

State Court Improvement Program 2026 Annual Self-Assessment Report

This self-assessment is intended as an opportunity for Court Improvement Programs (CIPs) to review progress on CIP projects, joint program planning and improvement efforts with the child welfare agency, and the ability to integrate (Continuous Quality Improvement) CQI successfully into practice. The self-assessment process is designed to help shape and inform ongoing strategic planning and should include meaningful discussion with the multi-disciplinary task force and others as needed and candid reflection of key CIP staff. The self-assessment is primarily focused on assessing efforts undertaken to date while the strategic plan maps out efforts going forward. Questions are designed to solicit candid responses that help CIPs apply CQI and identify support that may be helpful.

I. CQI Analyses of Required Projects

It is ok to cut and paste responses from last year, updating according to where you currently are in the process, and, if you do so, highlight text to show anything that is new. Complete the descriptions for CQI stages you have progressed through or are in. Though some upcoming stages will be inapplicable, consider whether your team may have preliminary thoughts that are relevant to those questions. Please also indicate if you need assistance from your federal or Capacity Building partners in a particular phase.

Joint Project with the Child Welfare Agency:

Project title:

Provide a concise description of the joint project selected in your jurisdiction.

Identify the specific safety, permanency, or well-being outcome(s) this project is intended to address. If this effort is linked to any agency measures, e.g. CFSR measures, please note those.

Approximate date that the project began:

Which stage of the CQI process best describes the current status of project work?

How was the need for this project identified? (Phase I)

What is the theory of change for the project? (Phase II).

Have you identified a solution/intervention that you will implement? If yes, what is it? (Phase III)

If your solution/intervention includes training, please provide a title and brief description of any training(s).

What has been done to implement the project? (Phase IV)

How are you or how do you intend to monitor the progress of the project? (Phase V). *Be specific in terms of what type of evaluation (e.g., fidelity or outcome, comparison group, etc.) and what results you have, if any. If you have already evaluated your effort, what do the data show, and how did you use these data to modify or expand the project?*

Have there been notable factors that delayed or accelerated this effort?

What assistance or support would be helpful from the Center for Legal and Judicial Innovation and Advancement (CLJIA) or the Children's Bureau to help move the project forward?

Hearing Quality Project:

Project title:

Provide a concise description of the hearing quality project selected in your jurisdiction.

Approximate date that the project began:

Which stage of the CQI process best describes the current status of project work?

How was the need for this project identified? (Phase I)

What is the theory of change for the project? (Phase II)

Have you identified a solution/intervention that you will implement? If yes, what is it? (Phase III)

If your solution/intervention includes training, please provide a title and brief description of any training(s).

What has been done to implement the project? (Phase IV)

How are you or how do you intend to monitor the progress of the project? (Phase V). *Be specific in terms of what type of evaluation (e.g., fidelity or outcome, comparison group, etc.) and what results you have, if any. If you have already evaluated your effort, what do the data show, and how did you use these data to modify or expand the project?*

Have there been notable factors that delayed or accelerated this effort?

What assistance or support would be helpful from the CLJIA or the Children's Bureau to help move the project forward?

Quality Legal Representation Project:

Project title:

Provide a concise description of the quality legal representation project selected in your jurisdiction.

Approximate date that the project began:

Which stage of the CQI process best describes the current status of project work?

How was the need for this project identified? (Phase I)

What is the theory of change for the project? (Phase II)

Have you identified a solution/intervention that you will implement? If yes, what is it? (Phase III)

If your solution/intervention includes training, please provide a title and brief description of any training(s).

What has been done to implement the project? (Phase IV)

How are you or how do you intend to monitor the progress of the project? (Phase V). *Be specific in terms of what type of evaluation (e.g., fidelity or outcome, comparison group, etc.) and what results you have, if any. If you have already evaluated your effort, what do the data show, and how did you use these data to modify or expand the project?*

Have there been notable factors that delayed or accelerated this effort?

