A Guide to the CCWIS Model Request for Proposals

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# Part One: An Introduction to the Model RFP Project

## The Promise of CCWIS

With the advent of the Federal government’s Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) program, states and tribes have access to a significant new funding source for revamping or replacing their aging child welfare information systems. CCWIS is much more than a funding stream, though: it also brings a fresh vision of how technology can drive positive outcomes for children, youth and families.

CCWIS fundamentally changes the ground rules under which Federal matching funds are made available to states and tribes. Rather than prescribe detailed technical requirements that systems must adhere to, CCWIS promotes a more programmatic and practice-centered vision—a vision sharply focused on the value of reliable, timely and meaningful data. Without high-quality data, caseworkers can’t make efficient decisions for families, policymakers can’t assess what’s working economically, and administrators can’t identify effective programs in the complex world of child welfare practice. This fundamental truth is embedded in CCWIS.

Through its encouragement of outcomes-driven practice models and forward-thinking technology, CCWIS represents an important inflection point in the evolution of child welfare practice. The new emphasis on data, when combined with a more flexible procurement model, poses both challenges and opportunities for states and tribes starting down the CCWIS path.

In keeping with its mission of promoting positive outcomes for children and families, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has funded the creation of a CCWIS Model Request for Proposals that agencies can use, in whole or in part, as a resource in planning their CCWIS transitions. The document is made available at no charge to all interested parties. States, tribes and procurement contractors are encouraged to freely borrow language and ideas from the Model RFP as they develop their own RFPs.

The Model RFP includes specimen language on such topics as:

* CCWIS requirements and mandated components
* Best practices in outcome-driven, evidence-influenced program design
* How to incorporate data-driven practice models into a CCWIS solution
* User-centric and family-centric design
* Current best practices in solution architecture, information security and cloud hosting
* Interoperability strategies, including integration of CCWIS-required data sources
* Incorporating mobile components
* Effective CCWIS contracting and implementation approaches

The Model RFP does not take a point of view regarding the dominant solution models currently found in the marketplace. The intent is to provide useful, well-grounded guidance to states and tribes whether they lean toward a COTS approach, a platform-based approach, a custom-build approach, or a hybrid. Some agencies may opt to leave the choice of solution model to the bidder.

## Working Principles and Approach

To maintain strict independence, the Model RFP team based its work solely on publicly-available sources. Specifically, it did not communicate with software, service or procurement vendors with a history of bidding on child welfare opportunities.

The team did consult with an array of independent experts in technology, child welfare practice, CCWIS and government procurement, all with long experience in their respective fields. This research was supplemented with an in-depth analysis of past RFPs aimed at identifying best and worst practices, both in child welfare IT procurement and in child welfare practice, with a special focus on extracting innovative ideas that could be leveraged by future CCWIS RFP writers. For an expanded view, the team also looked at promising RFPs from outside the child welfare world. The Model RFP embodies dozens of best practices uncovered in the course of this meta-analysis.

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) provided valuable input to the project and served as a primary reviewer of the documents produced. APHSA’s contribution is gratefully acknowledged by the authors.

## Intended Audiences

Taken together, the CCWIS Model Request for Proposals and this companion Guide are primarily intended for teams charged with planning a state’s CCWIS procurement strategy and then creating the procurement documents to execute on it. Often such teams will include a mix of government staff and consultants, with expertise in child welfare, procurement, contracting, IT, project management and other areas. Some team members will have responsibility for defined deliverables such as APDs and RFPs, while others will be in a more consultative role.

As a comprehensive template for creation of state-specific CCWIS RFPs, the CCWIS Model RFP document is aimed primarily at actual RFP writers and subject matter experts advising them. This Guide to the CCWIS Model RFP, on the other hand, discusses topics that are likely to be of interest to all stakeholders. Part One introduces the Model RFP project and outlines our working procedures and assumptions. Part Two, Procurement Strategy in the CCWIS Era, explores ways in which states can make the most of CCWIS and steer clear of obstacles that have impeded child welfare IT projects in the past. We also introduce our Goals, Guideposts and Constraints model, designed to improve upon the classic requirements-based RFP structure. We recommend that all parties read Parts One and Two.

Part Three is a section-by-section guide to the Model RFP in which we share best practices across dozens of topic areas, explain the reasoning behind specific RFP provisions and suggest questions RFP teams should ask themselves as they formulate their own approach. We expect that readers of Part Three will gravitate to the topics most aligned with their own subject matter expertise, be that in technology, procurement, project management or child welfare.

## A Note on Terminology

CCWIS provides a regulatory framework and funding for child welfare IT projects undertaken by both states and tribes. According to data provided by the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF), however, none of the covered tribes currently plans to issue a CCWIS procurement.[[1]](#footnote-1) To enhance readability, this document and the Model RFP therefore refer to the procuring entity as a State.

This said, the actual Model RFP provides a simple way for a tribe—or any other entity, such as a county-administered child welfare agency—to adjust RFP language to reflect its unique identity. Please see the discussion, on page 115, of how we employ Word document properties to facilitate customization of jurisdiction-specific content.

## Intended and Permitted Uses of the CCWIS Model RFP

The CCWIS Model Request for Proposals is distributed as a freestanding Word document, to be read and explored in conjunction with the document you’re now reading, A Guide to the CCWIS Model Request for Proposals.

The intent of the Model RFP project is to provide states and other entities with an immediately usable template that can serve as a source of ideas—as well as actual RFP text—in drafting their CCWIS procurement materials. The broader intent is to foster procurement approaches that lead to better results not only in procurement, but also in the conduct of CCWIS implementation projects and in the ultimate quality of CCWIS solutions.

We recognize throughout the Model RFP and this Guide that the current market includes a complex mix of solution models, vendor alliances and implementation methodologies. New approaches are being tested constantly. Because one size does not fit all, we do not take a position on the desirability of any particular paradigm; in fact, the Model RFP frequently offers alternative language to reflect various approaches to the same topic (e.g., Agile versus traditional implementation methodologies, or Platform vs. COTS vs. Custom Build solution models). When we do discuss best practices or the advantages and disadvantages of a particular approach, it is only to help states spur a meaningful internal discussion on what it should seek from bidders in its CCWIS RFP. Ultimately a specific state’s RFP must reflect its own preferred approaches, needs, capabilities and situation.

Far from asserting exclusive copyright to the CCWIS Model RFP, therefore, we encourage others to borrow from it freely, adapting content as appropriate to their needs. We do not expect the Model RFP to serve any state’s needs without modification; accordingly, we do not require that the document be carried intact into an actual RFP. RFP writers are encouraged to take what works for them, alter it as needed, and ignore elements that aren’t relevant to their needs.

In keeping with this vision, both this document and the CCWIS Model Request for Proposals are released into the public domain as of October 1, 2020 under the terms of the Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal License. For a full statement of license terms, please see <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/legalcode>. The license is also reprinted as Supplement 4 of this document.

Please see Supplement 5, LIMITATION OF LIABILITY, for additional important legal provisions regarding the permitted uses of the two documents.

## How to Use This Guide in Planning a CCWIS Procurement

This document has four parts:

Part One provides background on the project, information on how to work with the companion CCWIS Model RFP document, and a discussion of key assumptions behind our approach.

Part Two discusses various aspects of procurement strategy particular to the transition from S/TACWIS to CCWIS.

Part Three is a section-by-section guide to the CCWIS Model RFP document. Where appropriate, we explain the reasoning behind each RFP provision and provide background materials meant to assist RFP authors in deciding whether and how to use and customize our suggested RFP text. Such background materials include, among other things, policy research, references to CCWIS and other relevant statutes, our research-informed view of best practices for the topic at hand, and self-assessments an agency can use to flush out considerations not covered in our model.

The Supplement contains information primarily of interest to working staff charged with actually authoring procurement documents, as described below. It also includes information on the project’s history and contributors.

## Tailoring the Model RFP for Your Jurisdiction

To make it as easy as possible for RFP writers to adapt the Model RFP for their use, the text contains placeholders for information that is specific to the jurisdiction—the name of the primary child welfare agency, for example. We also use typographic conventions to indicate alternative words or phrases that might be chosen to reflect the specific needs of the procuring entity. As you review the Model RFP in conjunction with this Guide, look for these elements:

* «Chevrons» and a green font color, used to indicate items that need to be filled in with jurisdiction-specific information. As an example, the cover page includes the following:

All questions about this procurement should be addressed to:

«Procurement administrative contact name and email»

In cases where a numerical value is required, this is indicated with the special placeholder «n».

* [Square brackets], again in a green font, used toindicate alternative language reflecting different options a given RFP author might want to consider. The alternative texts are separated with a vertical bar (|). For example:

Proposals [may | may not] be submitted electronically.

In some cases we also use square brackets to indicate freestanding elements (as opposed to alternative text) that might form part of a list. Where necessary, items in square brackets are nested to indicate options within a larger option. For example:

[A custom-built solution [developed with Agile methodology]]

A good rule of thumb is that anything in green is a placeholder for content your team will supply.

Important: Certain global or frequently referenced items, such as the name of the procuring agency and the jurisdiction, are handled through the use of Microsoft Word document properties rather than placeholders. This approach is described in the Supplement, page 115.

## For Further Information and Assistance

Technical assistance is available, through a network of experienced consultants, to states (and their contractors) seeking to incorporate the Model RFP into their procurement process.

For more information, please contact the project team at [CCWIS@humanservicestech.com](mailto:CCWIS@humanservicestech.com).

# Part Two: Procurement Strategy in the CCWIS Era

## The First Decision: One Procurement or Several?

Before embarking on a CCWIS procurement process, a state must make a fundamental decision: will it issue a single procurement covering all aspects of the CCWIS solution, or a set of smaller procurements, each covering some aspect of CCWIS functionality or services? Correspondingly, will the project be carried out under a single large contract awarded to a single prime contractor, or under a series of smaller contracts that may be awarded to multiple, unrelated vendors? With its emphasis on modular, reusable solutions, CCWIS gives states considerably more flexibility in how they approach system modernization—they need only decide on a path to follow.

The S/TACWIS Backdrop

As of this writing, most CCWIS procurements have followed the traditional model in which a large, multi-million-dollar contract is awarded to a single large vendor, usually a household-name system integrator. Since CCWIS opens the door to an alternative model, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the pros and cons of each approach.

The traditional model for S/TACWIS procurements typically involves five entities:

* The state or tribe
* A contractor retained to assist the procuring agency in creating planning documents, including federally required Advance Planning Documents and sometimes the RFP itself
* A prime contractor selected to deliver software and various types of professional services, sometimes including maintenance and operation services to be delivered after the system goes live
* One or more subcontractors working through the prime
* An Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V) vendor charged with project oversight

This traditional model has encouraged awards to large system integrators capable of marshaling the diverse services called for and willing to stand in front of smaller subcontractors who might not be able to absorb on their own the complexity, risk, overheads or liability exposure of a large project. Most large bids include subcontractors that enable the prime contractor to qualify for set-aside requirements or incentives, an arrangement that can infuse diversity, innovation and a deep knowledge of the local landscape into a project.

Advantages of the Traditional Model

In principle, projects anchored by a single large contractor can benefit from the contractor’s accumulated subject matter expertise and the various technical assets it brings to bear. While lower-level staff may not have child welfare expertise per se, project leads almost always do, and senior staff may have prior career experience working in government. In addition, most large system integrators bring sophisticated delivery methodologies that reflect lessons learned over many years and many complex projects. All these factors can, when properly leveraged, contribute to the success of a child welfare IT project.

Having a single point of responsibility for the entire project can simplify certain aspects of project reporting and management while maintaining clear lines of accountability. Given the day-to-day challenges of managing a public child welfare agency with all its myriad complexities—too often a crisis of competing priorities—the ability to streamline oversight of a large IT project by working with a single prime contractor can bring certain efficiencies.

Working with a large contractor can also be helpful—at least initially—if a project runs into trouble. With a large organization behind them, project executives may be able to tap into additional resources that have the know-how to resolve issues before they derail the project. Large companies well understand the reputational risks associated with a troubled project; for the state, escalation to a firm’s senior leadership can get quick results. States may also perceive that they have more contractual leverage with a large firm that is able to post a substantial performance bond or provide similar performance guarantees.

Disadvantages of the Traditional Model

For all its apparent advantages, the single-contractor model is not the only way to control project risk and promote a successful project outcome.

While the received wisdom might be that having one large prime contractor accept full legal responsibility for all aspects of project delivery is a safer bet for the state, experience has not always borne this out. A single contractor is also a single point of failure; by staking every facet of a complex project on one company, the state exposes itself to significant risk. The history of S/TACWIS is littered with projects that exceeded their budget or timeline because the state found itself locked in with a single large vendor that could not deliver as promised. While a dispassionate analysis might show that poor decisions were made on both sides, the sheer magnitude of delays and budgetary overruns in these projects suggests that the underlying delivery model might have been unsound from the start.

States taking the single-contractor route, moreover, can actually find themselves more exposed, not less, when things don’t go as planned. Large firms, which tend to be risk-averse and legally sophisticated, may well have negotiated away contractual protections the state wished it had once a project gets into trouble.

There are other, non-financial concerns with the old model. Reliance on one large prime contractor, for example, may stifle innovation. While bringing in subcontractors might seem to inject fresh ideas into the project team, the reality is that not all prime contractors welcome such inputs. Subcontractors are often viewed as nothing more than a source of staff augmentation, with little or no input into the solution they’ve been hired to help build. Small subcontractors have little leverage in the context of a large team, and generally must fall into step with the prime contractor’s procedures, preexisting tools and products and overall solution approach.

A New Emphasis on Modularity

The system integrator model reflected, in large part, the S/TACWIS orientation toward monolithic solutions designed to support the full scope and the diverse needs of child welfare operations. The scale of such a solution was seen to necessitate a vendor of commensurate scale.

Under CCWIS this has changed dramatically. CCWIS places a strong emphasis on modular solutions, potentially comprised of multiple, loosely-coupled applications that exchange data bidirectionally using widely accepted interoperability technologies. This shift in vision is leading some states to reconsider whether the traditional delivery model, based on a single large prime contractor, is the best or only path toward a successful implementation.

In the Medicaid arena, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have long recognized the advantages of the modular approach as well as the risks associated with the traditional monolithic approach that stakes everything on a single large vendor. In fact, CMS altered its policy to allow for certification of systems (with attendant release of matching funds) on a modular basis rather than only when all functionality had been delivered. Through this change, states would “be able to leverage the modular approach to optimize project design for agility, interoperability and other desirable attributes as well as associated acquisition approaches to avoid prolonged development efforts and vendor lock-in.” [[2]](#footnote-2) With its emphasis on modular, non-comprehensive solutions, CCWIS mirrors this paradigm shift.

In developing its CCWIS procurement strategy, we encourage states to carefully weigh the pros and cons of issuing a set of smaller, modular procurements as opposed to a single comprehensive one. By bringing a wider array of vendors into the mix and decomposing a complex project into manageable pieces, the state encourages innovation and effectively spreads its risk. While there is certainly nothing that says a large project executed by a single, large vendor can’t succeed, CCWIS gives states the freedom to contemplate alternatives they simply could not under S/TACWIS.

Preparing for a Modular Procurement and Project

If a multiple-procurement, multiple-vendor strategy is pursued, certain project management considerations deserve special attention.

* *Effective segmentation* For a multiple-procurement approach to result in a coherent, solid CCWIS solution, thought must be given to how to break the work down efficiently and effectively. From a functional perspective, some business functions may lend themselves to being split off as separate projects—Intake, for example, or Licensing. Others will be much harder to tease out (e.g., the many component parts that make up ongoing Case Management). There are both technical considerations (e.g., harmonization of data models and integration of new work into the legacy system during the development period) and practice considerations (e.g., not hobbling worker efficiency by creating a pastiche of very old legacy visuals/workflow and modern elements) to analyze.  
    
  One quite valid consideration is whether the agency’s worst IT pain points—its most broken subsystems—should be addressed first. If the legacy core case management functionality is ugly but still functional while provider licensing is outright dysfunctional, a state may want to tackle licensing before all else, all other things being equal.  
    
  Similarly, the state may want to consider whether elements of its ultimate CCWIS solution can be drawn from its existing, non-child-welfare IT portfolio. It may be that a licensing system used for childcare providers can be effectively adapted to serve the needs of foster care provider licensing. A rules engine acquired for a Medicaid or TANF/SNAP modernization effort—and rule sets subsequently developed for eligibility determination—may be cross-licensed and used to get a running start on IV-E eligibility determination needs. These considerations also play into the decision about how to segment a modular procurement.
* *Workload demands* Running a successful procurement and then effectively monitoring a project are inherently complex and time-consuming activities. While a smaller project might demand somewhat less cycles from state staff, there is an irreducible set of tasks and activities that apply nonetheless. States should carefully assess the capacity of their procurement, IT, contracting and delivery organizations to absorb and execute successfully on the workload implied by a multiple-procurement CCWIS effort.
* *Unintended preclusion of effective bidders* Some states operate under procurement rules that prohibit the same vendor from bidding on certain types of related projects or services. By splitting a CCWIS project into multiple, modularized procurements a state may force qualified vendors to skip a procurement out of concern that a winning bid there would foreclose its right to bid on another (perhaps larger) procurement still to come. This becomes the state’s concern if it artificially removes capable vendors from the mix, narrowing the choices available for any specific procurement.
* *Vendor prequalification* Though its momentum seems to have flagged as of this writing, a few of the early CCWIS procurements iintroduced a process through which companies could apply to join a pool of prequalified vendors who were in turn the only vendors permitted to bid on forthcoming procurements. This model has been used for many years in other areas of government and in commercial contracting, taking various forms. Where it has been used in the child welfare arena, vendors have been asked to build a small software application that addresses a tightly-bounded, real-world use case specified by the state; the application is meant to demonstrate the bidder’s process as well as its level of expertise.   
    
  For states contemplating a series of modular CCWIS procurements, the prequalification approach can in principle save overall evaluation effort and simplify the process of selecting a contractor for any given solution component. The sample-application mechanism is most obviously suited to scenarios in which the state is seeking custom-built software, though having vendors demonstrate ahead of time their skill in configuring COTS or platform software could certainly make sense. If the state anticipates leaving the choice of solution style open-ended—in other words, if it will entertain custom-development bids alongside COTS or platform or hybrid solution bids—it would need to design the competition to reflect this decision.  
    
  If a state opts for the vendor pool concept, it should consider carefully the scope of the effort it is asking for—since the exercise will not result in a contract award per se—as well as the timetable and ground rules for periodically reopening the competition and/or requiring pool members to periodically requalify. In addition, there should be a process for removing vendors from the pool if their performance in projects falls short of expectations.
* *Vendor coordination* Inviting more vendors under the tent necessitates that a state think through how to coordinate its various contractors’ efforts and how to help them work effectively together. This might mean, for example, designating one vendor as the lead, with project executive responsibility (and perhaps no other deliverable than this). Such a project executive would generally report to a state agency executive sponsor situated within the child welfare agency, a state project management office or even the governor’s staff.  
    
