Instrument 2
Child Welfare Study to Enhance Equity with Data (CW-SEED)
Child Welfare Agency Advisory Focus Group Guide

CW-SEED

These focus groups will help the CW-SEED project team understand how and to what extent local child welfare agencies and their partners collect and use data to examine equity in child welfare services and family outcomes. The respondents will include members of advisory groups that work with the child welfare agency.

The average estimated public reporting burden for this collection of information is about 90 minutes per focus group. Providing information is voluntary, and all responses that are collected are kept private to the extent permitted by law.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB number for this information collection is xxxx-xxxx, and the expiration date is xx/xx/20xx.

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Key definitions

Data: For this conversation, we are defining data as information that is collected about individuals and families that come into contact with the child welfare system. Examples include information about age, gender identity, disability, and race/ethnicity, as well as descriptive information such as household structure, or the events that led to a child being placed in out-of-home care. In this study we are particularly interested in information agencies are collecting that can help assess and address equity, or inequities, in the child welfare system at the local level.

Data practices: We use the term data practices to broadly encompass all activities that involve data, including data planning, collection, access, and analysis; use of statistical tools and algorithms; and data reporting and dissemination. Unless otherwise specified, when thinking about data practices, please consider practices across the continuum of child welfare services, from prevention to addressing issues of child abuse and neglect, through permanency or other discharges (such as aging out).

Data lifecycle: The data life cycle refers to the sequence of stages a particular unit of data goes through. In CW-SEED, we consider the data life cycle to include data planning, collection, data quality assessment, data organization, analysis, equity assessment, reporting, and dissemination. Feedback could then inform subsequent rounds of data planning, collection, and so on.

Equity: The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. (Consistent with Executive Order (EO) 13985 [**Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government**])

Underserved communities: Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. (Consistent with EO13985 [**Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government**])

Note to interviewer

The following detailed script should not be read verbatim. As the interviewer, you must be familiar enough with the script to introduce the study and the focus of the discussion without reading from the script word-for-word. Please familiarize yourself thoroughly with the text before you conduct discussions.

Brief Script

1. Introduce the moderator and co-facilitator

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is [NAME,] and my colleague is [NAME]. We are from Mathematica, an independent research firm, and we are here to learn about [DATA PRACTICE OF INTEREST].

[If virtual] We especially appreciate your willingness to participate in this discussion virtually.

2. Explain the project and purpose of the discussion

I am going to start out by giving you a bit of background and talk about why we wanted to meet with you today. We are conducting the Child Welfare Study to Enhance Equity with Data (CW-SEED) project for the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This project is designed to understand how data

practices may be implemented by child welfare agencies to advance equity and address inequities. By data practices we mean the planning, collection, access, and analysis; use of statistical tools and algorithms; and data reporting and dissemination. Findings from this study are intended to identify emerging practices and lessons learned.

We are interested in hearing about the approaches, processes, challenges, and facilitators to using data practices to advance equity in your [AGENCY/ORGANIZATION]. We are interviewing leaders, supervisors, direct service and data staff from the child welfare agency, partner agencies, and community organizations about the data practices they are engaging in to advance equity. We are also speaking with members of advisory groups that work with [AGENCY/ORGANIZATION].

If virtual: You should have received a copy of the Consent Form by email. If you did not, please let us know and we will send you that information. I'm going to review the content of that form before we begin.

If in-person: We have provided a copy of the Consent Form. I'm going to review the content of that form before we begin.

3.   Privacy and recording [Read this section verbatim]

We expect this discussion to take up to 90 minutes. Before we start, I want to let you know that your participation in this discussion is voluntary. We will use the information you share with us to write a summary of what we have learned. We will not connect your name to any of your responses, so please feel free to talk openly about your opinions. We will keep your identity private to the extent permitted by law.

We will be taking notes, but we also want to record the conversation to make sure we capture the information you share accurately when we write reports. We will destroy the recording at the end of the project. If you want to say anything that you do not want recorded, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder and stop taking notes.

There are no consequences if you choose not to participate in this discussion. If you do not know the answer to a question, please let us know, and we will move on. If you prefer not to answer a question for any reason, you do not have to.

4.   Agreeing on the terms of the discussion
We value the information you will share with us, and your participation in this discussion is voluntary. Before we start, we want to share some expectations for our time together.

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. This will be an informal discussion. We are interested in learning everyone's opinion. Please respect others' opinions even if you don't agree with them.

- *If virtual focus group:* We have unmuted all of you so you can talk as if we are in a room together. We want all of you to share your thoughts, but please let one person talk at a time. If you are not speaking, you may want to mute your line. If something someone says sparks your thinking (like you agree, disagree, or want to build upon something that you hear), please speak up at any time. You can either just jump in or signal to us that you have something to say by holding up your hand in front of the video [*facilitator demonstrates*].

- *If in-person focus group:* We want all of you to share your thoughts, but please let one person talk at a time.

- *If virtual:* If it is possible for you to turn on your video, please do so. It's easier to have a conversation when we can see others' faces.

- To help us learn all that we can, I might change the subject or move ahead from time to time.

- *If focus group:* Please feel free to step away whenever you need to. There will be no formal breaks.