What assistance or support would be helpful from the CLJIA or the Children's Bureau to help move the project forward?

II. Additional Projects, Activities, and Training.

For questions 1-13, provide a **concise** description of work completed or underway to date in FY 2026 in the topical subcategories below where applicable.

1. Training Overall

Did you have any significant training efforts not related to a particular project (those are now integrated under 2 to 14 below)? If yes, please describe.

On average, how many training events do you hold per year?

What is your best prediction for the number of attorneys, judges, or other legal system community members that will participate in training annually?

The Family First Prevention Services Act amended the Social Security Act adding an eligibility criterion for the training of judges and attorneys on the congregate care provisions of the Act. See the highlighted portion below.

(1) IN GENERAL.— In order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section, a highest State court ... *shall provide for the training of judges, attorneys, and other legal personnel in child welfare cases on Federal child welfare policies and payment limitations with respect to children in foster care who are placed in settings that are not a foster family home...*—

Have you been involved in planning with the agency on implementing Family First? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please describe how the CIP has been involved.

Have you developed/been developing your Family First judicial training plan? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please describe what you have done.

2. Data Projects. Data projects include any work with administrative data sets (e.g, AFCARS, CCWIS), data dashboards, data reports, fostering court improvement data, case management systems, and data sharing efforts.

Do you have a data project/activity? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)
(add narrative here)		

(a) Do you have data reports that you consistently view? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(b) How are these reports used to support your work?

- 3. Legal Representation.** Legal representation projects include any efforts you have made to improve the quality of legal representation for parents, children and youth, the agency, or others. List projects here if you have any in addition to the required project.

Do you have (an additional) legal representation project/activity? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

- 4. Hearing Quality.** Hearing quality projects include any efforts you have made to improve the quality of child welfare hearings, including court observation/assessment projects, process improvements, specialty/pilot court projects, projects related to court orders or title IV-E determinations, mediation, or appeals. List projects here if you have any in addition to the required project.

Do you have (an additional) hearing quality project/activity? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

- 5. Improving Timeliness of Hearings or Permanency Outcomes.** Timeliness and permanency projects include any activities or projects meant to improve the timeliness of case processing or achievement of timely permanency. This could include general timeliness, focus on continuances or appeals, working on improvement in specific outcomes such as around reunification, guardianship, adoption or a focus on APPLA and older youth.

Do you have a timeliness or permanency project/activity? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

- 6. Engagement & Participation of Parties.** Engagement and participation of parties includes any efforts centered around youth, parent, foster family or caregiver, or relative engagement, limited English proficiency, or other efforts to increase presence and engagement at the hearing.

Do you have an engagement or participation of parties project/activity? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

- 7. Well-Being.** Well-being projects include any efforts related to improving the well-being of children and youth. Projects could focus on education, early childhood development, health, trauma, social network support, cultural connections, or other well-being related topics.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on well-being? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

8. ICWA/Tribal collaboration. These projects could include any efforts to enhance state and tribal collaboration, state and tribal court agreements, data collection and analysis including of Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) practice.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on ICWA or tribal collaboration? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

9. Preventing Sex Trafficking. These projects could include work around domestic child sex trafficking, a focus on runaway youth, collaboration with other agencies around this topic, data collection and analysis, data sharing, or other efforts to fully implement these sections of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act into practice.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on preventing sex trafficking/runaways? ☐ Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

10. Normalcy/Reasonable and Prudent Parent. These projects could include any work around normalcy or the reasonable and prudent parent standard or practices, collaboration with other agencies around this topic, data collection and analysis, data sharing, or other efforts to fully implement these sections of the Preventing Sex and Strengthening Families Act into practice.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on normalcy/reasonable prudent parenting? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

11. Prevention. Prevention projects include work around preventing child maltreatment including primary prevention (preventing maltreatment from occurring in the first place), secondary, and tertiary prevention.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on prevention? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

12. Safety. Safety projects are those that focus on decision-making around safety including decision-making practices in substantiation, removal, family time/visitation, and decisions about safety in out of home placements.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on safety? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)
	Choose an item.	
	Choose an item.	