  While the designation of a dedicated, contracted project executive charged with overseeing other firms might superficially resemble a classic prime/subcontractor configuration, it is quite different. Most significantly, the lead vendor carries neither a fiduciary nor a liability-underwriting role with regard to the other firms. Each vendor’s contract with the state is bilateral. The lead vendor has project-management deliverables just as other firms will have software and services deliverables, and is accountable to the state solely for its own scope of work.
* *Bringing vendor management in-house* Alternatively, the state may feel that it has the skills and bandwidth to coordinate multiple vendors itself, without use of an outside consultant or a lead vendor model. It is not strictly necessary to outsource this function if seasoned, internal project management professionals can be dedicated to the task, which will no doubt be a full-time one.  
    
  This said, procurement designers should assess whether any changes need to be made in the internal organizational structure in order to promote efficient multi-vendor management. Personnel capabilities, reporting relationships and project management functions/approach may all need adjustment in order to accommodate a more complex mix of sub-projects and vendors.
* *Coordination with other running projects* The challenge of vendor coordination is magnified when one considers that related modernization projects may be running in parallel with the CCWIS effort. If the state is currently in the midst of a Medicaid or Child Support Enforcement modernization, for example, there may be both risks and opportunities for the CCWIS project. On the risk side, to the extent that these systems need to exchange data with the CCWIS solution there is a coordination challenge; data models, interface approaches and timing of deliverables are just some of the logistical challenges that arise when both systems are in flux. On the opportunity side, there may be a way to cost-share, avoid duplicate work or redesign macro-level business processes that redound to the benefit of both teams.
* *Standard-setting* A multi-vendor technology project will run smoothly only if all vendors work on the basis of common and auditable standards. This requirement runs from tool selection (i.e., use of a common “stack” of technical building blocks) to data definitions, interface dialects and beyond. Some standards might be specified in the RFP (as *Constraints*, in our Model RFP’s formulation); others might be developed in the early stages of the project, as deliverables in themselves, if insufficient information is available to set them at RFP time. The key point is that all vendors need to work with a common vocabulary and set of baseline definitions if their respective work products are to be compatible.
* *Clarifying intellectual property ownership* With multiple vendors contributing elements of the overall solution and sometimes bringing their own proprietary products into the mix, legitimate questions may arise over ownership, licensing and fair use of vendors’ intellectual property. The State can head off these conflicts by asserting clear rules of engagement, which might include prohibitions on use of vendor-proprietary components if the vendor cannot conform to a common set of licensing or fair use provisions.
* *Managing disputes and conflicts* It goes without saying that with multiple vendors in the mix—some of whom may be more accustomed to being competitors than coworkers—disagreements will arise from time to time. As early in the procurement cycle as possible, the state should have in place a straightforward process for surfacing, analyzing and resolving such issues to the best interest of the project.   
    
  While the specifics of the process may be more pertinent to the contracting phase, describing the approach in the RFP, even at a high level, will help bidders know what to expect during the project itself.   
    
  There are real cost implications here for the state. Vendor concerns about managing project risk in a multi-vendor scenario are certainly reasonable; without clarity on dispute resolution processes, proposers are more likely to “price in” additional risk, increasing their bids to provide a buffer against excess expenses they might incur in working through conflicts. The more the state can be clear about how it plans to manage disputes among its various vendors, the more comfort bidders will have, and the less likely they will be to inflate their bids to cover uncertainty.

Lowering Contracting Barriers for New Entrants

As mentioned above, one potentially desirable effect of moving toward a modular procurement is the infusion of new ideas from smaller firms that could not effectively compete under the old monolithic model. Such a move may also further state initiatives to encourage diversity and inclusion in contracting.

It is worth noting that if a state intends to lower barriers for such vendors, certain changes in its own contracting rules may be needed. These might include the removal or reduction of performance bond requirements, for example, or tweaks to overly punitive liability language. Smaller companies with valuable contributions to make simply may not be able to clear such hurdles in their typical form.

One thing to remember is that if the procurement is broken into modular pieces, the state’s non-performance exposure for any given piece is far less grave than it would have been in an old-style monolithic project. It may be that heavyweight liability protections aren’t as appropriate in contracts where the scope of work is focused and modest.

States will need to weigh the legal impact of relaxing rules and requirements that represent insuperable entry barriers for smaller firms against the advantages of opening the process to a more varied population of vendors.

## Looking Beyond Requirements: The Goals, Guideposts and Constraints Framework

In keeping with the outcomes-directed spirit of CCWIS, the Model RFP employs a new framework for describing the specific products and services the procuring agency is seeking. Throughout the text we refer to *Goals, Guideposts* and *Constraints* rather than *Requirements* in the traditional sense. We believe this approach to be both a truer reflection of the thinking behind CCWIS and a better way of procuring solutions. Because it will be new to RFP respondents as well as RFP authors, we describe the framework in some detail in the Model RFP itself as well as in this section.

The Starting Point: What the CCWIS Final Rule Seeks to Do

Any procurement utilizing the Model RFP must of course be consistent with the CCWIS Final Rule (5 CFR Part 95), so the CCWIS regulations are an important starting point in the development of a state’s RFP. Here is how the authors of CCWIS describe their objectives:

This rule will assist title IV–E agencies in developing information management systems that leverage new innovations and technology in order to better serve children and families. More specifically, this final rule supports the use of cost-effective, innovative technologies to automate the collection of high-quality case management data and to promote its analysis, distribution, and use by workers, supervisors, administrators, researchers, and policy makers.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In a broad sense, the emphasis in CCWIS shifts from *required functions* to *best practices in data management and system design.* Rather than specify a lengthy list of mandatory functional requirements (S/TACWIS had fifty-one), CCWIS includes a much shorter list of requirements wrapped in a set of larger policy and practice goals.

* For the convenience of readers, Supplement 2: The CCWIS Final Rule Outlined presents the CCWIS statute’s provisions in a simple, hierarchical outline format more legible than the Federal Register text with its embedded outline. RFP writers may want to incorporate this into their RFP as a service to bidders.

CCWIS objectives are to be implemented in a variety of ways, each with implications for procurement of CCWIS solutions:

* States are no longer required, as they were under S/TACWIS, to field a monolithic, comprehensive system. Instead, they are encouraged to pursue less-expensive, more efficient modular solutions that exchange data using contemporary interoperability technologies and standards (e.g. RESTful Web services that use XML or JSON). Modules should be independent and reusable where feasible.
* A CCWIS may contain all the functions required to collect and maintain CCWIS data, be a data repository that marshals data from other systems, or fall somewhere in between these two extremes.
* Certain specific bidirectional data exchanges have been added to those required under S/TACWIS, “to the extent practicable.” CCWIS regulations permit multiple exchanges per external system, if necessary; we interpret this to mean that the full set of data for eligibility determination, for example, need not come through a single, massive Web service call.   
    
  The full list of required exchanges is now:
* IV-E/IV-B financial claim and payment systems, if applicable
  + Systems used to calculate one or more components of IV-E eligibility, if applicable
  + Title XIX Medicaid eligibility systems and Medicaid Management Information Systems
  + IV-A systems
  + IV-D child support systems
  + State child abuse and neglect systems
  + Medicaid claims
  + Education systems
  + Child welfare courts
  + Child welfare contributing agencies (CWCAs), if these CWCAs collect CCWIS data
* Any other systems the IV-E agency uses to collect CCWIS data
* While data may be gathered from external systems and stored in the CCWIS database, the CCWIS must be the official repository for federal reporting purposes. Where appropriate, provision should be made for CCWIS-related data to be collected from Child Welfare Contributing Agencies (CWCAs).
* Data quality, as expressed in a data quality plan and a regimen of monitoring and continuous quality improvement practices, is at the core of a successful CCWIS implementation. The plan should promote complete, timely, accurate and consistent data. The Title IV-E agency is further required to actively monitor, manage and enhance data quality.
* CCWIS solutions must exhibit certain architectural characteristics. Specifically, they must:
  + be modularly designed and separate business rules from core programming (waived for Software as a Service systems owned and maintained by vendors)
  + be documented in plain language
  + follow information technology standards that promote efficient, economical and effective development
  + be shareable and reusable by other states, tribes, and agencies

Importantly, the federal regulations make available a waiver process so that states can propose “new approaches to designing IT systems.”

*Discussion of the waiver provision, as well as discussion of the various rules and procedures surrounding Federal Financial Participation (FFP) and the process for filing Advance Planning Documents (APDs) and other ACF-required documents, is beyond the scope of this Guide, which focuses on the RFP stage of the procurement lifecycle.*

Where specific CCWIS requirements exist, the CCWIS Model RFP states them as such.

* As a resource for RFP designers, Supplement 3 contains a complete list of CCWIS requirements and a set of suggested self-assessment questions for each.

Striking a Balance Between Compliance and Innovation

As noted above, perhaps the most fundamental difference between S/TACWIS and CCWIS is a shift from a compliance-focused, requirements-heavy procurement approach to one based on overarching policy goals and outcomes. While CCWIS does include some fixed requirements, it leaves considerable room for states, tribes and solution providers to be creative and innovate.

This more flexible approach presents its own challenges from a procurement point of view. Specific jurisdictions may have strong preferences, opinions, technology standards or regulatory frameworks that will narrow the scope of what they would consider acceptable in their CCWIS solution. The state may already have an established enterprise architecture that must be conformed to. Local procurement rules may necessitate a more compliance-oriented RFP than the federal CCWIS rules strictly require. Contracting procedures may dictate deliverable and payment schemes that would seem to constrain innovation; for example, a State might prefer that vendors use Agile methodology, but be obligated by its own contracting rules to apply traditional, deliverable-based payment requirements that run contrary to Agile.

In creating its CCWIS RFP, a jurisdiction will need to work through these issues and find its way to an approach that works.

Goals, Guideposts and Constraints

The Model RFP seeks to facilitate this conversation by organizing each RFP section according to a three-part framework in which desired deliverables are expressed in terms of Goals, Guideposts and Constraints. While we suggest specific language for consideration under these headings, we fully expect RFP writers to refine, discard, add to or otherwise adapt that content to their needs. Our draft content is meant as a solid, thought-through starting point that can spur further discussion and serve as a source for both ideas and RFP language.

In the spirit of CCWIS, Goals state the overarching outcomes the State would like to achieve with regard to a specific functional area, such as Intake or Information Security; the CCWIS solution should contribute toward the achievement of goals by supporting program, policy, administrative and other organizational functions. Guideposts document any best practices, preferences or creative ideas the State would like bidders to consider in devising their responses. They are not requirements in the traditional sense, and in fact our suggested proposal scoring approach awards no points for adherence to Guideposts. Constraints, by contrast, are known limitations bidders *must* work within—formal State IT standards, for example, or limits on time that key agency staff can devote to the project. Where hard requirements do exist, whether in the CCWIS regulations or on the part of the state, these are documented as Constraints. This is where our model dovetails with the traditional model.

It is our belief that the Goals, Guideposts and Constraints framework strikes a good balance between the spirit of CCWIS and the more specific needs, desires and limitations that RFP writers must and should consider in designing a procurement. Because the framework will be unfamiliar to many bidders, the Model RFP contains a thorough description of it similar to the discussion here.

Framing of Guideposts

In the Model RFP, most Guideposts are cast in broad conceptual terms, generally avoiding mention of specific tools and techniques a vendor might employ to achieve the Goals. While we do mention proven approaches when appropriate, we have been careful to keep the focus on the *what* rather than the *how*. This is for two reasons:

First, the idea is to encourage vendors to think outside the box and bring fresh concepts into the conversation; providing too much detail would incline proposal teams to write to the Guideposts as if they were requirements in disguise.

Second, in asking bidders to reflect on high-level concepts rather than detailed requirements, the state will readily see how well each bidder understands child welfare and whether it is able to think creatively and generatively about the contribution technology might make. In a conventional RFP, with a spreadsheet of hundreds of requirements, the procuring agency has already done much of the hard conceptual work; even a bidder whose understanding of the domain is weak can respond to a rote checklist of requirements (though their ability to deliver on them may be doubtful). It takes more sophistication and domain knowledge to weave conceptual elements—expressed as Goals and Guideposts—into an innovative solution. Firms that exhibit the ability to do so will rise to the top quickly in the proposal evaluation phase, and should be pleased to have the latitude to display their creative thinking and expertise.

By framing Guideposts as we have, we hope to draw out the best ideas bidders can offer and give them a chance to show that they have a deep and thoroughgoing grasp of the real-world challenges agencies face.

The Children’s Bureau’s CCWIS Self-Assessment Tools

The Children’s Bureau is currently in the midst of developing a suite of self-assessment tools that will enable states and tribes to assess their own state of compliance with CCWIS requirements, preparatory to federal review and the provision of federal technical assistance. While this effort is in the early stages as of this writing, RFP developers may find the tools useful in crafting their procurements. See the Children’s Bureau website for the latest details. The original request for public comment appeared in the Federal Register on 6/5/2020 and can be viewed here: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/06/05/2020-12125/proposed-information-collection-activity-generic-clearance-for-the-comprehensive-child-welfare>.

## CCWIS, COVID-19 and Beyond: Leveraging Technology for Emergency Response

As the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear, public health and safety emergencies put enormous stress on an already stressed child welfare system. Children may be displaced from their foster homes, bringing on a wave of emergency placement needs; sudden food or income insecurity can heighten the incidence of abuse against children living with their birth parents. The physical safety of children may be threatened by flood, earthquake or terrorist action. Workers may be unable to carry out their duties because their own lives have been dislocated, creating a crisis of staff coverage. Compounding these emergency needs are the longer-term stressors: economic pressure on families who’ve lost their livelihoods, PTSD in children and parents alike, lingering health issues, the shutdown of community-based partner organizations when donations dry up during hard times.

The Challenge(s) of Disaster Response

Each emergency brings its unique challenges. In the immediate aftermath of a hurricane, earthquake or catastrophic wildfire, housing will likely be a pressing need—along with the related, even more pressing need to simply locate and track the whereabouts of vulnerable children who may have been placed in shelters or rendered homeless. In the rush to find shelter, parents may not be able to notify foster care worker where they’re going. Moreover, families may find themselves evacuated to other states, as happened with Hurricane Katrina, creating an administrative nightmare for caseworkers trying to maintain continuity of services for them or transfer cases to the other state’s system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought other sorts of challenges. Health concerns have moved to the forefront, of course, with particular implications for the child welfare system. How can the state ensure the safety of children in foster care when other household members, including the foster parents, may have been exposed to infection? How should quarantine be handled? How often should the caseworker check in on the child’s health status? Who should decide about testing of children? About vaccines, when they become available?

From a worker safety point of view, how can investigators be protected when they go into the field? If the worker observes that the family is failing to properly practice social distancing or masking guidelines, how should she record this in the case record, and what action should be taken?

From a programmatic point of view, how should the state interpret declines or surges in the volume of hotline calls? Is a puzzling decrease a reflection of the fact that mandated reporters are having fewer face-to-face encounters with children while the area is under a stay-at-home order? (This appears to be the case with COVID-19.)

Policy Responses

Good work has been done, both within and outside government, to tackle the many thorny policy and program questions. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, for example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation created a comprehensive resource guide for public agencies to follow in preparing for and responding to disasters.[[4]](#footnote-4) With COVID-19, creative strategizing is being done to raise foster parent reimbursement rates by leveraging the Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage rate.[[5]](#footnote-5) Meanwhile, the Children’s Bureau and state governments have been issuing frequent guidance on a range of current child welfare challenges.[[6]](#footnote-6)

How CCWIS Can Help

While policy responses are absolutely vital, the IT transformation underway with CCWIS provides a golden opportunity to bolster disaster preparedness through technology. The Model RFP suggests a host of capabilities that might be used to this end. RFP authors may want to expand on our text in places to further spell out what they’d like in a solution, based on past experiences in their own states. Here are a few scenarios to consider for explicit inclusion:

* In a pandemic situation, use a CCWIS solution’s custom assessment builder to create a special medical safety assessment that looks at the risk of exposure, disease history and current testing status of children, foster parents and siblings, and members of the birth family.
* Use the CCWIS solution’s ability to capture extended family relationships and social networks to aid in contact tracing.
* Use family network and household composition data to make decisions about quarantine or remain-in-place arrangements for children in care—who can or should be housed together?
* Use mobile tools to aid workers in immediately “checking in” displaced children as they are located in shelters or other locations.
* Use geolocation capabilities to map the whereabouts of children, caregivers and resources as an aid in prioritizing relocation or in-place services based on proximity to a disaster event.
* Use video facilities to support virtual visits between caseworkers and children and children and parents (policy permitting).
* Use built-in, secure messaging to interact with pediatricians and emergency rooms regarding the medical status of children in care, automatically keeping an audit trail of all such communications.
* Use the same messaging techniques to communicate with courts.
* Use rules-driven, batch case reassignment features to shift caseloads when a worker falls ill or cannot report to work because the disaster has affected them personally; dynamically allocate new cases based on staff skills, staff availability and case characteristics.
* Extend home study assessments with questions relevant to the disaster. (Is the foster home structurally sound following an earthquake? Has the prospective family been tested for a pandemic infection?)
* Add temporary match criteria to placement matching logic (e.g., criteria to expand or restrict the pool of possible foster home matches depending on whether the child has confirmed immunity to a pandemic virus).
* Extend eligibility logic to include temporary funding sources that may be made available through a IV-E waiver, Medicaid, relief assistance grants or another source.
* Leverage data in the Licensing module to prioritize potential safety issues at group and congregate care facilities. (How can locations close to the disaster be secured so that they don’t become hotspots?)
* Use staff management and caseload management capabilities to rebalance workloads as the emergency subsides and work backlogs must be addressed.
* By hosting the CCWIS solution in an outside data center hardened against natural disasters and equipped with state-of-the-art failover capabilities, diminish the chance that an emergency will bring the system down because state facilities or IT staff are temporarily out of commission.

These are but a few ideas for how the CCWIS transition might dramatically improve states’ emergency response capability. While most of them build on solution features already included in the Model RFP (usually with broader purposes in mind), RFP writers may want to be provide bidders with more concrete examples of capabilities they feel would speak to their unique situations. CCWIS is a great opportunity to do fresh thinking on the topic and to put in place systems that will make service delivery more resilient in times of crisis.

# Part Three: A Section-by-Section Guide to the Model RFP

## Using the Guide in Conjunction with the Model RFP

The Model RFP is provided as a separate document in order to simplify the process of transferring text into an actual RFP. The remainder of this Guide mirrors the structure of that document, providing explanatory commentary for many sections and background material that RFP authors may find useful in crafting their own procurements. We suggest that readers print out this Guide and the CCWIS Model RFP—or display them in a split-screen view in Word—for ease of navigating between them.

In each section that follows, the Topic header refers to the corresponding section of the Model RFP document, with a section and/or item number where relevant. Use this header to locate the topic in the Model RFP, then review our suggested RFP text in conjunction with the background discussion in the Guide.

Topic: Procurement Timeline

The Procurement Timeline lists various key dates for the procurement process.