- *If in person focus group:* We also ask that you keep this discussion private, and do not share what we say here with anyone outside this room. Use first names only to identify yourself or others.

- *If virtual focus group:* We ask that you keep this discussion private, and do not share the details of this conversation with anyone who isn't on the call today. We encourage you to find a quiet, private place where you feel comfortable sharing and where no one will overhear.

- After our discussion, you will receive a $20 gift card to offset any costs from your participation. You will receive the gift card even if you do not get a chance to answer all of the questions.

Do you have any questions on the study?

Do you agree to participate in the study

Do we have your permission to record the conversation for notetaking purposes only?

[If focus group] First, let's start by quickly going around the room and introducing yourselves with your first name only, sharing a brief description of how you became involved with the advisory group, and how long you have been involved.

Thank you again for joining today. Now, I'll start the recorder. [*Site visitors: Only start the recorder after everyone has introduced themselves*].

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for the described information collections is xxxx-xxxx.

A. Background

1. How would you describe the purpose of the advisory group?

2. How does your advisory group work with the child welfare agency to support [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY's] efforts to address [the aspects of equity the jurisdiction is working on]?

Probe:

a. How do you share your perspectives with [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY]?

B. Data practices across the data life cycle

We understand that advancing equity in the child welfare system might involve a wide range of activities. However, for this conversation we are interested in learning about how [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY], uses data to advance equity. So, please focus your responses to our questions specifically on the role that data plays when it comes to advancing equity. We might re-focus the group on this at some points during the conversation.

3. Consider how [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY] develops plans to decide **what** data they will collect and **how** they will collect it, and how they will **use** it to advance equity. Is your advisory group involved in developing these plans? *For example, identifying priorities and needs related to data, the goals of data collection, or the types of data that are collected.*

    a. What does this look like?

4. What, if any, child welfare agency data or information is shared with your advisory group? *For example, are data shared on race/ethnicity including data from American Indian and Alaska Native families and youth, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE), disability, and geographic area?*

    a. How are these data shared with you? For example, in aggregate, broken down by demographics or other characteristics, or as a completed report for your review.

    b. Are there specific strategies you think are working well related to how these data are shared with you? If so, what are some examples?

    c. Would you change anything about how [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY] shares data with you? If so, what would you change?

    d. Is there information that is not available to you that you think should be? What information, and why?

5. Is your advisory group involved in reviewing or analyzing data that could be used to promote equity? If so, how?

    a. To what extent are you able to make suggestions or influence decisions based on the data that you have access to?

6. Is your advisory group involved in interpreting data that could be used to promote equity? If so, how?

    a. To what extent are you able to make suggestions or influence decisions based on the data that you have access to?

7. How involved are you in [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY's] use of data to understand or address equity in its services from prevention to permanency?

    a. What does this look like?

        Probe for involvement in:

        1. How data is used to identify and monitor service needs

        1. How data is used to monitor referral and access to services

        2. How data is used to monitor the quality of services

        3. How data is used to track outcomes for families

8. Is your advisory group involved in reporting and disseminating data that could be used to promote equity? If so, how?

    By "reporting," we mean providing the results of reviewing and analyzing data. By "disseminating," we mean sharing the results with others.

    a. Are there any specific strategies you think are working well? If so, what are some examples?

    What could be improved?

9. Consider how the child welfare agency that you work with develops plans to decide how they will **use** the data that they collect and analyze to advance equity. Is your advisory group involved in developing these plans?

    a. What does this look like?

10. Thinking about the data that [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY] collects, how well does that data address [the aspects of equity the jurisdiction is working on, such as race/ethnicity or SOGIE], from your perspective?

    a. Are there specific strategies about data collection that [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY] is implementing that you think are working well? If so, what are some examples?

C. Opportunities at agency and system levels

11. Thinking about how data might be used to help advance equity in [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY], what improvements would you like to see at the [state/territory, tribal, or local] level? *Specify question based on the level at which the agency operates–state, territory, tribal or local.*

    For example, soliciting and incorporating ideas from community members about what information would help them understand inequities and help come up with ideas for addressing them, policies to make it easier to share data, procedures for using best practices when collecting data from families, workforce development and training, or other topics.

    a. What would you see, hear, or feel as you envision this?

    b. What are the barriers or challenges that might prevent such improvements from happening?

    c. What assets or resources are there in your community that could help make these improvements happen?

12. Thinking about how data might be used to help advance equity in [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY], what improvements would you like to see at a national level? *For example, changes to federal policies, funding, collaboration/coordination across sectors, resources on best practices for data collection, data use, training, or other topics.*

    a. What would you see, hear, or feel as you envision this?

    b. What are the barriers or challenges that might prevent such improvements from happening?

    c. What are the assets or resources that could help make these improvements happen?

13. In what ways do you see yourselves being part of these improvements?

14. Would you change anything about how the [CHILD WELFARE AGENCY] engages your advisory group to support their efforts to address equity? If so, what would you change?

D. Interview wrap-up

15. Those are all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else that you would like to share about how child welfare data can be used to understand and advance equity?

16. Are there any resources that you would like to share to elaborate on anything we discussed today?

Thank you for sharing your experiences with us today.