13. Continuity Planning. Continuity planning includes prevention and recovery planning for threats such as public health crises, natural disasters, or cyber-attacks. Please describe efforts around technology support for remote hearings or legal representation, developing guidance or protocols, coordinating with other agencies, or otherwise ensuring approaches are in place to ensure needed services are able to continue through any major disruptions.

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

14. Other. Please list any projects you have that do not fit in any of the categories above.

Do you have any other projects/activities? ☐Yes ☐No

Project Title and Description	Project Sub-category	CQI Stage (if applicable)

15. Other Notable Activities. Are there any other activities the CIP has been engaged in not included above that you believe would be important to share with partners including those in the state, partner tribes, the Children’s Bureau, or the Center for Legal and Judicial Innovation and Advancement?

16. Materials. From any of the work described above, do you have any documents or other materials that feel would be helpful to share with the national CIP community? For example, research, innovative approaches, compelling outcome data, etc. Please link here or note and include in your submission. If these relate to your three required projects, please indicate that here.

III. CIP Collaboration in Child Welfare Planning and Improvement Efforts

1. Please describe how the CIP was involved with the state’s Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)/Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) due June 30, 2027.

Does the CFSP include any of the following:

☐ the CIP/Agency Joint Project

- ☐ the Hearing Quality Project
- ☐ the Legal Representation Project
- ☐ other judicial strategies
- ☐ other attorney strategies

If yes, please describe.

2. Please describe how the CIP was or will be involved in the most recent/upcoming title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review in your state.

A) Only states that will be participating in round 4 of the CFSR and PIP in your state this reporting year are required to complete the questions in this section. However, working to organize meaningful engagement of a broad array of the legal and judicial community and to support collaboration with other system partners is useful for other major CIP projects as well, so others may wish to consider these with your teams. See the PI section II(a)(iii) for further explanation.

1. Regarding engaging the legal and judicial community with a broad array of perspectives in CFSR/PIP processes:

- i) What barriers do you foresee in engaging the community at an appropriate breadth and depth?

- ii) What do you believe will facilitate engaging the community at an appropriate breadth and depth?

2. Are there other leadership structures for the legal and judicial community and how can those facilitate the processes around the CFSR/PIP?

3. How will legal and judicial community involvement in the CFSR/PIP be managed? e.g. CIP is the lead, via the Multi-Disciplinary Task force, a sub-committee established by the child welfare agency, etc.

4. What court, judicial, or attorney data could be integrated into the CFSR/PIP process?

5. How might participation vary in stages of the process?

6. What feedback loops will be needed to keep the participants informed?

7. What supports do you need from the Children’s Bureau or the Centers for Innovation and Advancement for participating in the CFSR/PIP?

B) Collaboration with the Child Welfare Agency in General

1. What strategies or processes are in place in your state that you feel are particularly effective in supporting joint child welfare program planning and improvement?

2. What barriers exist in your state that make effective joint child welfare program planning and improvement challenging?

3. Regarding collaboration on training with the child welfare agency...

a. Regarding training needs across the child welfare system, what is your process to work with the agency to consider how to maximize the impact of complementary resources and ensure there is no undue duplication of efforts?

b. Does the state child welfare agency currently offer professional partner training to judges, attorneys, and court personnel as part of its Title IV-E Training Plan?

If yes, please provide a brief description of what is provided and how.

If no, have you met with child welfare agency leadership to discuss and explore utilizing professional partner training for judges, attorneys and court personnel?