While this section of the RFP is fairly self-explanatory, one innovative element is worth noting: *Early Submission of Administrative Sections.*

Administrative Submissions

The State of California introduced this approach for its CWS-NS procurements in the 2015-2016 period. The idea is that bidders have the option to submit routine administrative portions of their response—statutorily required attestations of non-discrimination, for example, or business license information, or certification of minority- or women-owned enterprise status—prior to submission of the solution portion of the bid. Because these items are generally scored Pass/Fail and are routine both to submit and to review, they can be cleanly separated from the more creative work of crafting a solution proposal. Procurement staff get a head start on a time-consuming aspect of proposal evaluation, as well.

States taking this approach should weigh whether or not it makes sense to require that *key staff* *résumés and references*, and/or *company project references,* be included in the Administrative submission. Doing so provides more time for references to be contacted and interviewed by reviewers, shortening the turnaround time for overall proposal review. On the other hand, it can take time for bidders to contact and line up their references, potentially undercutting the advantages of early submission for them.

On balance, we recommend that CCWIS RFPs include an early submission option, as it can smooth the RFP process for all parties concerned while presenting little or no downside for the state or for the bidder community.

Question Submission

Elsewhere in the Timeline, we mark items pertaining to formal question submission as optional. If the State opts to implement the discussion forum concept described on page 43, this may obviate the need for a traditional question submission process. In this case, the RFP writer might want to retain the Timeline items but adapt the language to indicate that questions will be submitted and answered via the forum, with deadlines as appropriate.

Topic: Purpose of the Procurement

Here the RFP should provide a formal description of solutions and/or services being sought, per the text in the Model RFP.

Topic: High-level Goals for the Project

This section describes what the State is seeking to achieve by procuring and implementing a CCWIS solution. It is an opportunity for the State to describe its vision for the future state of not only its technology, but also—more importantly—the programs and human service practice model that the technology is to support. We recommend that the following topics be addressed in this section:

* The desired future state of the State’s child welfare programs, with an eye toward child and family outcomes as well as practice improvements
* The State’s vision of how the CCWIS solution will integrate into the current enterprise technology portfolio
* Key goals for the CCWIS implementation project itself, including engagement of relevant stakeholders, including end users
* The State’s desired procurement process and outcomes

Balancing CCWIS Goals and State Goals

Each of these topics ties in some way to the CCWIS regulations and subsequent ACF bulletins. (See the brief overview on page 26.) The outline of the project’s high-level goals should be consistent with the CCWIS paradigm, but not necessarily limited to it; the State should describe its own priorities and programmatic desires even when these go beyond CCWIS proper. The more context the RFP provides to the bidders, the more responsive the bids will be.

It is worth noting, as well, that states themselves provide substantial funding for a CCWIS project, beyond the federal match. A successful CCWIS implementation must satisfy federal standards, but it should also provide real and substantial value to a state’s taxpayers, children and families.

In the Model RFP text, we propose a number of High-level Goals for consideration. These include CCWIS-required goals as well as goals we believe to be relevant to a broad swath of child welfare agencies.

Topic: Solution Architecture

This section provides specifics, if available, on the State’s preferred technical approach to the CCWIS solution. At a minimum it should include these two topics:

* Solution model—custom-built solution, commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) product, configurable application development platform (PaaS), hybrid, bidder-proposed approach
* Solution platform—on-premise, cloud-hosted etc.

Every permutation of the above options can be found in the current HHS marketplace. Some states have opted to leave the question of solution architecture to bidders, inviting them to propose the architecture they feel best suits the state’s needs. Others have expressed a strong preference for a particular approach—a custom-built solution developed with Agile methodology, for example, or a solution built on a configurable platform the state is already using for other projects.

In this section, the State should clearly declare any preferences it has for the solution architecture, or bounding conditions it might place on a bidder-recommended architecture. As an example of the latter, the State might leave it up to bidders to propose an architecture but require that proposals leverage a particular business intelligence product the state has already invested in. Another requirement might be that a proposed solution publish its Web services to the state’s existing enterprise service bus (ESB) (such requirements are listed as “enterprise resources” in the Model RFP). While not giving vendors an entirely blank slate, such an approach leaves them considerable room to put together a solution that addresses the State’s goals while respecting its preferences and constraints.

Whether the solution architecture described in this section is more prescriptive or more flexible, any specific requirements it contains should be mirrored in other relevant sections of the RFP. If, for example, the solution architecture requires that the bidder integrate with the statewide user authentication and identity management system, this requirement should also be reflected in the Security section of the RFP.

Topic: Ownership of Work Products

Here the State asserts its position with regard to ownership of work products that emanate from the project. Our default language assumes that such products become the property of the State and/or are considered to be in the public domain, with exceptions for commercial and other proprietary products or components the vendor might employ.

We include an optional statement that directs respondents to contact a procurement official with any questions about specific intellectual property it intends to propose. The State may or may not want to invite such queries, for legal or other reasons, but vendors may have a legitimate need for clarification.

Topic: Bidder Eligibility

This section directs readers to the RFP Appendix 1 qualifying criteria that determine whether a firm is eligible to bid on the procurement. If a pre-qualified vendor pool approach is used, this section also states, optionally, that only pool members are eligible to submit bids.

Topic: Contract Term

This section states the initial contract term and any optional extensions the State might offer.

Topic: Initial and Ongoing Budget

In this section, the Model RFP provides a place for the State to declare its budget for the CCWIS project, should it wish to. The budget should include the anticipated CCWIS federal match. Appropriate caveats, as reflected in the Model RFP text, can be included to protect the State in the event that unforeseen legislative, regulatory or other developments cause a decrease in the anticipated budget.

Disclosing the Project Budget: Pros and Cons

In the S/TACWIS era it was all but unheard of for a state or tribe to disclose its project budget. In some cases this reflected statutory procurement rules that the child welfare agency had no power to waive, and these limitations may still apply, for certain states, in the CCWIS era. Whether encoded in statute or not, the perception has long been that revealing a project budget will lead to higher-dollar bids, as bidders will not want to leave money on the table. This would appear on the face of it to be a fiduciary risk for the state and its taxpayers.

In practice, however, the effects of concealing the project budget have at times been negative, and arguably *more* costly for taxpayers in the end. Familiar scenarios include:

* A state receives an array of cost proposals with wildly divergent pricing. Because significant points are awarded based on price, the state’s own scoring system forces it to award the contract to a bidder whose proposed solution is actually less responsive than the proposals of higher-priced bidders.
* Less experienced bidders—often newer entrants to the field who may have the technical capacity to deliver a solid solution but who may not understand the prevailing market and government project dynamics as well as incumbent firms do—submit bids that are simply too low to fund a viable project. Their pricing is so attractive that they win the contract, but then they fail to deliver, forcing the State to re-procure and/or take costly legal action against the vendor.
* An unrealistically low bid imperils the project, creating—ironically—an unacceptable vendor lock-in. Regardless of firm size, bids ratcheted too far downward can result in severe cost overruns and slipped timelines, forcing the state to seek additional, out-year appropriations far exceeding the original budget. States are then placed in the untenable position of gambling between a vendor that has manifestly failed to deliver on budget—but is now the resident expert on the project—and a risky, expensive changeover to a new vendor. The switching cost that would be incurred in disengaging from the original vendor, including the cost of potential contract litigation should the original vendor sue, only adds to the budgetary overrun, inclining the state to stick with an unacceptable status quo.
* Large firms with access to seasoned procurement consultants and lobbyists are better able to accurately estimate the State’s project budget, creating a disproportionate advantage and discouraging smaller, more innovative vendors from bidding.

In a broader sense, concealing a project budget shifts the focus of the procurement away from *value* and toward *absolute cost*. Taxpayer interests are not well served if a vendor fails because its bid was unrealistically low; they are very well served when taxpayer money buys a solution of enduring value. Hence the Model RFP includes an optional section in which the State can disclose its budget if it is statutorily and procedurally able to do so.

The Model RFP includes placeholders for tables showing the initial implementation budget spread across contract periods (plus any optional extensions) and the budget for operations and maintenance, similarly spread across contractual periods.

Topic: Procurement Philosophy

This section describes the Goals, Guideposts and Constraints model for the benefit of bidders. Please see our somewhat more in-depth discussion of the model, intended for RFP authors, beginning on page 25 of this Guide.

Topic: Access to State Information and Staff

This section addresses bidders’ access to the State’s information and staff during the procurement period, as opposed to access once the project has begun.

Pre-proposal Bidders’ Conference

If the State intends to hold an in-person, virtual, or mixed-mode bidders’ conference, this section provides the logistics.

Resource Library

It is traditional to offer an online library of resource materials that bidders can consult to better understand the landscape of social service programs, technologies and other institutional elements the winning bidder will encounter in delivering their solution. The Model RFP text outlines our recommended approach to managing the Resource Library, but does not specify the contents of the library per se, as these will vary by jurisdiction. We suggest that procuring agencies consider providing such resources as:

* Agency/departmental annual reports and planning documents relevant to the project.
* Descriptions of current practice improvement or outreach initiatives.
* The text of State regulations and policies that bear on the delivery of child welfare services or IT solutions.
* Brief descriptions of partner agencies that will be involved in the project, including information on their labor forces (e.g. counts of staff by role and experience, vacancy patterns, contractors), locations and any existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) governing the exchange of information between the partner agency and the central child welfare agency.
* Reports produced by external program evaluators.
* Information on consent decrees or other legal oversight frameworks governing child welfare operations.
* Recent AFCARS and NCANDS submissions to the federal government.
* Enterprise technology diagrams and standards, including information on the State network and any cloud computing capabilities/services/chargebacks.
* Detailed technical information on the legacy child welfare system, including platform (e.g. mainframe, client-server, cloud/Web), programming language, underlying database management system, entity-relationship diagrams or database schemas, current row counts for major tables and any external binary object stores, available interface points and current interfaces, report libraries, and vendors who have been involved with the system in a development or maintenance and operations capacity. Note that this may be somewhat less important if the State is contemplating a wholesale system replacement, but still quite relevant for purposes of scoping data conversion efforts.
* Documentation of business processes and workflows to be supported by the new CCWIS solution. Examples might be the process for processing eligibility, or in determining whether to open an investigation for an intake, or in making a foster care referral. The more bidders understand about these processes, the more likely they will propose solutions that can optimize them.   
    
  Creating and/or compiling this information can take substantial time, so states should build enough leeway into the RFP development schedule to account for it.
* Examples of important standardized forms used in service delivery or administration.
* Information on any known data quality issues—data considered unreliable because validation logic is lacking, “plug” values for required but unvalidated fields, missing data, data corruption and so on.
* An inventory of expected CCWIS user counts by user type, including any users external to the State.
* An inventory of current systems relevant to the project, with some narrative on their history, functions and interfaces.
* For interfaces that will be replaced during the CCWIS project, information on the underlying technology (e.g. batch FTP, real-time Web-service), data volume, directionality, schedule, data elements exchanged and data mappings or translations between the interfaced systems.
* Entity-relationship diagrams for systems with which the CCWIS solution will exchange data.
* Information on the populations served by the child welfare agency (demographics, regional distribution, etc.).

The Resource Library should include an index or directory as well as a mechanism for users to search for the content they need.

Bidder Question and Answer Process

Procurements typically include a process for submission of written questions. While we favor a forum-based approach as outlined in the section immediately following, we include here text describing the traditional approach as well. If utilizing this section, simply modify the following section to remove references to an online submission/response process.

Online Bidder Forum

Bidder questions are traditionally handled in the form of written submissions to which the State responds without disclosing the identity of the submitter. There may be multiple rounds of questions spread over many weeks during the proposal development period; the turnaround time on publishing responses to bidder questions can run into several weeks. It is not uncommon for states to continue publishing responses to vendor questions right up until a few weeks before proposals are due. This makes the RFP something of a moving target for proposal writers, sometimes causing significant eleventh-hour rework. Just as states have formal processes and timelines for evaluating proposals, with checkpoints at various stages, so vendors have an internal approval process they must conform to. When a proposal is in the late stages of development, changes in RFP requirements wreak havoc on this approval workflow.

We recommend that procurement agencies consider replacing or supplementing the traditional question submission process with an *online discussion forum* where both formal and informal responses to questions can be given. The corresponding section of the Model RFP describes this idea and outlines common-sense ground rules for implementing it.

A key recommendation here is that one part of the forum be reserved for the State to post its *formal* responses to questions, separating them cleanly from *informal* back-and-forth discussions that may occur in the rest of the forum. Only the formal responses would become part of the procurement record and would be considered binding upon the State; these would correspond, in other words, to formal responses delivered under a traditional bidder question process.

Other logistical considerations:

* The State could require that forum participants declare their affiliation, or could choose to mask this from other participants by assigning randomized user names to bidders who apply for access.
* The same applies to State staff: they may or may not be allowed to see the identities and corporate affiliations of forum participants.
* The State could offer a schedule of hours when the forum will be monitored by its staff, perhaps reserving certain time slots for program/functional staff, others for technical staff, still others for procurement staff. This sets reasonable expectations as to the availability of State staff and enables staff to manage their forum time effectively with other responsibilities.

Advantages we see to offering a forum option:

* Duplicative questions are minimized, as bidders can see in real time all other questions that are being asked and answered. Administrator tools supported by many forum software products allow topic threads to be merged, giving forum moderators another tool for cleaning up overlapping questions.
* Feedback is much faster. Rather than wait one or more weeks for the procurement agency to publish answers to a raft of questions, bidders may receive informal responses and feedback in short order, with formal responses to follow for questions that warrant them. In our study of questions submitted in past procurements we found that a large percentage of questions were requests for simple clarifications that could be dispatched quickly, unblocking proposal writers and heading off misconceptions that might lead to nonresponsive proposals.
* As discussion threads unfold, the State may gain insight into problematic areas of its RFP. If multiple bidders are confused on a given point, an amendment may be called for.

Topic: Process Provisions

This section presents various provisions that derive from the State’s specific laws and regulations controlling public procurements. RFP authors will want to incorporate references to their own state’s codes and standard procedures.

The Process Provisions section declares the State’s commitment to a fair and non-discriminatory process, reserves the right to amend the RFP and contains typical language indicating that the State is not obliged to reimburse bidders for procurement-related expenditures. It also states the period for price binding and reserves the State’s to right to reject any proposal.

There is an additional provision, marked as [optional], which indicates that the State may choose to make multiple awards under the RFP.

In the Price Binding subsection, the State should indicate how long the bidder’s cost proposal will be considered binding. Given the speed at which both technology and labor markets can change, we urge RFP teams to make this a reasonable number, on the order of 90-120 days. Besides basic fairness to bidders, there is an economic consideration here: If a bidder is asked to guarantee their pricing for six months or a year—not unheard-of provisions—it is certain to inflate its price to provide a buffer against rising costs for its own suppliers. If several bidders do the same, the State may find itself paying a premium for its solution.

The Notice of Conditional Award subsection explains how the State will notify bidders of its decision and makes the award conditional upon contract negotiation. There is a placeholder here for the RFP author to insert state-specific boilerplate concerning the contracting process, including, optionally, such matters as:

* Creation of a statement of work based on the proposal
* Timeline and ground rules for contract negotiation
* Procedure for award to another vendor if no contract can be completed with the initial winner
* Process and timeline for spending authorization (release of funds encumbered for the project) following contract execution
* Designation of contract administration entity
* Payment terms and process, including any requirement that the contractor be registered on the State’s vendor and/or accounts payable system

Because such provisions are highly state-specific and tend to include statutorily-mandated boilerplate language, we do not provide suggested language for them.

The Appeals subsection should be edited to include a citation directing bidders to the State’s standard regulations and/or procedures for receiving and ruling on appeals.

Topic: How Bids Will Be Evaluated

This section of the Model RFP outlines, at a high level, what happens once a bid is submitted. As our suggested RFP language implies, we recommend that evaluators explicitly reward creativity and innovation while assessing how well a proposed solution satisfies the State’s stated Goals and Constraints. Other evaluation factors include, of course, adherence to administrative requirements and a competitive cost proposal.

Approaches to the Scoring Process

The Model RFP includes a prototype Evaluation Factors table that details the criteria against which proposals will be judged, as well as point values associated with each criterion. The criteria listed in this table may vary depending upon the State’s preferred implementation methodology. If the State is looking for a COTS solution, for example, the criterion that refers to the *user experience* would refer fairly directly to the product’s already-existing web pages, navigation, and so on. If, on the other hand, the State were seeking to develop a new solution from scratch, this item might be adjusted to evaluate the quality of the bidder’s *process* for developing user interfaces—user research, wireframing, usability testing and so on.

Similarly, the «Solution functional completeness» criterion may not apply at all to RFPs seeking a custom-built solution, and is enclosed in chevrons to indicate that it is optional.

In the draft Evaluation Factors table, specific point values for the criteria are left as placeholders (denoted «nn»), recognizing that different RFP teams will have different views on which factors should count higher than others. Note that the table embodies a goals-driven approach in which points are awarded for the bidder’s perceived ability to help the State achieve its desired outcomes rather than strict adherence to the hundreds of requirements often found in the older S/TACWIS RFPs. The proposal’s adherence to stated Constraints is also a scoring factor.

We include a scoring factor called *Diversity incentive* as a placeholder for any state-specific scoring factors pertaining to women-, minority- or veteran-owned enterprises.

One particular criterion deserves special mention. The criterion entitled *Solution’s ability to meet Goals and adhere to Constraints stated for each numbered functional area* is intended to capture the total points rolled up from point values assigned to each of the numbered deliverables found in the Solution Components Sought and Services Sought sections of the RFP. This criterion is, in other words, an aggregate score of the proposal’s ability to achieve stated goals and respect stated constraints for all functional components and services provided. To provide a sufficient point “budget” to allow for detailed scoring of all deliverables, we suggest that a significant percentage of the 1,000 maximum proposal points be reserved for this item.

The RFP team may find it most efficient to build a simple score sheet from the final outline of its RFP’s numbered sections.

Some states require that evaluators consider the economic impact of the proposed solution and services. If needed, this section is the appropriate place to state this requirement.

While not every procurement includes a BAFO stage, most procuring agencies find it helpful to provide finalist bidders with an opportunity to refine their proposals based on evaluator feedback. When properly structured, a BAFO increases the chance that the State will get the solution and project it wants while maintaining a fair and level playing field for vendors. No one is served by contract awards based on proposals that do not accurately reflect the State’s vision of what it needs.

The text of the Model RFP describes in detail our recommended approach to conducting a Best and Final Offer process.

Topic: Format for Responses and Submission Instructions

This section is where the RFP details document formatting requirements and delivery information for proposals. It also provides clear instructions on which RFP components require a response and which are included for background purposes only. States will need to adjust some of the Model RFP language in this section if a different item numbering system is used.

Topic: The Child Welfare Practice Ecosystem

Here the RFP should map out the network of organizations that cooperate to provide the full spectrum of child welfare services, then document important initiatives, outcome goals and measures, and any areas already identified for improvement. The overall purpose of the section is to give bidders a meaningful snapshot of the world in which their solution will be implemented, but also a forward-looking, somewhat more aspirational view of how the State would like to see its practice evolve. The more thorough the RFP can be, the more likely it is that proposals will be responsive to the larger goals of the effort.

