may not work, as busy staff regularly receive

⁴ Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K.A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Department of Child and Family Studies.



hundreds of emails and may not read them all. Instead, supervision and staff meetings offer good opportunities to engage staff in discussion about workforce changes and to affirm, recognize, and celebrate progress.

In this phase, teams will establish strong CQI strategies to test the effectiveness of implementation and make additional implementation or program adjustments as needed to keep projects moving forward. As appropriate, the organization adjusts supports to facilitate implementation.

PHASE 4 – Evaluation and Sustainability

Guided by the implementation plan, teams monitor and assess interventions and make adjustments as needed. When implemented as intended, leaders can measure the impact of workforce interventions on targeted outcomes such as job satisfaction, staff retention, job performance, and even client outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being. *Evaluation* planning actually begins in Phase I, where organizations identify short- and long-term outcomes and develop a measurement plan to collect the data they need to evaluate outcomes. This phase provides the opportunity to assess progress and share lessons learned and findings. As appropriate, the organization will scale successful interventions to other sites or geographic areas.

The *Process* supports a strategy for implementing workforce development strategies and evaluating outcomes. *Sustainability* means that the workforce interventions endure beyond implementation and continue to address workforce development.

Workforce Development: The *Components*

The workforce development *Components* were tailored for the child welfare workforce, though they consistently appear across multiple professions and in public and private organizations. The components selected describe the integral pieces that create a strong and thriving workforce.

While distinct, the *Components* also interconnect. For example, a program may struggle with community engagement and negative media coverage that impacts staff morale, yet a positive and supportive organizational culture and climate where staff feel respected and valued may help buffer the effects of negative public perception of the



program. Integrated components work together, such as when one state agency implemented a new trauma-informed practice model and integrated multiple workforce components to make the implementation successful, including their training, job descriptions, and competencies for frontline caseworkers and supervisors.

The following provides a brief description of each component and suggested intervention strategies.

Community Engagement

Child welfare programs must build strong, sustainable partnerships with families, community agencies and providers, courts, law enforcement, and schools to effectively prevent and address maltreatment. Child welfare is one part of a system supporting the prevention and strengthening of families, and the workforce must have the skills to convene and facilitate teams of partners and providers to work collectively to support families.

Strategies for improving *Community Engagement* include:

- Implementing a positive media campaign
- Developing a teaming approach for including community partners and providers in family assessment and case planning
- Cross-systems training around evidence-based practices for stronger collaboration and service delivery





- Inviting community members and families, youth, and foster families to meaningfully engage on advisory committees, workgroups, and the like in shared decision-making
- Hosting a Community Resource Fair to promote reciprocal education and collaboration and inform community members and families about resources and supportive services

Inclusivity & Racial Equity

A diverse and inclusive workplace strengthens the workforce and positively impacts a child welfare program's ability to provide effective services and supports. Building an organizational culture that embraces racial equity and addresses issues of inclusivity and racial equity occurs as an independent effort as well as within all other components. A diverse workforce embraced by inclusivity efforts within the child welfare program supports a series of actions and practices that demonstrates the commitment to improving disparate outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Strategies for addressing *Inclusivity and Racial Equity* include:

- Conducting an institutional analysis to identify policies, practices, perceptions, or attitudes that contribute to disparate outcomes
- Partnering with members of communities of color and tribal communities to create actions of accountability and sustainability addressing the root causes of inequities found in an institutional analysis
- Partnering with social work programs in colleges and universities serving racially and ethnically diverse students to exchange resources and implement strategies
- Offering training and professional development to staff at all levels, emphasizing reflective practices on how racism and implicit bias impact the lives of children and promoting critical thinking on how to address structural racism
- Leading, encouraging, and supporting employee racial equity work within and outside the child welfare program by addressing microaggressions, harassment, and social exclusion (micro or macro) when they occur and implementing a proactive plan addressing workplace culture and inclusivity expectations
- Investing in racial equity training and learning exchanges that provide foundational understanding about personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism and opportunities for productive dialogue



Recruitment & Selection

Finding the right person for the right job at the right time requires a concerted, multi-pronged approach. This component includes a broad range of activities associated with recruitment practices to attract a large, diverse pool of candidates and then selecting the best people using standard and inclusive protocols.

Strategies for bolstering *Recruitment and Selection* include:

- Posting announcements on websites or in newspapers intended for diverse job seekers
- Using Realistic Job Preview videos to encourage candidates to self-select on entering the applicant pool
- Screening candidates and developing competency-based, standardized interviewing processes that minimize opportunity for implicit bias to impact decision-making
- Using hiring procedures that streamline the process and avoid lengthy delays

Education / Professional Development

Education at universities and colleges generates a pool of workforce candidates with foundational knowledge, while professional development prepares newly hired staff with the knowledge and skills to do the job and seasoned staff with ongoing skill development and potential for advancement. Determining the educational preparation most relevant for a position also leads to opportunities for partnership with institutions of higher learning. Schools that seek racial equity in educational outcomes for students also contribute to a diverse workforce by successfully recruiting, supporting, preparing, and graduating a diverse student body.