4. Title IV-E legal representation.

Please provide updates, as applicable, for types of Title IV-E Legal Representation you have supported in your state:	
Child Welfare Agency	
Children	

Please provide updates, as applicable, for types of Title IV-E Legal Representation you have supported in your state:	
Parents	
Kin	
Indian Child Welfare Act	
Tribe(s) via IV-E agreement(s)	
Other Civil Legal Representation	
IV-E administrative support overall	
Other	

C) Other Collaborative Activities

Please briefly describe (or cross reference if noted elsewhere) any significant collaborative activities with other child serving partners (e.g. employment, education, housing, mental health substance misuse providers).

D) To facilitate collaborations, partnerships and technical assistance, please indicate where your Self-Assessment will be published or a provide a point of contact to request a copy.

IV. CQI Current Capacity Assessment

1. Has your ability to integrate CQI into practice changed this year? If yes, what do you attribute the change to?

2. Do you have any of the following resources to help you integrate CQI into practice?
 - ☐ CIP staff with data expertise
 - ☐ CIP staff with evaluation expertise
 - ☐ CIP staff with CQI expertise
 - ☐ CIP staff with lived expertise
 - ☐ a University partnership
 - ☐ a statewide court case management system
 - ☐ Contracts with external individuals or organizations to assist with CQI efforts

☐ Other resources: _____

a. Do you record your child welfare court hearings? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, are they ☐ audio ☐ video

b. Can you remotely access your court case management system? *For example, Odyssey systems often allow remote access to case files.*

☐ Yes ☐ No

c. What court case management software does your state use? If multiple, please indicate the most common:

d. Have you employed any new technology or applications to strengthen your work?

e. Do any of these systems include an electronic filing system?

3. Considering the phases of change management and how you integrate these into practice, are there phases of the process (e.g., Phase I-needs assessment, Phase II-theory of change) that you struggle with integrating more than others?

4. Is there a topic or practice area that you would find useful from the Center for Legal and Judicial Innovation and Advancement? Be as specific as possible (e.g., data analysis, how to evaluate trainings, more information on research about quality legal representation, how to facilitate group meetings, etc.)

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of Evidence

Evidence-based practice – evidence-based practices are practice that have been empirically tested in a rigorous way (involving random assignment to groups), have demonstrated effectiveness related to specific outcomes, have been replicated in practice at least one, and have findings published in peer reviewed journal articles.

Empirically-supported- less rigorous than evidence-based practices are empirically-supported practices. To be empirically supported, a program must have been evaluated in some way and have demonstrated some relationship to a positive outcome. This may not meet the rigor of evidence-base, but still has some support for effectiveness.

Best-practices – best practices are often those widely accepted as good practice. They may or may not have empirical support as to effectiveness, but are often derived from teams of experts.

Definitions for CQI Phases

Identifying and Assessing Needs – This phase is the earliest phase in the process, where you are identifying a need to be addressed. The assessing needs phase includes identifying the need, determining if there is available data demonstrating that this a problem, forming teams to address the issue.

Develop theory of change—This phase focuses on the theorizing the causes of a problem. In this phase you would identify what you think might be causing the problem and develop a “theory of change”. The theory of change is essentially how you think your activities (or intervention) will improve outcomes.

Develop/select solution—This phase includes developing or selecting a solution. In this phase, you might be exploring potential best-practices or evidence-based practices that you may want to implement as a solution to the identified need. You might also be developing a specific training, program, or practice that you want to implement.

Implementation – the implementation phase of work is when an intervention is being piloted or tested. This includes adapting programs or practices to meet your needs, and developing implementation supports.

Evaluation/assessment – the evaluation and assessment phase includes any efforts to collect data about the fidelity (process measures: was it implemented as planned?) or effectiveness (outcome measures: is the intervention making a difference?) of the project. The evaluation assessment phase also includes post-evaluation efforts to apply findings, such as making changes to the program/practice and using the data to inform next steps.

Paperwork Reduction Act

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-13), 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 control number for this collection is 0970-0307 and it expires 02/28/2026. The estimated time to complete the Self-Assessment is 40 hours