Key Agencies and Organizations

The Model RFP contains placeholders the typical array of partner organizations. For each, the RFP writer should provide a brief overview of the organization’s primary role with respect to child welfare services and any commentary that might influence a bidder’s solution design (e.g. existing or newly contemplated data exchanges).

Current Program and Policy Initiatives

Any new CCWIS solution must support the State’s core child welfare program and policy initiatives. Some devolve from federal programs, e.g. Family First Prevention Services and Human Trafficking; others will be State-specific. In the RFP we provide sample language for the two federal programs mentioned. RFP authors may want to add their own.

Guiding Principles of Practice

This section orients bidders to the state’s philosophy of child welfare practice. In the Model RFP we provide several widely shared, evidence-influenced principles derived from our collective experience in the field. As a further resource to RFP teams, the Children’s Bureau offers a wealth of information on child welfare practice models here: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/approaches/>.

* In August/September 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide reckoning over racial disparity and injustice, the Children’s Bureau and a broad group of organizations issued a joint call to action aimed at reimagining the child welfare system.[[7]](#footnote-7) In drafting its Guiding Principles of Practice, we encourage RFP teams to consider the many incisive observations and suggestions outlined in this work.

Important Outcome Goals and Measures; Areas Identified for Improvement

Here the RFP writer can describe the state’s specific goals for child welfare outcomes, and how they will be measured. *Areas Identified for Improvement* represent specific initiatives to amend, improve or increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

We provide placeholders for these items as they are very state-specific, but examples might include:

* Reducing the number of repeat placements by nn%
* Increasing the share of kinship placements by nn%
* Reducing the incidence of repeat abuse by nn%
* Reducing the use of congregate care by nn%

Topic: The Child Welfare Technology Ecosystem

Key Organizations and Their Functions

The purpose of this subsection is to provide bidders with a conceptual map of the various IT organizations and vendors they will have to work with in delivering their proposed CCWIS solution. For each organization, the RFP author should describe the organization’s scope of responsibility and list the systems for which it is responsible. The more information, the better.

Key Systems of Record

Software applications, of course, are a key component of the IT ecosystem. In this subsection, the RFP author should document each important system the bidder would want to know about in formulating its proposal, with special emphasis on the systems with which the CCWIS solution will exchange data. See the topic on Interoperability and Integrations, on page 84, with regard to data exchanges.

In the RFP we provide a table that can be adapted and replicated for use in documenting each system. An important element in the table is the row *for* Integrations with other systems. If bidders are to accurately and realistically estimate the effort level needed to create the required data exchanges, they will need to know where the target data resides, and what existing integrations might be leveraged to provide it. If, for example, the TANF system already offers an array of Web services that other systems use to communicate with it, the bidder needs to know this, and should have a sense of the type and amount of data that passes across those integration points.

We highly recommend that states provide bidders with detailed information on data models, schemas, Web services and other technical matters that may affect their solution design and/or costing process. Because much of this information is very technical and can be voluminous, it is usually most efficient to have it reside in the Resource Library and provide a link in the actual RFP.

Enterprise Components Available for Solutions to Leverage

Most states will have a variety of enterprise software tools already licensed to them, some of which may be useful to the CCWIS vendor. Common examples include database management systems, enterprise service buses, centralized identity management systems, master data management tools, business intelligence tools and business rules engines. States that have recently implemented modernized Medicaid management information systems, in particular, may have obtained such components with federal matching funds.

To the extent that these building blocks are available for bidders to incorporate into their solutions, the RFP author can document them here. In some cases the State may *require* that a vendor use a particular solution, say an enterprise service bus; this should be documented as a Constraint in the RFP.

Statewide Technology Standards

Nearly all government organizations have promulgated a set of standards for technology infrastructure and projects. We recommend that the State place all relevant documents in the Resource Library and briefly describe them in this section of the RFP.

Solution Components Sought

From this point forward, the Model RFP describes in detail what the State is asking vendors to propose in the areas of program and practice functionality, technology, and professional services. Accordingly, content is organized into three large sections: Program and Practice Goals, Guideposts and Constraints; Technology Goals, Guideposts and Constraints; and Solution Delivery Goals, Guideposts and Constraints. Appendices contain additional items for which a response is expected, e.g. the Cost Proposal.

At this point the RFP moves into a structured outline format, with topics organized under numbered headings. The Model RFP explains that bidders are expected to respond only to these numbered items. By mingling explanatory information with actual requirements, poorly-designed RFPs can leave proposal writers unclear on what it is they are being asked to respond to, and what they will be scored on. The Model RFP seeks to avoid such confusion by creating a clear demarcation between background information on the agency and technology environment, for example, and scoreable items for which a response is expected.

## Program and Practice Goals, Guideposts and Constraints

Topic: 1.1 Intake

This section describes the State’s vision for a smoothly-running intake process that efficiently receives reports of suspected abuse and neglect and, with the help of a structured screening process, enables staff to make informed decisions on whether to advance the intake to the investigation phase. While intakes often arrive through a hotline or other channel that does not involve face-to-face contact with child protective services staff, the Model RFP is written to address the intake process regardless of how reports are initiated. At the same time, it encourages bidders to embrace a multichannel approach reflective of a world in which more and more important transactions are conducted on smartphones and the Web.

RFP authors will want to adjust details of the Model RFP text to conform to their own infrastructure and intake practices.

Intake Best Practices

From a best practice perspective, it is imperative that hotline callers and other incident reporters are not faced with discouraging barriers, including such practical impediments as long telephone hold times. It is also important that intake workers make the best possible decision regarding whether to screen in or screen out a report, even when information is incomplete or conflicting.

The need to gather the most thorough information possible—and to verify as many aspects of that information as feasible—makes the intake process inherently “high touch.” There is no substitute for a structured dialog between trained intake worker and reporter. Once raw information-gathering segués into decision making, however, technology is often used to augment or guide human judgment. Because intake is the leading edge of an agency’s potential intervention in situations involving harm to children, intake processes increasingly involve research-influenced safety and risk assessment tools, such as structured decision making instruments (SDMs), and escalation/approval workflows designed to minimize the chance that a genuine incident of concern will slip through the cracks.

Use of a proven practice model as the framework for the intake process is highly effective, but like nearly everything in human services, practice models evolve over time. As tools for implementing a practice model, assessments and workflows must be able to evolve as well. These elements of a CCWIS intake solution should be easily adaptable, allowing for such things as the modification of assessment questionnaires, adjustment of scores and weights assigned to assessed factors, and flexible modification of workflows (e.g., the ability to change decision timeframes for intakes of particular types). Configurability of core intake business functions adds significantly to the long-term viability of an intake solution.

This said, changes to even minor-seeming aspects of the data model (as expressed, for example, in the addition of a question to an assessment) or calculation logic can have unintended consequences elsewhere in the system. They should always be undertaken with care and appropriate side-by-side testing, and generally after vendor consultation.

Innovation Opportunities to Consider

*Leveraging Artificial Intelligence in intake decision making* As artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities have become increasingly embedded in commercial processes, opportunities may exist for states to leverage AI as a tool for helping intake workers make still better decisions. The use of safety and risk assessments represents a first-generation step in this direction, but stock-in-trade AI tools such as automated learning systems, heuristic (“fuzzy”) reasoning algorithms and deep text analysis have potential to take intake decision making to a new level of sophistication. In particular, the proven ability for AI to find structure in ambiguous or unstructured data, often using probability-based algorithms that consult historical data, may directly address one of the core challenges of intake decision making.

Some have expressed concern that various types of implicit bias might creep into analytical datasets or algorithms, skewing predictions to the disadvantage of specific groups or individuals.[[8]](#footnote-8) Models are ultimately only as good as the design thinking that goes into them, and flawed assumptions will likely lead to flawed results. In response to these concerns, some policy research organizations have made efforts to articulate standards for the ethical and effective use of this technology. Chapin Hall[[9]](#footnote-9) and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency[[10]](#footnote-10), among others, have published useful guides. The potential use of predictive analytics is not limited to Intake, of course, and we will return to it elsewhere in this document.

Though there are certainly pros and cons to injecting more automation into a fundamentally human-driven process, we believe that RFP developers may find it worthwhile to solicit creative AI-based solution ideas from their bidders while documenting organizational concerns and limitations as *Constraints* in the Intake section of their RFP. If possible, states may wish to allocate a modest amount of funding to retain outside experts to assist in developing or validating any predictive models created with vendor analytics tools.

*Mobile reporting* Another technology trend to consider is the pervasiveness of smartphones and tablets. If a reporter personally witnesses a situation that drives him or her to make a report, it is increasingly likely that that reporter has a smartphone in hand. The quickest (and perhaps safest) way to initiate an intake from the scene might be to send a text message to a publicized text address. Interactive technology now exists that would enable the intake system to automatically respond to such a text with a series of preliminary screening questions and to enable the reporter to request a callback, potentially after a delay or at another number, so that further information can be collected by a human intake worker. If responses to the preliminary questions suggest imminent danger, workflow rules could escalate the report for immediate followup and/or direct the reporter to call 911.

Once a live interview with the reporter is underway, text messaging might also enable the reporter to transmit supplemental materials (video, audio or photos recorded on the phone) for possible inclusion in the online report. While the ultimate evidentiary standing of such unverified materials may be doubtful from a legal perspective, they may still help the intake worker assess the credibility of the report in the initial screening process. After all, verbal reports and claims made by the reporter during an intake interview are unverified until an investigation is undertaken, yet still form the basis for a screen-in/screen-out judgment. The ability to round out the reporter’s oral report with supplemental media represents an opportunity RFP authors, and bidders, may want to consider pursuing.

A related and intriguing dimension of mobile reporting is the possibility that accepting reports via text message will encourage more self-reporting by victims of abuse. A recent Purdue University study[[11]](#footnote-11) suggested that access to a text-based “hotline” encouraged children to report concerns more frequently, and in straightforward language.

Topic: 1.2 Investigation

This section concerns the process that follows the determination that an intake report warrants or requires further investigation. RFP authors will want to adjust details of the Model RFP text to conform to their own business process, practice standards and regulations.

Key Business Processes

The investigation process utilizes professionally trained staff to ascertain whether the allegations made during the intake phase are substantiated by the available evidence, and to determine the level of immediate safety threat as well as longer-term risk of harm to a child. Investigations unfold according to state-mandated[[12]](#footnote-12) timeframes which vary depending primarily on the immediacy of the safety threat suggested by the reporter.

*Differential response* Some states use a Differential Response approach in which screened-in reports are assigned to one of two paths based on an array of factors, such as the presence of imminent danger, level of risk, number of previous reports, source of the report and/or presenting case characteristics (e.g. the type of alleged maltreatment and the age of the alleged victim).

For reports involving low to moderate safety concerns, a Differential Response path uses assessments to identify and coordinate voluntary services (e.g. food or housing assistance) that can help mitigate safety concerns without a formal finding regarding allegations made during intake. The second (traditional) path, for more serious allegations, involves a more structured investigation that results in a decision on whether or not to substantiate each allegation. In states employing a Differential Response framework, RFP authors may want to include a description of their organization’s specific process, decision rules and assessment tools. We do not provide such text in the Model RFP.

*Interventions during investigation* Because an investigator is often the first child welfare professional to see first-hand the situation in the home, she may initiate immediate interventions such as separating children from caregivers, provision of emergency medical services to a child, and law enforcement or court actions. All this may occur prior to formal disposition of allegations or opening of a case.

Thus, while the investigator operates under clearly-defined practice guidelines and regulations with regard to the investigation itself, she also must be equipped to respond to the family’s immediate needs in a more flexible manner, making appropriate decisions about urgent service referrals, separation of child from caregiver, placements and the like. The CCWIS solution should support both modes of work. This implies a number of solution capabilities which we discuss below. In the Model RFP, some are listed as Guideposts, others as Constraints; RFP authors may well want to adjust our categorization to reflect their policy and practice imperatives.

*Seamless access to information collected during intake...and before* Any information collected during intake should be carried forward automatically to prepopulate the investigation record. While the original intake may contain inaccuracies or false statements later uncovered by the investigation, it represents a baseline legal record of the reported abuse or neglect, and thus a starting point for the investigator. The CCWIS solution should not allow the investigator to alter the intake record itself, but to document new findings even when they conflict with what was originally reported.

Similarly, investigators should have as much access as possible to relevant information predating the latest intake. This might include, among other things, any prior allegations against the alleged perpetrator, and their disposition; the history of changes in focus children’s living arrangements; criminal justice records for the alleged perpetrator; details of cases family members have been involved with in the past; child support arrangements and orders; joint custody arrangements; court findings and actions in relation to alleged victims and perpetrators.

*Workload management and intake assignment* Some agencies have established target maximum caseloads for investigators, often taking into account the complexity and mandated turnaround times of alleged incidents. In large agencies, assignment of intakes to investigators may be largely an automated process, while in others it might be entirely at supervisory discretion. Some jurisdictions have a dedicated team of investigators, while others share out investigation duties across a team of case managers. Ideally a CCWIS solution would support all these models in a configurable manner (e.g., with the ability to tweak target caseloads and assignment logic) and would provide dashboard views that enable supervisors to see at a glance the caseloads and case characteristics of their investigative teams.

*Enforcement of mandated turnaround times* For an investigator juggling multiple simultaneous investigations, management of turnaround times and other parameters can be time-consuming. A CCWIS solution can help through judicious use of reminders and alerts and user interface features such as time- and complexity-ranked task lists and/or visual timelines.

*Ability to initiate removals, placements and service referrals during the investigation* Because some services and actions may be initiated while the investigation is ongoing, the Investigation component of the CCWIS solution should connect with other relevant components such as Placement Selection and Service Referrals. If and when a case is opened, regardless of the ultimate disposition of allegations, the full constellation of data and documentation and events surrounding the child(ren) in question should be visible to future case managers.

*Production of mandated and agency-designed reports* Investigations involve the assembly of documentation, the making of informed judgments and the recording of formal dispositional decisions regarding alleged incidents of abuse or neglect. A CCWIS solution must include facilities for producing an array of reports and documents reflecting this business process.

*Integration with court systems* When substantial threats to a child’s safety are confirmed during an investigation, the child welfare organization typically interacts with law enforcement and ultimately the legal system. To the extent that evidence collected in the course of the investigation will form part of the legal record, a CCWIS solution should make it simple to package evidence, associated documentation such as assessments, and findings in a form that can be transmitted to the court and/or attorneys. In some jurisdictions it may be possible to interface directly with the court system—this is one of the data exchanges CCWIS requires “to the extent practicable”— but at a minimum the CCWIS solution should be able to produce well-organized documents in Word or PDF format and export associated evidence files (photos, videos, audio) as appropriate. The ability to manage court dates and docket information is also very helpful to child welfare staff.

*Integration with other data repositories* In the process of collecting evidence, an investigator will be most productive if she can access relevant data that may reside in other systems—schools, healthcare, vital records, criminal justice, sex offender registries, courts and so on. Investigations that are closed without a case being opened for ongoing services may still result in a referral to community and supportive services, in which case a data exchange with community-based service providers would be ideal. In keeping with the CCWIS emphasis on data exchanges, solutions can add significant value by providing hooks into this information wherever possible.

Configurability Considerations

RFP writers may want to consider the desirability of having a solution that provides the ability to configure *assessments* and/or *workflow*.

Investigators typically employ structured assessments to evaluate the child’s immediate safety, risk of harm and other factors. Please see Topic 1.3, below, for our thoughts on CCWIS support for configurable assessments.

The investigation workflow involves various steps, signoffs, outbound actions (such as placements or referrals for service), escalations and production of court-related documentation. While the process is certainly similar across the country, variations do exist, and best practices can be expected to evolve. As time goes on, agencies should be able to modify investigation workflows with modest effort and cost.

As importantly, workflow capabilities need to allow for human judgment to intervene at critical decision points. Child welfare practice abounds in situations where an algorithmic conclusion will not necessarily produce a better outcome than would the considered judgment of a professional. Case management is not and never will be a mechanized process. To the extent that workflow tools can allow for supervisory overrides—with the ability to record a reason, and with a full audit trail—they will better reflect the real-world needs of practitioners.

Innovation Opportunities to Consider

*Mobile access to data and assessment tools* Much of what an investigator does necessarily occurs outside the office. While we include it here as an innovation opportunity, the ability to carry relevant records and tools into the field on a portable device is now considered by many to be baseline functionality. As with any mobile capability, solutions will ideally accommodate offline as well as online use, with secure synchronization of offline activity once a connection is reestablished.

*Ability to collect evidence using portable device capabilities* On a related note, a mobile investigator will be most productive if she can use her device’s native capabilities—camera, microphone and GPS, first and foremost—to collect evidence and embed it into the online record. In a mobile CCWIS solution, this might involve, for example, a feature that enables the investigator to record an interview and associate it, perhaps with system-generated metadata such as the interview date, time and location, with the underlying investigation record.

*GPS routing and worker safety tracking* Investigators often face tense and sometimes dangerous situations; agencies are rightly concerned for their safety. One advantage of equipping workers with a mobile device is that the GPS capability of the device (assuming the device has a cellular connection) can be used to track the worker’s location—or the device’s, if it happens to be stolen. By using mapping technology to build a travel route for the investigator and then periodically comparing the investigator’s whereabouts with the route, a supervisor or an automated system function could detect deviations that might signal trouble. The same capabilities can create an audit trail that confirms that a planned visit actually did take place.

Topic: 1.3 Assessment

Assessment plays a role in many phases of the case management lifecycle, from intake through service planning and beyond. A strong CCWIS solution should integrate assessments into all relevant functional modules and should make them easy to configure and modify.

Assessment Instruments

While there are certain widely used assessment instruments such as those included in the National Council on Crime and Delinquency’s Structured Decision Making (SDM)® model[[13]](#footnote-13), departments often adapt them for their specific needs and may create their own. Helpful information on the states’ use of assessment tools can be found at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/assessment/approaches/structured-decision-making/>.

Assessments usually involve both factual questions and scored questions, and may include calculations that generate a score (e.g. a score indicating safety threats, risk of future harm or readiness for reunification). These assessments focus explicitly on a family’s strengths and needs, providing crucial input to removal decisions, case planning, service referrals and interventions. Many assessments include space for caseworkers to comment or provide descriptive narrative alongside more structured fields. In some cases the completion of an assessment constitutes a formal step in a business process workflow (e.g. placement, adoption, resource licensing).

Concerning Configurability

Because practice standards vary and evolve, a CCWIS solution should make it easy to configure such assessments and any workflows surrounding them. While it might seem ideal to give IT departments or business analysts the ability to configure assessments on their own, RFP authors may or may not want to make this a fixed requirement. Because assessments are often linked to workflow and other aspects of case management, even minor changes require a careful impact analysis—sometimes best done, perhaps, by the vendor responsible for the rest of the solution. This is especially the case with changes that would extend or reframe the data model underlying the assessment tool. Modifying the visual aspect of an assessment can be made quite simple with a form designer, but the underlying calculations, data elements and assumptions matter more.

Use of Third-party Assessment Tools

Alternatively, states may rely on independent software tools provided by the assessment designers themselves, as is the case with NCCD’s Structured Decision Making product set. In this case the question is more one of integrating assessment inputs and outputs with the CCWIS solution than of supporting the custom configuration of assessments.