Strategies for increasing *Education and Professional Development* include:

- Supporting MSW/BSW traineeship programs that offer social work education for current and future child welfare staff and creating field placement opportunities that facilitate student skill development and experiences
- Developing agency-university partnerships that provide pre-service, in-service, and ongoing professional development



- Collaborating with Human Resources to offer tuition assistance or other incentives to staff that encourage obtaining educational degrees and certifications that also support organizational goals
- Offering a variety of blended learning opportunities for the workforce, including e-learning, classroom events, simulation experiences, and webinars
- Providing coaching and mentoring to facilitate transfer of learning and career development

Supervision

Quality supervision directly contributes to employee satisfaction and the desire to stay on the job. Supervisors also play a role in how staff experience the organization as a diverse and inclusive workplace. They build clinical skills, offer emotional and social support, provide coaching and feedback, and promote a healthy team culture and climate. Through their actions, supervisors model a commitment to best practice and policies, such as meaningfully engaging families and diligently searching for family and kin or adhering to laws, such as the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Strategies for enhancing *Supervision* include:

- Providing regular, ongoing supervision using a developmental approach that promotes critical thinking
- Engaging in an ongoing process to assess and address performance at the individual, unit, team, and organizational level
- Offering coaching and mentoring to supervisors to build skills and encourage career development
- Conducting learning circles to provide peer support and develop innovative approaches to commonly shared challenges

Leadership

Effective leaders create a positive organizational climate supporting a healthy workforce that, in turn, promotes improved practice and positive outcomes for children and families. Leadership from every seat means that staff in all positions are able to manage change and identify and respond to adaptive challenges by engaging meaningfully with others. The **Leadership Competency Model** provides guidance on how to effectively lead in child welfare.



Strategies for supporting *Leadership* include:

- Practicing adaptive leadership by engaging diverse staff and points of view at all levels in decision-making and problem solving
- Offering ongoing professional development to leaders at all levels through training, expert consultation, coaching, and mentoring
- Strengthening leadership and management through a career ladder that includes selection procedures resulting in diversity and inclusion
- Building a leadership pipeline by creating equitable career progression opportunities for frontline staff and planning for succession

Workload

Staff must have a manageable workload for their well-being and work/life balance. Many factors contribute to workload, including number of cases or supervisees, professional development, and other responsibilities and job support. Child welfare staff often report that both workload and caseload are too high, which can lead to burnout and exits from the agency.

Strategies for easing *Workload* include:

- Establishing caseload guidelines or policies for units that realistically reflect the job demands
- Assessing and improving case-flow processes using Theory of Constraints or other systems to identify systemic barriers and improving limiting factors or bottlenecks
- Offering flexible equitable scheduling options such as telecommuting, compressed work weeks, and job sharing
- Teaming of cases to share the responsibilities and provide more constant coverage

Work Conditions & Benefits

Staff at all levels must receive competitive and equitable salary, compensation, and benefits and have the necessary tools and resources in the office and field to feel safe, supported, and valued as professionals and individuals. Staff need a physically and emotionally safe and secure work environment and the resources to do the job. Benefits



involve a wide range of informal and formal programs to address staff stress, respond to trauma, and encourage staff well-being.

Strategies for improving *Work Conditions and Benefits* include:

- Offering onsite or partnered programs for equitable usage of culturally responsive self-care and wellness to address the impact of secondary traumatic stress and promote resiliency
- Conducting regular compensation studies to ensure salary competitiveness
- Including childcare and elder care information and Employee Assistance Programs that assure confidential services
- Assessing staff perceptions and experiences regarding safety in the office and field and developing safety protocols and procedures and risk management procedures

Practice Supports

Child welfare agencies may adopt specific strategies for how they assess the needs of families and provide services and supports. Often these strategies build on core organizational values around engagement and service delivery for families. Other essential practice supports include sufficient resources for staff to provide efficient services and continuous quality improvement strategies to monitor program effectiveness and outcomes.

Specific strategies for developing *Practice Supports* include:

- Creating and employing a defined practice model that provides a road map for the workforce on the core principles, values, and related skills that create the organization's overall practice approach
- Displaying the agency's vision, mission, and values to remind staff of what guides practice and engaging staff in ongoing discussions about how organizational values occur in daily behaviors and decisions
- Conducting and employing a Pathway to Change that leads to the provision of services and supports that meet organizational goals and related outcomes
- Using evidence-based practice approaches such as differential response
- Improving practice efficiency, such as using the Theory of Constraints and process mapping



Organizational Culture & Climate

Programs with an organizational culture with shared values, norms, and expectations for practice result in a climate where staff feel valued, supported, and enabled to effectively serve families. Organizational climate and culture is a strong predictor of job satisfaction and retention.

Strategies for strengthening *Organizational Culture and Climate* include:

- Conducting a rigorous, structured agency self-assessment exploring staff perceptions (examined by race, ethnicity, age, gender, and position level) and identifying organizational health factors that contribute to, or impede, a positive and constructive organizational culture and climate as part of an ongoing plan for improving organizational climate
- Creating an environment that welcomes diverse people, thoughts, and ideas across the agency
- Ensuring that staff across the agency have a voice in agency, policy, procedures, and practices and encouraging leadership “from every seat”
- Ensuring that staff are physically safe in the office and in the field
- Engaging in transparent communication at all levels of the organization using various channels such as emails, newsletters, in-person meetings, and the like
- Holding formal and informal employee recognition and appreciation events to celebrate achievements and efforts
- Helping staff feel “emotionally safe” to make mistakes and voice opinions and engage in courageous conversations
- Conducting routine staff satisfaction surveys and involving staff in preparing responses to suggestions and planning for implementation of recommendations

Summary

The NCWWI Workforce Development Framework offers a process to guide the phases for developing a strong workforce in a purposeful manner, as well as showing the range of components that comprise a holistic approach. Ongoing efforts for workforce development provide an intentional approach to respond to the continually changing context of child welfare. The WDF, with its defined process and attention to the



components, provides the foundation and structure to achieve workforce excellence. NCWWI's website, [ncwwi.org](https://www.ncwwi.org), provides a wealth of resources that can support efforts for every component. For example, there are products that cover adaptive leadership, supervision, coaching, professional development, realistic job previews, university-agency partnerships, evidence-based practices, racial equity, workload, and more. If you are unable to find what you are looking for, please **contact us** for workforce development resources and support.