Topic: 1.4 Eligibility

Eligibility determination and periodic redetermination are essential steps in tapping funding streams that pay for child welfare services, with Title IV-E being the chief source of federal funds. The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 made significant changes in the array and duration of services for which IV-E funding may be used.

Baseline CCWIS Requirements

At a minimum, the CCWIS solution must be able to determine and redetermine eligibility for reimbursement under Titles IV-B and IV-E, deriving data (and potentially calculations or calculation logic) from other eligibility systems as appropriate. In practice, most states will want their CCWIS solution to handle other types of eligibility as well, e.g. non-IV-E state adoption assistance (when the child does not qualify for IV-E) or emergency assistance.

Data Exchanges

The CCWIS Final Rule requires that the CCWIS solution must support “efficient, economical, and effective bi-directional data exchanges” to exchange relevant data with “each system used to calculate one or more components of Title IV–E eligibility determinations...if applicable.” Whether or not this is “applicable” will depend on the State’s particular array of systems; in the Model RFP we leave it as an optional element. In a broader sense, the more the CCWIS solution can minimize the need for manual data entry by pulling data from elsewhere, the better.

Externalization of Business Rules

CCWIS application design requirements, detailed in §1355.53 of the Final Rule, call for “separation of business rules from core programming.” As it is inherently rules-based, the Eligibility function would be a logical place to demonstrate adherence to this design principle; we suggest this in the Model RFP as a Guidepost.

In practice, the separation of business rules might well be implemented by basing the eligibility function on a business rules engine. Because there are other ways to achieve the same objective, however, we chose not to specify a rules engine either in the Guidepost text or as a Constraint. RFP authors may want to consider making a rules engine a formal Constraint if their state is already committed to the use of one as part of its enterprise architecture.

Topic: 1.5 Case Planning and Management

Case planning and ongoing case management are multifaceted business processes that bring together many components found in other areas of child welfare practice. In the course of these activities, for example, case managers may administer assessments, make service referrals, make placements, monitor service utilization and interact with the courts. In some jurisidictions they may also be responsible for determining eligibility for funding streams like Title IV-E and/or monitoring service consumption against budgets. As these related business processes are covered in their own sections of the RFP, here we focus on case planning itself and highlight some best practices in ongoing case management.

CCWIS as an Opportunity to Zero in on Outcomes

While outcome-focused case management has long been the gold standard in social services practice, traditional child welfare applications don’t always make it easy to achieve. In particular, their data models and user experiences may not draw a clear through-line from assessment findings, to plan objectives, to interventions and service delivery in pursuit of those objectives, to measurement of outcomes against evidence-based metrics. CCWIS provides an opportunity to better support these linkages, resulting in better data, better individual and family outcomes, and, at a macro policy level, better analysis about what works and what doesn’t in child welfare.

Family-centric Case Management

As is now widely recognized and as embodied in initiatives like Family First, provision of appropriate, meaningful supportive services to families can improve outcomes for at-risk children. A detailed understanding of extended family structures can also help caseworkers identify prospective kinship placement resources such as aunts and uncles or grandparents. CCWIS solutions should provide the ability to build case plans with multiple participants and service recipients, including parents, children and potentially other involved parties. The ability to visually present family structures, including nontraditional and complex structures, can help familiarize caseworkers with extended social networks that might serve as resources to the family and its children.

Team Working

All states incorporate some aspects of team working into their practice, whether through a formal Team Decision Making (TDM) model[[14]](#footnote-14) or more informally. Some examples include placement-related decision making (initial separation from parents/placement changes/reunification or other permanency decisions), regular case monitoring, and federally-required semiannual case reviews for kids in custody.

Sophisticated tools for collaborative (and often remote) working abound in the commercial world—one need only think of the widespread, rapid adoption of the Zoom™ conferencing tool during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bidders should be encouraged to leverage the best of these commercial tools creatively in their CCWIS solution, giving child welfare workers access to the same cutting-edge technology that others use to collaborate and make joint decisions. The Model RFP includes a placeholder

Maintaining High Data Quality

CCWIS places strong emphasis on data quality. In the case management context, this can be achieved through such solution features as reminders to enter specific types of data, data quality checking at the time of entry, avoidance of unverified default values, carry-forward of historical data to avoid the need to reenter it, and strong data entry validations. Bidders should demonstrate clearly that they understand the depth and breadth of the CCWIS data quality agenda. Several of the Constraints in this section of the Model RFP reflect specific requirements found in the CCWIS Final Rule.

Data Sharing with CWCAs

An important dimension of case management practice is that many states rely on partner agencies—known in CCWIS parlance as Child Welfare Contributing Agencies (CWCAs)—to perform certain case management functions. (Agencies that provide *only* direct services such as parenting classes are excluded.) The IV-E agency is required to share CCWIS data with these agencies, as outlined in ACF’s CCWIS Technical Bulletin #2, revised and reissued January 27, 2020. Data sharing can occur in two ways: 1) CWCA staff can be given direct access, as users, to the CCWIS solution; 2) an automated bidirectional interface can be created to link the CCWIS with the CWCA’s own information system.

State RFP authors will want to be explicit about the desired or required approach here. If CWCAs will become system users, for example, bidders may need to describe how their role-based security model would enable the State to grant access only to selected CCWIS functions for a given type of CWCA user; external users may not have access to as many functions as State users. If the automated interface approach is favored, bidders will want to understand something about the systems they are expected to connect with; without this, their estimates of the effort level to build integrations might be far off the mark.

In the Model RFP, we provide text that points bidders to an informational document the State would place in its Resource Library. This document provides a list of current CWCAs, an indication of which data exchange approach the State would like to use for each, and for automated-exchange CWCAs some basic information on the interoperability capabilities of the CWCA’s own information system. A template for this type of document follows.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **CWCA name** | **Exchange method** | **Interoperability capabilities** |
| Alpha Placement Services | Bidirectional interface | System supports Web service exchange of: child and foster parent demographics; resource license data; placement activities |
| Beta Home Visitors | Bidirectional interface | System supports exchange of case and contact information through batch files |
| Gamma Foster Care | Direct access | N/A |

While it will take some effort to assemble this data, doing so will help bidders provide realistic estimates for the effort involved in building integrations. The 2020 revision of ACF’s Technical Bulletin #2 provides useful suggestions on how to gather such information through a CWCA survey. See section 7 of the bulletin.

In lieu of or in addition to furnishing details on current capabilities of CWCA systems, the State might consider imposing its own standards for CWCA data exchanges to create uniformity among its CWCA partners. Section 6 of ACF’s technical bulletin #2, in its revised 2020 edition, provides specific guidance on this.

Topic: 1.6 Placement Selection

This section pertains to the process of identifying and selecting appropriate placements for children and youth. The decision of *whether* to place is addressed in other parts of the document, such as the Assessment and Case Plan sections.

Best Practices

Out-of-home placement is a core element of child welfare practice, and as such has been the focus of much research.[[15]](#footnote-15) This research has identified a number of widely accepted best practices, such as placement of children with kin, placement of siblings together (as required by the federal Fostering Connections Act), and placements that enable the child to stay in his or her school. Our Model RFP text puts evidence-influenced best practices front and center as both Goals and Guideposts.

RFP authors may want to convert certain Guideposts into formal Constraints if they regard them as true requirements. (We have opted for a conservative approach because CCWIS generally shies away from prescriptive requirements.) For example, it may be that a state wants to formalize the concept of having the placement identification solution automatically screen based on criteria such as language, location, school district and cultural background (or other factors we haven’t named). Moving this Guidepost to the Constraints section will make it a mandatory requirement.

As is our practice throughout the Model RFP, we state Goals and Guideposts in high-level terms in order to encourage bidders to provide their most innovative solutions. While we might have described some of the commonly seen approaches to placement matching workflow and the placement user experience, for example, we prefer to leave the door open to creative thinking and novel ideas.

The Importance of Data in Placement Decisions

Echoing CCWIS, the Placement Selection section emphasizes the importance of data in making strong placement selections and evaluating the results of placement practices.

* *Operationally*, good placements depend not only upon foster home availability—often the dominant consideration, realistically—but also upon the caseworker’s ability to bring compare information about the child being placed with information on foster placement resources, including the composition and characteristics of the foster home. An effective CCWIS solution should make such data readily available and actionable for the user.
* *From an evaluation perspective*, reliable data on placement stability, foster care resources, interruptions in placement, permanency outcomes and other key factors is essential to both ongoing practice improvement and an understanding of what constitutes best practice in the field.

Direct and Brokered Placements

Another important element of a successful CCWIS solution, for most states, will be its ability to support both direct placements (in which agency staff interact with and manage a pool of foster resources) and brokered placements (in which a CWCA acts as intermediary between the child welfare agency and foster care resources, and potentially provides full, privatized case management services). In the latter scenario, some states may want the CWCA to have direct access to the CCWIS solution, with restrictions that enable them to manage only their placement cases; other states may prefer a more arm’s-length approach in which state workers communicate with CWCAs via structured messaging (e.g., automated placement requests and responses) or an integration with the CWCA’s own information system. The Model RFP includes optional language that anticipates these various scenarios.

We list a number of Constraints in the Placements section. Some correspond to federal data collection requirements, while others which concern the interconnection of placements with other business processes such as assessment and foster care payment management. States may want to add constraints of their own.

Topic: 1.7 Service Referral and Utilization Management

This topic covers both the referral process and the tracking and management of service delivery.

Referrals to service providers can occur at nearly any time in the case management lifecycle. They may begin, in fact, before a case is formally opened, if urgent needs are uncovered during the investigation of an intake. When referrals are for services delivered under contract, service referral data and the underlying workflow need to connect with the financial management modules of the CCWIS solution.

A Wealth of Referral Types

Service providers might be within or without the government agency sphere, contracted (using IV-E or other funds) or independently funded, child-centered or family-centered; a good CCWIS solution should be able to handle as many referral scenarios as possible. Beyond the classic sorts of referrals, for services like substance abuse treatment, parenting classes and so on, we see scenarios such as:

* Diversion of hotline callers toward a sister agency or community-based organization when an incoming call implies the need for services (e.g. housing or a food pantry) but not child welfare services per se
* Coordination of community-based services under a differential response program
* Coordination of daycare services for an elderly relative in order to provide respite to the child’s parent
* Arrangement of ongoing services for youth transitioning out of the system
* Referral for services to community-based providers and collaboratives when an investigation is inconclusive (or allegations are judged unfounded) despite the fact that social service needs exist

From Service Referral to Service Utilization

Service referral is the first link in the chain of service delivery. Once a referral is accepted by the service provider (an inquiry-response workflow that can be effectively automated), service delivery typically proceeds according to an agreed budget and timeframe, with or without specific outcome goals. In many cases the services delivered under the case plan will be court-dictated and court-supervised. Utilization is tracked and monitored over time; adjustments may be made to the budget and referral parameters as needs change and funding permits.

Other types of service are less structured. While not specific to child welfare, for example, a referral to a food bank might help address food insecurity concerns and thereby help stabilize the family; in this case, utilization of the service will likely be ad hoc and not “budgeted” per se, and may not be included in the family’s case plan. Utilization may not be tracked at all.

Who Minds the Budget?

Different states have different practices with regard to a caseworker’s responsibility for managing the service budget. Though it is the exception, some states require the case manager to act as fiscal gatekeeper, monitoring utilization and even payments; others shield caseworkers from these duties and leave them to the fiscal office. The RFP author will want to reflect the State’s preferred approach.

Tracking at the Family and Individual Levels

Some service types necessarily involve multiple family members—often parents with their children. In this case, the typical model is for the referral to reference all family members, but service episode tracking to be at the individual level. This data model accommodates situations in which, for example, one of a family’s three children has to miss a family therapy session because she is in the hospital; the participation of the parents and other two children is recorded, as is the absence (and reason for absence) of the third child. Because most funding streams follow the individual, the ability to track utilization individually is also very important from a fiscal perspective.

Innovation Opportunities to Consider

While there is wide agreement that family supportive services can have a powerful impact on outcomes, the scope of such services can be quite broad, leaving a caseworker unsure where to direct the family for help. Empowering caseworkers with wider, deeper and more carefully curated information on community-based services—as well as powerful matching tools to make the search easier—can add considerable value to a CCWIS solution, especially when a caseworker is faced with multigenerational social service challenges.

For example, one of the family’s strengths may be competent and committed grandparent who lives next door and represents a source of stability for the children, but who needs costly assisted living services in order to continue living independently. A directed and meaningful intervention might be to explore ways of funding the needed services and lining up a service provider—the goal being to keep the grandparent next door and thus present in the children’s lives. Unfortunately, despite her best intentions, the child welfare caseworker may have neither the expertise nor the time to pursue this intervention. Perhaps it’s the first time she’s ever had to look into services for seniors, and she doesn’t know where to begin.

One can envision several ways in which an innovative CCWIS solution might help:

* Support for collaborative working between allied professionals, leveraging secure messaging, video chat and other commercially available technologies.
* In-system links to call, text or chat with a 211 resource line where available. (Most 211s are operated by the United Way; there is also a [211.org](http://211.org/) website that routes visitors to their local 211 center.)
* Integration of a curated database of community-based resources accessible through a search engine. Rather than expect a child welfare professional to keep abreast of resources available to seniors, or recent immigrants, or other target groups, put at her fingertips an externally-managed knowledgebase she can efficiently query on behalf of the families she serves. Perhaps the most mature such solution is Aunt Bertha ([auntbertha.com](http://auntbertha.com/)), which boasts nearly three million users and offers human-checked profiles of tens of thousands of social service programs and benefits across the United States. As with 211, melding such a resource into service referral functions could add real value to a CCWIS solution by enabling caseworkers to greatly extend the portfolio of supportive services available to families.
* Integration of assessment results with service matching tools. For example, if an assessment identifies a need for respite care—perhaps a mother is struggling to care not only for her children but for an elderly relative who lives in the home—it would save the caseworker steps to have relevant community resources identified and proposed automatically, without the need to manually key in search terms based on the assessment.

Topic: 1.8 Permanency Planning and Post-Permanency Support

Successful case outcomes depend on thorough planning for the child’s exit from care, whether that exit be through reunification with the birth family, adoption, guardianship or transition to adulthood. From a CCWIS and regulatory point of view, a number of requirements must be met both in process and in data collection, and these are detailed in the Model RFP as Constraints. In line with best practices, the Model RFP discusses a number of processes such as team decision making and sharing of case information with supportive service providers to assist with a smooth segué out of the public system.

Because permanency is the ultimate goal of child welfare practice, the Model RFP includes a number of Guideposts and Constraints that focus on longitudinal outcome reporting and the data collection needed to support it.

State-specific Practice Variations

Optional text is provided to account for certain common state variations in practice. For example, some states have a designated staff role responsible for handling eligibility determination with regard to adoption subsidies; in other states this is handled by the relevant case manager. Some states have chosen to extend the window for foster care to age 21 under the Fostering Connections Act, while others have not.[[16]](#footnote-16) The State’s RFP should be explicit about such state policy and program variations so that bidders can respond accurately.

Topic: 1.9 Adoption and Guardianship

This section describes the State’s vision for an efficient program, guided by timely and thorough data management and smooth points of transition through a critical pipeline, that ultimately ensures a safe and stable “second family” for children who will not return to their families of origin. For adoption, the agency’s decision to pursue the termination of parental rights must adhere to federal and state timelines so that children do not languish in temporary situations. Once the public agency and the court determine that a child cannot be reunified, their responsibility to quickly secure a new family is profound.

Guardianship as Permanency Plan

If a child has spent his or her time in foster care with a relative or close friend, especially when it is considered beneficial to allow a continuing relationship with the parents, guardianship is often the plan for a child’s permanency. In this type of guardianship, all legal responsibilities for the child shift to the legal guardian, without termination of parental rights. Guardianships can be reversed or amended by the court which granted them. There is no ongoing relationship of the family formed by guardianship with the public agency unless a subsidy has been provided.

Adoption Application, Approval and Matching

The Model RFP envisions a solution that supports the application and approval process for prospective adoptive parents and then links these parents, once licensed, to the pool of legally available children. The solution must also include a sensitive, individualized matching process, with ample opportunity for parents and child to “try out” living together as a family prior to finalization. (The process for children adopted by their foster parents is generally simpler.)

Larger public child welfare systems often contract with multiple private partners for both foster care and adoption services. The solution must integrate contracted agency recruitment, licensing and matching processes with its own, as well as manage payment processes based on performance where contracts are structured in that way.

The urgent need for suitable adoptive parents has led to a variety of state and national “adoption exchange” programs, which facilitate the identification and matching of “legally free” children with interested adults. A solution which could integrate a system’s data on available children with the information in these exchange programs to surface potential matches would greatly enhance an agency’s odds of achieving successful adoptions.

Adoption Subsidies and Finalization

The solution must support the pursuit of financial subsidies to defray the legal and administrative costs associated with the adoption and the special needs of an adopted child, as well as any ongoing requirements for renewal of subsidies. Finally, the Model RFP describes a process that culminates in a timely and well-supported adoption petition to the court and results in a new permanent family for the child.

Adoption Records Management

Public system staffing approaches to support adoption and guardianship vary greatly. In one model, specialized adoption workers serve as adjuncts to the primary case manager who saw the case through to termination of parental rights; in others, the case is transferred to the adoption specialist at the point of termination. The sharing of the child’s historical information with the adoption worker is critical in either case, and a CCWIS solution that addresses this need is desirable.

Adoption is also the point at which the child’s public system record is typically separated from the family record. State laws often dictate that records are sealed for confidentiality reasons; access to family records by adopted children is usually governed by regulations that are specific as to the time and manner in which they can be shared. In recent years, many states have legislated more open access, allowing adoptees to obtain their birth certificates, for example. The CCWIS solution should reflect these developments and support the state’s need to manage case records and the regulations around their storage and release. Because state laws vary, the Model RFP provides basic, optional language to cover these provisions.

If the State’s regulations support open adoption, whereby biological and adoptive parents mutually agree to support continuing contact between the child and their biological family, the CCWIS solution may require systems to document and/or revise such agreements. This provision is included in the Model RFP as an optional Constraint.

How CCWIS Technology Can Support Guardianship

Guardianship provides an alternative to adoption as a means for creating a permanent family for a child. The Model RFP envisions a solution that provides the child’s worker with reminders and tracking mechanisms to meet timelined requirements for placement, family/home approval and legal validation that are similar to but much simpler than those for adoption. If the State offers a subsidy for kinship guardianship, the solution must also support processes for application, payment, and any ongoing re-certification requirements.

In addition, many public agencies partner with “relative search and engagement” specialty programs, with which they contract to increase the pool of potential permanent families for children unable to reunify. These entities use a variety of strategies, often influenced by successful law enforcement practices, to track down extended family members not recently (and often not ever) in contact with legally available children. Some of these arrangements may be performance-based, with payment determined by successful and stable permanent placements. The Model RFP invites innovative approaches for the public agency to integrate such partnerships with its own recruitment processes, and utilize the information gained to strengthen the success of its matching activities.

Topic: 1.10 Program Administration

The Program Administration module provides tools for administrators to manage various operational elements that underlie day-to-day program management.

Meeting CCWIS Criteria for Program Administration

This module is an important contributor to the CCWIS goal of “efficient, economical and effective administration.” Though a CCWIS solution will necessarily be complex, administering it should be straightforward and not overly time-consuming for staff who almost certainly have many other duties. Bidders should be expected to show how their proposed solution will make program administrators more productive. The judicious use of alerts and reminders can go a long way toward this objective.

Staff Management

The depth of this function will depend on the state’s procedures for managing employee onboarding, credentialing, ongoing training and other human resources activities. If these functions reside within the child welfare agency, the CCWIS solution *could* be the primary workspace for performing them, though it need not be; if the state has dedicated departments and processes for the functions, the CCWIS vendor’s role may be more one of ensuring that data from external HR systems can be automatically synchronized with CCWIS data on staff (and potentially resource) licensing, training and so on. For example, many states handle licensing of all licensed employee types through a dedicated, centralized team rather than leaving it to individual departments. This situation calls for a different level of CCWIS support than other scenarios. The Model RFP includes alternate text for various arrangements.

One basic data exchange that can be of high value is an automated interface with the HR system to update the CCWIS on hires, fires and changes in employee reporting structure. When an employee in the child welfare agency is terminated, for example, their system access needs to be cut off immediately; an integration that triggers this action, or alerts an administrator to perform it, would contribute toward administrative efficiency and minimize the chance of unauthorized access.

Caseload Management

Program administrators, at various supervisory levels, need good tools for monitoring staff caseloads and making sound decisions about the assignment of new cases. The Model RFP discusses these needs briefly here, in the Program Administration section, and in more depth in the Case Planning and Management section.

Case Review Support

Formal case reviews, conducted on a periodic basis with or without federal partners present, are a core aspect of program management. The Model RFP highlights a number of ways in which bidder solutions could make the process more efficient.

Audit

This section of the Model RFP lists various audit trails that can aid in program administration and accountability.

Topic: 1.11 Foster Care Provider Management

Recruiting, vetting, licensing and ongoing management of foster care resources is a core business function in the child welfare arena. Some public agencies outsource much of the process—sometimes including case management as well—to private foster care agencies; others keep all or most aspects inhouse. Hybrid models also exist, in which the public agency manages a stable of foster homes and contracts with external agencies to manage others. Whatever the arrangement, the public agency is ultimately responsible for quality assurance and oversight of foster care providers.

Privatized models often involve performance-based contracting (PBC), in which contract awards, payments and/or renewals are tied to a pre-agreed set of performance metrics. Rather than focus primarily on the *how* of the foster care process, such a contract approach emphasizes *results*. Contract structures, and contracting strategies, vary widely across the United States. Some states, for example, bid contracts competitively; others contract with all available foster care agencies.

The Model RFP provides various optional sections reflecting these different models; not all components will apply to any given setting. If a state leaves it to private agencies to recruit prospective foster parents, for example, sections pertaining to CCWIS solution support for this function would most likely be omitted.

Recruitment of Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents

Many states face chronic shortages of foster and adoptive homes. More effective recruitment of prospective resource families, especially those with a kinship relationship to children being placed, can substantially improve the quality of placement efforts by shortening placement times and engaging stronger candidates who can provide better and longer-lasting care.

The Children’s Bureau maintains a rich list of recruitment strategies and tools here: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/recruiting/recruitment-tools/> From a CCWIS point of view, RFP authors may want to consider how technology might be used to pursue recruitment in new or more efficient ways. Since recruitment combines elements of outreach, contact management and prospect cultivation, technologies borrowed from the commercial sector may well be worth adding to the recruiter’s toolkit. Introduction of a new CCWIS solution could be the perfect time to turbocharge outreach strategies with new capabilities.

The Model RFP invites bidders to put forward techniques and lessons learned from the commercial sphere that might help widen the pool of potential resource families. While our suggested text is intentionally non-specific and non-directive, ideas worthy of consideration (and possibly worth mentioning in a state’s RFP) might include:

* Use of multichannel marketing tools
* Social media outreach
* Use of Big Data to zero in on potential cohorts that might include resource family prospects
* Geographic analysis
* Microtargeting based on purchased third-party data and vital records (to build kinship maps)
* Prospect management and CRM
* Web portal engagement monitoring

Licensing

Foster care licensing processes and rules are not controlled by federal statute and thus vary state by state. In 2012-2013, a comprehensive study[[17]](#footnote-17) spearheaded and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) compared licensing regimes across the country; building on this, a consortium consisting of AECF, the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law, Generations United and the National Association of Regulatory Administration (NARA) developed a set of Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards[[18]](#footnote-18) which NARA has now formally adopted.

In the Model RFP we provide language reflecting the high-level processes used by all or most states. RFP authors will need to adjust our text to reflect their situation and may wish to provide more granular detail on a number of points—differences in workflow between relative and non-relative caregiver licensing, for example. We refer readers to the Model Family Foster Home Licensing Standards document referenced above for evidence-informed guidance on potential enhancements to their current licensing processes. That document includes a Crosswalk Tool designed to assist states in comparing their current practices to the model standards.

Capacity Management

Accurate and timely information on foster care bed capacity and the current foster care census is essential to a smoothly running placement process. Another key factor is information on foster home characteristics—which homes offer support for children with special needs, for example. CCWIS solutions can facilitate data quality by automating capacity tracking and by providing simple ways for foster care resources to directly or indirectly notify the agency of temporary changes in their capacity.

Because capacity management ties to both licensing (on the front end of the supply chain, so to speak) and resource family payment (on the back end), it is important that bidders understand in some detail business processes specific to the agency. For example, does the agency expect/allow foster families to update their own capacity information, if, for example, the return of a biological sibling to the home will reduce its capacity to accept foster children? How does the agency manage its waitlist, if any? The answers to questions like these will give bidders a clearer sense of how their solution can help improve agency business processes.

Monitoring Performance-based Contracts

Some states employ a performance-based contract model in working with out-of-home placement providers. Payments are set according to various metrics, and may use a variety of payment triggers (e.g. achievement of defined milestones). If support for performance-based contracting is relevant, the RFP author should provide complete information on payment models and metrics. We further recommend including a sample contract in the Resource Library for bidders to review.

This topic is more thoroughly discussed in the section on Performance-based Contracting, beginning on page 75.

Topic: 1.12 Financial Management and Contracting

This module includes all functions agencies need to manage their fiscal processes, produce financial reports for various stakeholders, and integrate with other systems of record such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) or payment systems.

Decoupling Fiscal Functions from the Child Welfare Management System

In a departure from the model imposed on first-generation, monolithic S/TACWIS systems, where federal statute required that robust financial functions be embedded within the child welfare information system, financial functions can now be parceled out or shared with external partner systems when it is efficient or economical to do so. This is a reflection, in part, of the fact that both commercial financial management systems and interoperability tools have advanced by leaps and bounds since the S/TACWIS program was first conceived. The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) product category barely existed when S/TACWIS was promulgated. As S/TACWIS and software offerings evolved, ACF relaxed some of the original “monolithic system” requirements—a process now fully consummated in CCWIS, with its emphasis on modular and interoperable solutions.

Rather than create a shadow departmental accounting system that duplicates functionality found in the state’s preexisting fiscal systems, CCWIS systems can focus on managing such fiscal components as contracts, service definitions, child welfare-specific funding sources and utilization tracking, leaving it (potentially) to outside systems to handle the routine mechanics of processing invoices, making payments and reporting on the use of funds.

In designing their CCWIS RFPs, states should consider whether bread-and-butter fiscal functions that traditionally have resided inside their child welfare management information system really need to stay there. In many cases these operations could be more effectively delegated to another system in the state portfolio. While it is true that the child welfare funding model has some exotic features, many financial processes carried out by a child welfare agency are common to nearly any governmental organization. Does the CCWIS solution really need to cut checks or trigger EFT payments, or should it simply send the needed utilization data to the state payment system? Does it need to provide a portal for provider invoice submission, when the state may already offer such a portal for its other contractors? Such duplication of functionality is antithetical to the CCWIS philosophy unless it is somehow more efficient to keep such processes within the child welfare department.

If the decision is to solicit a solution that leaves certain fiscal functions to other systems—exchanging necessary data through an integration—the RFP writer should be as specific as possible in describing which functions this would apply to, since bidders’ solution architects will need to conceive and scope, at a high level, an approach to the required integration.

The Model RFP contains several optional Guideposts and Constraints reflecting the difference between the two payment paradigms (i.e., direct payment management within the CCWIS solution versus through an integration with a state’s accounting system or ERP). RFP authors should select those that reflect its desired future-state business process.

Optimizing Funding Sources

Funding of child welfare services can be notoriously complex. With a plethora of service types, service recipient types and funding streams (federal, state, local, foundations and more)—and the fact that some administrative overheads, such as IT support, may also be reimbursable by external sources—finding the right blend of funding sources is both challenging and extremely important for the sustainability of the entire system of care.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Given the CCWIS mandate for efficient, economical and effective management, CCWIS solutions should be able to help agencies devise, implement and manage coherent strategies to optimize funding. Some states grant considerable discretion to finance staff in assigning funding sources to specific services; others automate this function to a greater or lesser degree, using predefined allocation templates and other means to impose consistent funding rules. To account for this variation in state practices we have included in the Model RFP optional language concerning the ability for human users to override system-assigned allocations. RFP authors may want to go further in communicating to bidders the specifics of their business process.

Fiscal Support for Performance-Based Contracting

As discussed above, many public agencies use a performance-based contracting model for certain classes of providers, typically those who conduct placement, adoption and/or case management services. Models vary in terms of the metrics used to evaluate performance and in the contractual effect of meeting or failing to meet them. Performance data may be used to set contractor compensation rates, trigger milestone payments, influence contract renewal decisions or adjust contract terms, among other things.

Because not all states utilize performance-based contracting, and because each state’s scheme is somewhat different from other states’, the Model RFP includes optional terms reflecting the most common variations. The most fundamental consideration is that the new CCWIS solution must capture all the data needed to produce the metrics used for performance monitoring. This need is universal even if the specific metrics are not.

A further RFP consideration is whether or not to require or suggest an integration between the CCWIS contract management module and the financial system used to pay contractors. For maximum efficiency, changes in metrics with payment or compensation rate implications could automatically trigger appropriate updates or transactions on the accounts payable side. A few examples, drawn from actual state contracts:

* Referral of a child to the provider could trigger a one-time payment based on a capitated rate
* Finalization of a permanent placement could trigger a fixed-rate milestone payment
* Finalization of an adoption within five months of termination of parental rights could trigger a one-time incentive payment

Other types of contracts base payment on the achievement of cohort-level metrics rather than metrics at the child level, and thus would not lend themselves to the sort of transaction-based integration described above. In this case, the CCWIS solution should at least be able to produce performance monitoring reports that reflect these contract structures.

We suggest that the RFP author consider placing in the bidder Resource Library a document describing the agency’s performance-based contracting model (if one is used), and perhaps provide examples of such contracts.

Support for Standard Transactional Workflows and Reports

The CCWIS solution will need to support, directly or indirectly, a host of common accounting workflows associated with invoicing, payments, trust fund accounting, purchasing, audit and other transactional processes. Depending on the state’s systems portfolio, some or all of these functions might be delegated to an ERP system, with the child welfare system providing inputs (e.g. foster care utilization data) and receiving outputs in return (e.g. expenditure reports by child). If the latter is the case, the RFP author will need to provide bidders with a detailed picture of the desired division of labor between the CCWIS solution and other enterprise systems. Ideally, bidders should have access to data flow diagrams or interface specifications that will help them design (and correctly scope) the necessary data-sharing architecture.

In a hybrid scenario, standard financial reporting may be the responsibility of the external accounting system, but bear in mind that the CCWIS solution must be the ultimate system of record for formal reporting to the federal government with regard to IV-E-funded expenditures.

Topic: 1.13 Reporting, Data Exports and Document Generation

CCWIS places a high value on data and reporting. From an outcomes perspective, a smart reporting strategy can greatly enhance the synergy between *practice* and *evaluation*.[[20]](#footnote-20) Ideally, the information caseworkers collect to determine risk and service needs and to choose appropriate interventions becomes the data used for program evaluation.

Section 1.13 of the Model RFP considers several types of reporting:

Federal Reporting encompasses a host of mandated reports and data extracts, from AFCARS to CFSR data. The CCWIS Final Rule includes some specific requirements that are listed in the Model RFP as Constraints, since they should be considered formal requirements.

Operational Reporting addresses the CCWIS “efficient, economical and effective” goal by putting clear and meaningful reports in the hands of staff as they perform their diverse job functions. We provide Guideposts with some suggested best practices such as support for “pinned” or “favorite” reports and the capability for trained staff to create ad hoc reports. If the state already has an enterprise-standard business reporting toolset it wishes the bidder to use, this should be indicated as a Constraint; information should be given as to whether the bidder will need to include a budget for additional license capacity.

Analytical Reporting is the essential link between practice and practice improvement. The Model RFP leaves plenty of room for bidders to suggest innovative approaches to this vital quality improvement function, but RFP authors may want to provide more specific examples of analytical reporting capabilities they see as valuable. A few possibilities to consider:

* Gap analysis (provider/service gaps)
* Service outcomes analysis
* Trajectory analysis (progress toward permanency)
* Predictive analysis (risk of future harm and other determinants of long-term child welfare)
* Race and ethnic disparities
* The Model RFP includes optional language that can be used to link the bidder’s proposed analytical reporting strategy to an existing or planned data warehouse. States should be aware, however, that creation of a data warehouse that incorporates CCWIS data may not qualify for federal financial participation under their approved CCWIS cost allocation plan. See the Children’s Bureau’s revised questions and answers to the Child Welfare Policy Manual, issued on 4/17/2020, specifically question #14.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Topic: 1.14 Solution Administration

The CCWIS solution should provide some ability for basic settings, values in most dropdown selection lists, security definitions and other operating parameters to be altered with relative ease in the field—which is to say, without programming. Any modern system offers some degree of support in this regard, though implementation approaches vary widely. In some cases, administrative functions may reside on special Web pages accessible to users with the administrator role. In others, administrative tasks might be performed with an external configuration tool. In some cases parameters will be held in text files on the server, or in registry settings. Hierarchies of administrative functions are generally recognized, with only a handful of staff empowered to perform sensitive operations that pertain to system-wide security, performance and so on.

The key point is that the solution supports its own administration without the state having to constantly call for vendor intervention. The Model RFP provides a robust list of administrative functions states should typically expect a proposed solution to support.

## Technology Goals, Guideposts and Constraints

Topic: 2.1 Solution Architecture

This section describes, at a high level, the sort of solution the state envisions, from the platform it is built on to best practices in user experience design. It also provides a vision of how the CCWIS solution will thread into the state’s existing tapestry of enterprise and departmental systems.

Choosing a Solution Model

Among the most fundamental matters states must decide in conceiving a CCWIS procurement is the degree to which they will leave it to vendors to propose the *solution model*. At the time of this writing, several models can be found in the child welfare marketplace. The predominant ones are:

* *The Custom-built Solution* In line with the majority of S/TACWIS-generation systems, this approach has a vendor work with the state to design and build a CCWIS solution essentially from scratch (though elements could certainly be borrowed from other government-funded solutions, which are considered to be in the public domain because built with public funds). Methodologies for software development are constantly evolving, with Agile gaining more and more mindshare over the past several years, and hybrid methodologies[[22]](#footnote-22) more and more common; states will need to decide whether to express a preference or include a hard requirement that a particular approach be used.   
    
  For custom-built solutions, we suggest that states consider allowing the bidder to propose the development methodology they feel will result in the best solution. There are pros and cons to each, and examples of successful and failed projects for any methodology one can find. States should also consider their own capacity to collaborate with vendors who use a methodology the state staff may be less familiar with.   
    
  Looking at the first wave of CCWIS procurements, custom-built solutions seem to be less appealing to states than they were in the S/TACWIS era.

*For clarity, in the Services Sought section we use Solution Delivery Methodology as a generic term for whichever specific methodology the state and/or the bidder selects.*

* *The Commercial-Off-The-Shelf (COTS) solution* Some vendors offer prebuilt solutions, often modular, that come with standard support plans. Various licensing models are used, from traditional seat-based licensing to server licensing. COTS solutions may be on-premise or cloud-based, with the latter rapidly gaining ascendancy.
* *Platform-based solution* With the rapid growth of the Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) model, some vendors in the child welfare market are bidding cloud-based solutions based on custom configuration of an existing software or application development toolset. The assertion is that custom programming can be minimized or avoided entirely because such a toolset provides high configurability. In reality, configuration sometimes does involve programming—albeit far less programming than would be required for a custom-built solution. Platform programming is typically done in JavaScript or a (typically more declarative) language native to the platform product.   
    
  Some states have licensed such platforms as part of their enterprise architectures (not necessarily in connection with their child welfare projects). Having such a platform already in place may incline a state to solicit CCWIS bids that leverage that existing investment and enterprise standard.
* *Hybrids* Thanks to the CCWIS emphasis on modular solutions, states may be open to mixed modes involving any or all of the preceding solution models.

Specific vendors, and their various products and service offerings, are associated with each of the options above. Because this document strives to be agnostic and impartial with regard to products and approaches advocated or marketed by specific companies, we have opted not to discuss the relative merits of the solution models described above. We encourage states to do their own research, then consider whether they want to mandate a specific model or leave the door open for vendors to propose and make the case for their preferred one.

Best Practices Highlighted

The Solution Architecture section is a good place for the RFP writer to detail best practices or state preferences with regard to the specific design of the solution. Our Model RFP text includes several as Guideposts—configurability, for example, and support for mobile working. We list as Constraints a number of CCWIS-specific requirements, such as modular design, and in some cases use Guideposts to suggest ways in which bidders might satisfy the constraint. For example, the idea of incorporating open source and free-to-use or low-cost commercial services such as mapping tools and automated language translation tools speaks to the CCWIS “efficient, economical and effective” requirement. If a state considers one of the Guideposts to be a hard requirement, the RFP writer can simply convert it into a Constraint.

Deployment Model

Another key element of the solution architecture is the deployment model it uses. Here again the RFP can be agnostic, or can take a specific position and require a particular deployment approach. If, for example, the state prefers an on-premise installation of a COTS product or custom-built solution, this can be stated as a Guidepost or Constraint (the latter if it’s an absolute requirement). Some states will only consider a cloud solution; others are content to leave it open to bidders to propose a recommended approach, or alternatives.

In the case of a custom-built solution, a state may have standardized on a set of development tools and may have IT staff schooled in how to use them. Similarly, it may have enterprise processes and procedures for testing and deploying source code—a containerized approach, for example. This information is critical to bidders and should be included here or elsewhere in the RFP.

Topic: 2.2 Use of Existing Enterprise Components

States increasingly have invested in enterprise-grade software tools designed to serve the needs of multiple departments and government business functions. Perhaps the first tool to be widely acquired for this purpose was the database management system; from the late 1990s through the first decade of the 2000s, many states signed enterprise licenses for Oracle, DB2 or other commercial DBMS platforms. The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) wave came next, followed more recently by widespread acquisition of everything from Enterprise Service Buses (ESBs) to Business Rules Management Systems (BRMSs), not to mention Business Intelligence (BI) software. In some cases the process was spurred by the availability of federal matching funds, such as the 90/10 match that enabled states to acquire rules engines and other technologies as part of their Medicaid eligibility projects.

Besides providing economies of scale—in principle—such investments usually drive a standards process that imposes some degree of order on the traditionally chaotic mix of state software assets. Certain tools also provide an important backbone for interoperability. The most significant of these is the ESB, which enables service-oriented applications—including, ideally, a CCWIS solution—to communicate efficiently with one another. Other enterprise tools could address specific CCWIS requirements; a BRMS, for example, might speak to the requirement that business logic reside outside the application.

To the extent that the state would like bidders to incorporate its existing enterprise toolset into the proposed CCWIS solution, this section can be used to outline the preferred approach.

Topic: 2.3 Data Security

Data security is a vital consideration for a CCWIS system on a number of levels.

*Confidentiality* Confidentiality of data comes into play from the earliest report of suspected maltreatment to closure of the case; caseworkers have access to a wide range of sensitive information regarding children, family issues and challenges, legal allegations, court processes and so on. Such information is exposed and shared only on a need-to-know basis. From a solution point of view, this implies a strong role-based security model which gives system administrators fine-tuned control over the assignment of specific privileges to specific job roles.

Role-based privilege profiles might govern such controls as:

* Access to solution modules
* Ability to view/edit/add/delete specific record types
* Masking of specific fields
* Access to information on cases to which the user is not assigned—e.g., cases being worked out of the same county office, or the same team, but by different case managers
* Administrative rights—the ability to manage user access, system configurations and other global solution components
* Report generation privileges

In the Model RFP we specify all of the above items as Constraints.

*General data protections* Another dimension of data security is the need, common to any enterprise system, to protect data from unauthorized access, exploitation, corruption or outright theft. This is a more purely technical problem for which there are many proven solutions, thankfully, from the use of encrypted communications (SSL) to elaborate intrusion detection techniques and monitoring systems. Best practice in the field focuses on *defense in depth*, a multilayered approach to security that addresses potential vulnerabilities at every level of the technology stack and uses active monitoring logic to spot suspicious activity. Again, these are established technologies embodied in standards such as FedRAMP[[23]](#footnote-23); we suggest, as stated in the Model RFP, that if the bidder is proposing a FedRAMP-certified hosting platform, it is not necessary for the proposal to detail its specific security components.

Topic: 2.4 Data Quality

Data quality is one of the core concerns of CCWIS, and as such warrants close attention in the development of an RFP. Because data enters the CCWIS stream from such a wide variety of sources—conversion of historical records, direct user entry on the Web or a mobile device, bidirectional data exchanges, interactions with external parties such as CWCAs, and interfaces to commercial and governmental systems outside the state’s own boundaries—it is far from easy to ensure the quality of data throughout the CCWIS ecosystem.

The Model RFP is specific about the sorts of technology measures that can be taken to keep quality high, including design elements in the CCWIS solution that incentivize and prompt users to enter complete and timely information. A flexible, intelligent search facility, for example, can make it easier for users to find historical records so that they don’t enter duplicate data. The ability to perform certain kinds of data entry in an offline mode shortens the time between the occurrence of an event (e.g. a home visit) and the recording of facts about it.

But these are fairly simple mechanics to implement. The more complex data quality issues surround the evolution of an underlying data model over time, or the reconciliation of different data models when a bidirectional data exchange is created. As examples of the latter challenge, TANF, child support enforcement, Medicaid and child welfare each have their own conceptual models for cases, families and households, aspects of which are not readily compatible. Translations, mappings and other technical measures must be used to ensure that data analysts and frontline staff understand what they’re seeing when they view data extracted from another system of record. And what happens when the child welfare agency extends or rethinks the data model underlying its CCWIS solution, seeking to support some new program initiative? Is historical data lost or orphaned in the process? Are bidirectional exchanges broken?

We reference these deeper challenges in the Model RFP as Guideposts and Constraints. RFP authors may want to reclassify some of them from one category into the other or drop those that don’t seem relevant.

Topic: 2.5 Interoperability and Integrations

CCWIS requires that states mandate a series of bidirectional data exchanges, enumerated in the Model RFP. This section of the RFP lays out some ground rules and guidance for the successful implementation of such integrations while recapping the federal requirements as Constraints.

The RFP notes that reliance on standardized data definitions, such as those found in the Human Services Domain of the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM)[[24]](#footnote-24), may enhance maintainability and speed up the development of exchanges. Use of common IT standards such as RESTful Web services, XML and JSON is a given. At the same time, a bidder’s proposed approach should not assume that all systems in the ecosystem have equivalent capabilities in this regard. An older mainframe TANF system, for example, may not be able to interact through Web services, but can be augmented with third-party tools that translate messages to and from Web services; vendor proposals should show some awareness of the tools available to solve such common problems.

From an architectural perspective, exchanges should be designed for resilience and able to withstand interruptions in network communication and performance. Not all exchanges need to be real-time; there is still a place for batch interfaces when necessary.

We highly recommend that the RFP team document as well as possible the systems to which the CCWIS solution will be interfaced via a data exchange. This information can be placed in the RFP section entitled “The Child Welfare Technology Ecosystem” and perhaps in the Resource Library as well. The more detail the state provides on external systems, the better and more detailed proposals it will receive regarding creation of the data exchanges, which are so vital to the CCWIS vision and such a common source of project risk.

## Services Sought

The Services Sought section describes the state’s expectations for services to be provided by the vendor(s). As described previously in the section The First Decision: One Procurement or Several?, states can elect to spread services among several vendors. CCWIS gives states considerably more flexibility in how they approach system modernization, in that modularity can apply to both solution modules and services. Recent procurements, including procurements in the Medicaid market, illustrate this trend.

Topic 3.1: Delivery Methodology

Decision Point: Who Selects the Methodology, the State or the Bidder?

Recent market trends illustrate an increasing adoption of Agile methodologies for the delivery of CCWIS. While there have been a few instances in which a comparatively purist Agile approach has been applied to a child welfare project, most states have adopted a hybrid approach that blends elements of Agile with elements of a more traditional delivery approach. The hybrid approach enables states to borrow certain methods from Agile while still navigating state procurement regulations that often do not align with the nature of an Agile engagement. As one might expect, this is not always an elegant process.

The Model RFP includes optional language that enables the state to express a preference for a specific methodology, or even to mandate one if it so chooses. The alternative is to invite bidders to propose the methodology they feel will best deliver a successful project. If the state opts to specify a preferred methodology, it should consider that while the methodology may be aligned with current state capabilities and staff, it may preclude vendors from putting forward the methodology that has proven most effective for implementing their particular solution. While a vendor’s methodology may be unfamiliar to a state, its relative worth can be assessed through project references and case studies that demonstrate its effective use. The extent of alignment with industry best practices is another gauge of the viability of a bidder’s proposed approach.

It is worth noting that by allowing a vendor to bring in a methodology reflective of industry best practices, the state may provide a valuable opportunity for its own staff to enhance their capabilities and professional skills.

Aligning Deliverables with Methodology

Regardless of the approach adopted for the engagement, it is important to align deliverables with the methodology. For example, if Agile is proposed or preferred, deliverables will take the form of project artifacts, such as a Product Roadmap and Product Backlog, that continuously evolve throughout the project. By contrast, deliverables in a more traditional project will include work products such as a Requirements Traceability Matrix and a Detailed Design Document, typically developed at the outset of the project or at a particular project milestone.

Topic 3.1.1: Solution Delivery Life Cycle (SDLC)

As some readers will note, we have replaced the terms “Software” and “Development” in SDLC with “Solution” and “Delivery,” respectively. This is an intentional change. We have done this for two reasons.

First, the term Solution Delivery Life Cycle emphasizes the fact that a successful CCWIS implementation will require much more than software development—and nowadays, in fact, may involve no software development at all. There is a project life cycle, to be sure, but it encompasses deliverables such as organizational change management and training in addition to strictly technical deliverables. Success will depend upon these deliverables as much as it depends on the vendor’s technical execution.

The second reason for repurposing the term SDLC to mean Solution Delivery Life Cycle is that it more accurately reflects the current reality of CCWIS projects. Custom software development in the traditional sense is playing an ever-diminishing role in these projects. The market is increasingly adopting COTS, SaaS and PaaS offerings which are *configured* to create a CCWIS solution. Software *development* is kept to a minimum, given the out-of-the-box features and functionality that can be configured to meet state needs. This said, the overall solution will be much more than simply the COTS, SaaS or PaaS that underpins it. It will include other components such as interfaces, data and mobility, as well as service-intensive deliverables like data conversion. This totality of deliverables, threaded into an organic project plan, is what we mean by the Solution Delivery Life Cycle, or SDLC.

Topic 3.1.2: Project Management Methodology

The proposed project management approach should align with the overall delivery methodology—whether specified by the RFP or left to the bidder—and be based on best practices in the industry. The de facto standard for project management best practices has long been the Project Management Institute’s [A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide).](https://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-standards) Most vendors will have a project management approach based on PMBOK standards as well as project managers certified (as Project Management Professionals, or PMPs) to practice the PMBOK methodology.

To accommodate a range of potential methodologies, the Model RFP asks bidders to explain their approach to core management functions common to any project—schedule management, risk management and so on.

Agile Methodology and Organizational Capacity

With the increasing adoption of Agile, the Project Management Institute (PMI) has supplemented its traditional PMBOK materials with the [Agile Practice Guide](https://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-standards/practice-guides/agile). As PMI notes in the article “Agile project management and the PMBOK® Guide,”[[25]](#footnote-25) a common misconception is that in order to properly follow PMBOK the project must hew to the classic “waterfall” approach, against which Agile was an insurgent reaction. As Agile has evolved (awkwardly[[26]](#footnote-26)) to support projects of enterprise scale and scope, its core concepts have increasingly entered the mainstream of project management culture, as reflected in PMI’s decision to issue an Agile guide. They have also appeared, sometimes in scattershot fashion, in child welfare RFPs both prior to and following the advent of CCWIS.

Agile is nonetheless a dramatically different method of running a large project, and states should assess carefully their readiness and capacity to undertake Agile before building it into a CCWIS RFP. A few of the areas in which Agile may present a challenge include IT staff training, contract compliance regimes, project accountability procedures and reporting relationships. For many states, a hybrid approach that combines Agile with more traditional, sequential project management structures might be a better fit.

Defining Deliverables

From a procurement and contracting perspective, it is important to keep in mind that project management deliverables may manifest themselves differently in Agile and traditional approaches. For example, traditional project management will include documented plans for activities such as risk management and change management. In Agile, risk identification and mitigation are embedded into ongoing sprint activities via the daily standup, sprint retrospective and other practices. Change control is addressed via the prioritization of the product backlog and management of the product roadmap.

Management of the overall project schedule is also approached differently. In the traditional PMBOK paradigm, project progress is measured against the Project Plan; in Agile, project progress is measured through concepts like velocity and backlog burndown and is reassessed with every sprint.

Governance

S/TACWIS projects were often viewed primarily as IT efforts. While requirements would be gathered from practice teams during the RFP creation process, overall ownership and responsibility for vendor management during the implementation typically resided with either IT staff or a dedicated Project Management Office (PMO). This was in part, no doubt, a reflection of the fact that most of the first-generation systems were either custom-coded or adapted, with significant recoding, from other states. The technical work was complex and voluminous and represented the largest project risk burden overall. In this regard, the assignment of primary project management responsibility to IT organizations made sense.

An unintended consequence, however, was that program and practice experts had a seat at the table mainly in the early stages of the project. Once requirements had been harvested, the IT team went about the hard work of coding them, going back to the program side only when requirements needed clarification or when functionality tradeoffs had to be made due to time or budget or technology constraints. By the time the system rolled out, program and practice needs might well have evolved. Field staff, having had little direct involvement during the course of a multiyear project, were not positioned to act as internal evangelists in the critical months during and after rollout.

Since those days, the parameters of such projects have changed. Few if any CCWIS applications will be built from scratch, for one thing, and modern software development and configuration tools make it much easier to adapt and adjust designs midstream, as new ideas and concepts emerge. The IT dimension of the work is still crucial and complex, but there is certainly more space on a project team for non-IT staff.

Accordingly, we strongly recommend that program and policy staff be given a central role in project governance. Regardless of whether the project is run from the IT department or elsewhere, the decision structure should give as much weight to the ultimate user constituencies as to the IT organization. Besides ensuring that program and policy goals are kept squarely in everyone’s sights throughout the process, the close participation of program and policy teams builds a community of natural evangelists who will play an important role as the new CCWIS solution embeds itself into the day-to-day life of the organization.

From a governance perspective, it is also important that the state appoint an executive sponsor at the appropriate level and with sufficient decision making (or decision escalation) authority. State government structures vary greatly, but this individual might be within the child welfare agency, or a state project management office, or even the governor’s staff. Selection of the right executive sponsor should be considered a critical success factor for any CCWIS project.

Topic 3.1.3: Project Planning Methodology

Project planning is arguably the most critical step in a CCWIS project, as it is in any other complex IT project. Planning is necessary in order to establish project goals and set expectations with regard to schedule and solution. Project planning guides the project teams and all stakeholders through all other project phases.

The Role of Planning in Agile and Traditional Models

Planning occurs in both traditional and Agile methodologies, though there is a widely held belief that Agile disdains it in favor of releasing working code as often as possible. While it is a fundamental tenet of Agile that working code should always take priority over documentation (including formal product and project plans), this doesn’t mean that planning has no role to play. The key consideration for Agile is that project plans need to be able to accommodate valuable and important shifts in underlying assumptions as more is understood about user needs.

Planning activities occur throughout the Agile SDLC. At the outset of the project, planning is conducted to establish project goals and define the product vision statement, initial product roadmap and release plan. Sprint planning is the forum for the team (led by the product owner or scrum master) to lock in the next set of product backlog items to be tackled (“stories” in Agile parlance) and do rough estimates of the effort level for each. The product roadmap, meanwhile, is a living planning document used to communicate product direction and progress to internal teams and external stakeholders.

All this contrasts with the traditional model of software project management, in which the project plan is mapped out in distinct, sequential phases, with each phase beginning only when the prior phase has been completed. The team works in a linear fashion, with estimation typically handled by the project manager and/or PMO team. Comprehensive requirements are documented in the requirements traceability matrix (RTM); a detailed project schedule, typically including resource assignments, is produced. The RTM and detailed schedule are used to manage the project teams and to validate that all requirements of the project have been met.

Developing a Future-state Vision

Regardless of the delivery methodology chosen, it is important for planning activities to include documentation of the envisioned future state in order to guide teams in the design and development/configuration of the new CCWIS. The state can utilize a variety of artifacts to visualize the future state, including:

* To-be business process models, often generated from as-is process models
* User journey maps (visual representations of the client experience)
* A domain model that describes CCWIS entities and the relationships between them

RFP teams will want to give some thought to how much of this work should be done ahead of the project versus once the project is underway. There is no one-size-fits-all answer here. Some states may find it helpful to have their vendor help facilitate the future-state visioning process, while others will have already done this work internally. The RFP should be written to set clear expectations in this regard.

Project planning and visioning can be a good candidate for an RFP separate from the solution delivery procurement, as many planning activities can be conducted prior to release of the solution RFP. This is an emerging trend in other markets such as Medicaid, in line with CMS guidance on modularity.

Topic 3.1.4: Quality Management Methodology

In technology projects, quality is often framed in mostly technical terms, focusing on indicators such as low product defect rates, quick response time, reliable uptime and so on. While these factors are important, the successful CCWIS implementation team will embed quality into *every* facet of the project SDLC.

Quality is both a perspective and an approach to increasing stakeholder satisfaction, reducing cycle time and costs and eliminating errors and rework. Quality needs to be reflected in all aspects of the project and integrated into the project team’s culture. That culture should be one of continuous quality improvement in which every team member understands expectations and contributes meaningfully toward meeting them. The Model RFP seeks to elicit bidders’ views on how to cultivate this quality-driven culture without imposing an external model upon them.

Topic 3.1.5: Managing the CCWIS Solution Design Process

Solution design is a key element of the delivery process regardless of whether the solution is custom-built, built on a platform, COTS, or some combination of these. Many platform solutions were originally designed for purposes not at all related to child welfare, such as customer relationship management (CRM); out-of-the-box functionality of the product is likely not optimized for child welfare. Design provides the opportunity to tailor the user experience to address the specific needs of CCWIS users and other stakeholders in the child welfare ecosystem.

Human-centered Design

Human-centered design (HCD) has emerged as the standard for designing the contemporary user experience. HCD is an approach to interactive systems development that aims to make systems optimally usable and useful by focusing strongly on user needs, behaviors and requirements. With HCD, users will be involved in the design of the CCWIS solution right from the start; design teams will shadow users and employ other techniques to gain an understanding of the user’s actual workday and how she or he interacts with the current system (and later, as users become testers, with the new one).

Prototyping

Through prototyping, the design team can test design patterns and features with users and receive immediate feedback to incorporate into the design prior to development/configuration of the system. As an important leg of the solution design process, prototyping is an efficient way to validate early assumptions about solution features, discover new opportunities for innovation and avoid costly rework later in the SDLC.

The Model RFP presents a robust set of goals and guideposts with regard to solution design, inviting the bidder to propose an innovative approach for addressing them.

Topic 3.1.6: Managing the Solution [Development | Configuration] Process

With the increased adoption of configurable COTS and SaaS applications for CCWIS, the “development” phase of the project often involves configuration rather than coding, where software features are tailored to meet the requirements/user stories. It is important, however, to distinguish between two concepts that can, and often do, cause confusion in projects that rely on packaged software.

Configuration involves using administrative tools provided with the application to implement the requirements/user stories. Configuration involves both business and technical configuration of the application. Configured features are covered under a vendor’s software warranty and are supported by the vendor’s routine maintenance and upgrades.

Customization is the modification of the base product software by adapting the out-of-the-box functionality or adding new functionality through code. Customized features are often not covered under a vendor’s standard warranty and/or routine maintenance and upgrades. As such, careful consideration should be taken when opting for customizations as they carry not only increased development and testing costs, but also additional ongoing maintenance costs as the code needs to be maintained via a process separate from standard product maintenance and upgrades.

Regardless of whether the project will involve configuration, customization or creation of custom code, many of the same best practices in managing solution delivery apply.

Topic 3.1.7: Testing

Thorough and rigorous testing is imperative to CCWIS success. Testing involves various stages all with a specific objective. Some are designed to flush out defects, others are designed to assure the solution meets the needs of the users, while others are to confirm system performance and security of the data. Every stage of testing contributes to the overall quality of the end solution and can save time and investment in the long run as provides opportunity to resolve defects and address solution gaps prior to production.

User Acceptance Testing (UAT) is a testing stage that is often overlooked or short-changed given the time and resource investment. But UAT not only helps improve the quality of the CCWIS but also user acceptance. UAT should be performed by actual CCWIS users to confirm the system can support their daily tasks and real-world scenarios. Even if users have been involved in HCD and prototyping, which is encouraged as a best practice, UAT allows users to be hands on in the system and completing tasks. It is important to note that by the time UAT is reached, the incidence of defects should be small or zero as UAT is confirmatory rather than diagnostic in nature.

Testing can be executed differently based on SDLC methodology. In Agile methodologies, testing occurs more frequently and throughout development, whereas in traditional models, testing is typically a large effort completed at the end of development. Regardless of methodology, the state should confirm the process for regression testing.

The term “Integration Testing” can cause confusion, as people define it in a variety of ways. “Integration Testing” as used in this RFP refers to combined, simultaneous testing of all solution components in a simulated real-world testbed. Testing of system-to-system integrations, by contrast, means the testing of Data Exchanges. We point this out as, per CCWIS regulations, it is important that states do not overlook testing Data Exchanges.

Test-driven Development

Test Driven Development (TDD) is a useful quality discipline popular in Agile methodologies but adaptable to nearly any development environment. In TDD, code is written to fulfill prewritten test criteria. Test logic is actually coded *before* the the developer writes code to implement the feature in question. Before any new code is written, the developer first writes a failing test, runs the failing test and then modifies the code in the quickest way possible to pass the test. Once the test has passed, the developer refactors to “clean up” the code and remove any duplication and technical debt.

For COTS, SaaS and PaaS offerings to be extended through custom development, this approach can provide test coverage for all customized functionality and enable developers to confirm that existing functionality is not broken as new code is rewritten or refactored. If a feature does break, then developers can quickly find the issue and resolve it, as they are able to focus on the code that was recently changed. Rapid feedback and less time spent debugging reduce rework, improve quality and contributes toward efficient development timelines.

Engaging an Independent Vendor for Testing

As discussed in the section The First Decision: One RFP or Several, some testing stages can be a good candidate for an RFP separate from the system design and development. While the IV&V vendor will be involved in testing oversight, the engagement of another independent vendor in executing certain testing stages can provide an additional “check and balance” on the solution to improve overall quality.

Topic 3.1.8: Data Conversion

As discussed in Program and Practice Goals, Guideposts and Constraints section, access to historical information is critical in serving children, as it directly informs decisions on child safety. From intake and investigation to case planning, placement and reunification, the history of a child provides rich and essential context for child welfare decision making in all its forms. Accordingly, the migration of legacy data into the new CCWIS solution is an activity that requires the same planning, design, development and testing as will be applied to the new software itself.

Taking the Opportunity to Clean House

Data conversion also presents the state with an opportunity to improve the completeness, accuracy and consistency of historical data, thereby establishing a foundation of high data quality in the new system. Users of the legacy system are a great resource to tap for guidance on legacy data (and its shortcomings); here again we highly recommend that end users have a seat at the table during the implementation phase. Their insights can greatly inform conversion and clean-up strategies and can often save the team some steps.

Bidder proposals should show an awareness of the need and the complexity of cleansing historical data as an early step in the data conversion cycle. In the Model RFP we include both a Guidepost and a Constraint to address this topic.

How Much Data to Convert?

States are often inclined to have their vendor convert all data residing in the legacy system. Depending on the age of the legacy system, this can be unnecessary, not to mention very costly. There is diminishing value in having online access to a case that was closed ten years ago. Instead, during the planning phase of data conversion or before, states should consider which data needs to be “live” in the new system, which data needs to be available to users but accessed via another mechanism (i.e. case history look up that returns read-only results), and which data is not worth converting at all. If these decisions can be made prior to issuance of the RFP, the RFP should clearly document them.

Topic 3.1.9: Training

In the S/TACWIS era, training involved multi-day/week classroom-based sessions in which a good portion of the time was spent simply orienting users to system navigation and the basics of operation. With technology increasingly integral to our lives and software becoming more and more intuitive, older approaches to training are no longer as appropriate. The CCWIS transition provides numerous opportunities to rethink and improve the training experience.

The Interplay of Training and a Well-designed User Experience

To the extent that a CCWIS solution’s look and feel can mirror that of common web applications, training can focus less on mechanics and more on how to use the system efficiently and effectively. With less time spent on mastering rote skills, training can also be a good occasion to introduce users to practice enhancements and best practices the agency would like to promote. For example, training could...

* Help intake workers learn to quickly locate and make sense of relevant history in order to make effective screening decisions
* Advise investigators on how to locate individuals and families who may have relocated to evade investigation
* Train placement workers how to mine historical information and explore social graphs to find possible placement resource families
* Guide case managers on how to utilize data to manage caseloads and to prioritize particular activities like family meetings and visitation
* Teach eligibility workers how to focus effort on activities that will maximize drawdown of federal funding
* Suggest how licensing workers can make use of embedded tools to help prospective foster families find services they might need in order to complete the licensing process
* Teach case managers and supervisors alike to use data as a means to make decisions about a case, to see patterns and disparities, and so on
* Demonstrate how supervisors can utilize data and dashboards as a tool for supervision conversations

This all presumes a CCWIS solution that leverages familiar Web and mobile design patterns to make its operation as intuitive and as self-explanatory as possible. The design best practices we enumerate in the Solution Architecture section of the Model RFP will all contribute toward this end. In reading proposals, evaluators might want to look at the training section to discern how confident the bidder feels about the intuitive, self-training nature of their solution’s user experience.

Training Delivery Models

Not all individuals learn in the same way, nor can they always be available for face-to-face training sessions. Accordingly, bidders should be able to offer training in a variety of formats keyed to diverse learning styles and schedules. Formats such as computer-based training (CBT) provide opportunities for self-paced learning and serve as a reusable asset that users can return to later if they need to brush up their skills. Online help (including not only context-sensitive topic articles but also, potentially, chat bots, live chat, interactive FAQs and human-staffed call centers) supports users after the system goes live, providing contextual assistance on tasks the user may not perform frequently.

Both CBT and online help are efficient, cost-effective ways to convey relatively static information to a broad swath of users. This said, it is important for states to have substantial capacity for these training supports during the months following the initial go-live, as even a very intuitive and high-quality solution is likely to generate a high volume of questions and requests in the early days.

Blended learning approaches that combine online learning activities with more traditional classroom experiences can be an effective way to introduce users to the new CCWIS solution. Workers might use computer-based training to learn the mechanics and capabilities of a component of the CCWIS solution, for example, then attend trainer-led activities to deepen their understanding, ask questions and think creatively, in a group setting, about how to apply the component to their job responsibilities. For example, intake workers could work through an online module that covers the process of capturing a telephone report, then follow up with a trainer-led role play during which they are coached on the most effective questions to ask during the call or a group discussion on how to decide whether a particular report should be screened in or out.

The Power of Power Users

Power users—practitioners who are experts in their roles, have a demonstrated facility for utilizing technology, and have received additional training and hands-on experience with the CCWIS solution—are very useful as a supplement to the training team. These users are most effective as adjuncts when they retain some ongoing responsibilities for delivering services (as intake workers, supervisors, licensing staff, etc.) but are also relieved of some of their usual workload so that they can serve as real-time resources to their colleagues during rollout.

Power users often emerge naturally as the go-to people when someone has a “how do I” question about the system, but it is advisable to proactively seek out potential power users after considering their roles, training level and availability. Explicit inclusion of power users in a training plan can give an indication of a bidder’s understanding of how to successfully roll out a complex solution in a complex environment.

Building a CCWIS Center of Excellence and Innovation

Development of a strong training curriculum necessitates the building of a deep knowledge base on how the child welfare organization, in all its many facets, does what it does. But in any large organization, there is a risk that the training portfolio—by which we mean training materials, instructional technologies, courses and even training staff—will be allowed to stagnate, becoming a mere archive for out-of-date practices and stale materials that are neither refreshed nor particularly valued. All too often the training portfolio is left to languish.

But what if the training portfolio were to be built into a source of innovation and emerging best practices—a CCWIS Center of Excellence and Innovation? With commitment, senior leadership endorsement and influence combined with modest funding, such a center could serve multiple purposes, continuing in its core function of onboarding new users while acting as a knowledge and skills exchange useful to the entire organization.

A CCWIS Center of Excellence and Innovation could be....

* A repository for CCWIS best-practice use cases and scenarios
* A forum for creative thinking about CCWIS feature/function improvements
* A data analysis hub that reveals important findings, trends and opportunities from both user data and outcome data
* A laboratory for generating and trying out new practice and process ideas
* A hub for focus group discussions bringing together experienced users, program and policy decision-makers, data analysts, and product managers and/or user design experts
* A contributor to national and regional forums where CCWIS implementations are discussed

A few scenarios help demonstrate the value of such an organizational resource:

* Through their training sessions, trainers collect “how do I,” “why do I” and “why can’t I” questions on a regular basis. These questions can stimulate new thinking about practice. A user’s “why can’t I” question could lead to an innovative idea for a new product feature or a new way of using the solution. Perhaps a trainee asks:   
    
  *“Why do I have to enter a family meeting with a caseworker, a mother and the two teenagers twice—as both a contact and a visitation? Why can’t the system handle that for me?”*   
    
  This might lead to the design and prototyping of a new feature that allows the worker to check a box if a visit is both a contact and visitation. The question “Why do we measure the time between visits in calendar months instead of actual days?” might lead to a research effort to determine if there are different safety outcomes for children who receive more frequent contacts. The center would support these efforts as a clearinghouse for ideas, a discussion forum and a testbed for prototyping possible solutions—the latter leveraging its work in maintaining training environments that contain real-world-like case data.
* The center could proactively run reflection sessions where users are brought together to share experiences and brainstorm effective practice. Expert users might come together—virtually, perhaps, utilizing the training team’s video conferencing capabilities—to discuss practices that allow them to gain the most value out of the CCWIS tools, information that could be used to enhance the training curriculum. Users who are struggling with the solution might be brought together to describe their difficulties so that training could be adapted to better inform and support them.
* The center could host “hackathons” where users come together to invent solutions to challenging problems ("Is there a dashboard view that would make it easier for me to see upcoming court deadlines?” or “How can we minimize duplicate data being created?”). These creative sessions would provide excellent input to a product (and organizational) roadmap for ongoing maturation of the CCWIS solution.

The essential idea is to evolve the training center from its primary role during the system transition period—that of a venue for mostly one-way knowledge transfer to staff—into a marketplace for collective learning and innovation. As such, a CCWIS Center of Excellence and Innovation would become a cornerstone of practice reform and improvement long after the initial rollout of the solution.

Topic 3.1.10: Organizational Change Management

The new CCWIS will bring significant change to the organization. Organizational Change Management (OCM) aims to equip the workforce for this transformation, in part by communicating management’s CCWIS vision. The goal is to help staff understand that the new solution will help them excel at what they do. Early involvement by a core group of users—as expert sounding boards, testers of prototype versions of the software and so on—is key to this pursuit and should be a fundamental component of any change management plan.

OCM: Practice Early and Often

All too often, organizations defer OCM activities until late in the project, thereby missing opportunities for informing and engaging stakeholders. OCM can even be overlooked or erroneously equated with training. While training is a facet of OCM, it is not sufficient for a smooth and positive transition to a new solution as expansive and transformational as a CCWIS system.

The OCM plan should be developed in the early stages of the project. Activities such as stakeholder analysis, communications and training should then be executed throughout, so that the change becomes rooted in the culture. This will allow adoption of strategies to minimize disruption and to generate enthusiasm, meanwhile building a community of grassroots change agents.

Just as people do not all learn in the same manner, people don’t necessarily communicate in the same way. Multi-channel communication, which is communication via a variety of channels such as print, email, SMS, web portals and mobile applications, allows for broader reach and engagement of stakeholders.

As discussed in the sectionThe First Decision: One Procurement or Several?, OCM and training activities can be good candidates for an RFP separate from the main solution RFP. This is a trend emerging in other markets, in recognition of the concern that training and OCM activities might be shortchanged as the primary IT vendor focuses on solution delivery. It can make sense to have a separate vendor focusing, in parallel, on readying stakeholders for the coming change.

Topic 3.1.11: Implementation/Rollout

One of the biggest decisions for the implementation of a new CCWIS is the choice between a “big bang” and an “incremental” rollout. There isn’t a right or wrong answer here. The decision should be informed by multiple factors, including overall project goals, the readiness of the organization and the stability of the solution. Decision makers will need to carefully balance cost and risk.

The Big Bang Approach

In the “big bang” approach, all CCWIS users start using the entire system on the same go-live date. The legacy system is essentially switched off and the new CCWIS is switched on for all users. Big bang launches are often faster and do not incur the added cost of interim planning or temporary, throwaway interfaces between the new solution and those portions of the legacy system that are still operational.

This approach, however, can be higher risk, given that the entire system goes live at once. User productivity may decrease in the initial weeks as the entire user population learns to efficiently weave the system into their daily work, a process that no amount of training can fully short-circuit. In addition, despite the most aggressive of testing plans, it is likely that scenarios will arise that were not accounted for—and that they will arise on a very large scale, potentially affecting thousands of users. Big bang rollouts are not for the faint of heart.

The Incremental Approach

In an incremental rollout, by contrast, modules of the CCWIS solution are rolled out over a period of time across several go-live dates. The emphasis in the CCWIS regulations on solution modularity, as well as use of a service-oriented architecture (SOA), provides states an opportunity to undertake an incremental rollout if that is their preference.

While the incremental approach would seem less prone to catastrophe, there are genuine risks and costs associated with it, too. For one thing, it requires that the legacy system(s) be run in parallel with the new CCWIS modules for some time. Besides the costs associated with managing two operating environments, there is the matter of training new hires and supporting all users on a hybrid “solution” in which some components look and behave entirely differently from others. This puts stress on any organization.

From an architectural point of view, some functional areas are easier to decouple than others, especially given the monolithic nature of most legacy system designs. While it may seem straightforward to move placement functionality onto the CCWIS side, for example, placement depends on a host of data that will likely still reside on the S/TACWIS side—data on children, court orders, resource families and licensing, for example.

From a cost perspective, it is likely that the IT team will have to build temporary interfaces between the old and new systems, which can be a considerable expense that will never be recouped. As an example, if the legacy S/TACWIS system were to remain for some time as the system of record for case management but the new CCWIS system is now responsible for intake and investigation, an interface will be needed to pass data forward from the CCWIS modules as well as a backward-looking interface to perform lookups on case history held in the legacy database. The technical complexities and associated costs mount quickly.

On the positive side, in the incremental model the user community has the opportunity to adjust to the new system in smaller pieces, and over a longer period of time—generally a plus, as long as an adept change management team can set expectations, communicate well and frequently, and prepare users for what’s coming next. The goal is to avoid the feeling of nonstop churn and uncertainty. By the same token, while bugs and issues with the system will still surface from time to time, they will be confined to a smaller subset of the overall functionality and might expose correctible issues in modules still in development.

States may consider combining aspects of the big bang and incremental methods for a hybrid approach. The approach need not be strictly one or the other. For example, the state could phase in the CCWIS solution by region, office or county, releasing full CCWIS functionality but only to a subset of the user population. This cuts the risk of the rollout somewhat, eases the burden on trainers, and enables the team to garner data and lessons that can be used to make the next stages of rollout smoother.

Regardless of approach, effective and well-executed OCM and training are critical for successful implementation. User readiness and stakeholder engagement contribute to a smoother go-live process and greater acceptance of the new system.

Topic 3.1.12: Warranty

Warranty is an important contract provision, as it defines expectations for software performance and makes them legally binding. It is important to clearly define the standard to which the vendor is subject (e.g. “free from material defects,” “performs in accordance with end user documentation,” or something else) as well as the definition of when warranty will go into effect (e.g. when all modules are in production for all user groups), the duration of the vendor’s commitment, and the process and remedies available to each party in the event the customer invokes the warranty provision.

SaaS, PaaS and COTS solutions will all come with warranty provisions in their standard software contracts. Vendors tend to limit their warranty given the number of factors that can affect the performance of the software. These provisions typically cover warranty for configured software, but often *exclude* customized software (i.e., software that has been created de novo or extended through programming).

In addition, the warranty will specify various exclusions (e.g. errors that cannot be reproduced, and/or errors that occur in an unsupported hardware environment). The state should keep in mind that while it can push a vendor to expand the standard warranty, this will almost certainly come with increased cost. Moreover, many software vendors will not accept an expanded warranty, leaving the state to negotiate expanded warranty provisions with the services vendor (e.g. the system integrator).

Topic 3.2: Team Composition and Qualifications

Our discussion in Topic 1.5 Key Staff Biographies includes questions for the state to consider when defining Key Staff. As roles and required skills for Key Staff are contemplated, there can be a tendency to require those skills to be illustrated with reference to a previous CCWIS engagement. We caution RFP developers not to make prior CCWIS work a requirement.

As CCWIS is still a relatively new endeavor for many states, the pool of professionals with direct CCWIS experience is limited. Key staff can illustrate proven capabilities from other industries that are transferrable to CCWIS projects, thereby instilling new ideas, concepts and methodologies that will further innovation in the state’s CCWIS project. Moreover, if a state adopts a newer delivery methodology such as Agile, it may be necessary to expand the requirements for references outside of even the government sector, as Agile has only recently found its way into public sector.

As the overall project team is contemplated—vendor and state staff both—it may be useful for bidders to have insight into the key state staff who will be engaged in the project. Including a short description of the state roles, responsibilities and skills background for each key state staffmember can guide the bidder in proposing a project team that complements the state team and addresses any potential skill gaps. It is understood that the state staff’s actual names would not be included, given the nature of a competitive procurement. Again, we strongly urge states to include significant representation from program and policy staff on their own project teams.

Topic 3.3: Ongoing Support

The Ongoing Support section of the Model RFP covers all the expected dimensions: support for trouble-free operation of the environment, technical change management to accommodate new software releases and revisions to federal reporting standards, performance monitoring and management, problem resolution and user support. Readers will find most of this material familiar, so we won’t recap the RFP here beyond highlighting a few discussion points.

* States should decide what sort of long-term relationship they would like with their primary CCWIS vendor. Do they envision a mostly outsourced model in which the vendor handles day-to-day operations, largely from remote locations, or do they prefer to give vendor staff permanent desks within their organization? Does the state hope or plan to assume responsibility for operations after the transition period, or is it happy to have the vendor provide this service indefinitely, providing software updates from time to time in a more arm’s-length fashion?  
    
  While some states are concerned about vendor “lock-in,” whereby the vendor is permanently in place and typically on site for the entire lifespan of the solution, other states are quite comfortable with this arrangement, viewing it as both a staff augmentation expedient and a way to keep an eye on the vendor. The RFP the state ultimately writes should set appropriate expectations for the sort of relationship the state would prefer.
* From a contractual point of view, the RFP should be explicit about performance standards for the solution. We suggest a number of possible metrics, but also include optional language in the Guideposts that can be used to solicit a list of appropriate metrics *from the bidder*. This is an unusual approach, but we feel it is well worth considering.   
    
  First, in proposing a set of metrics by which it will be measured, the bidder must convey its best sense of what its solution can achieve, which gives an indication of its confidence level in its product. Second, the selection of metrics and the threshold values proposed for them is a basic indication of whether or not the bidder really understands the environment in which their solution will be deployed. By inviting the bidder to propose metrics rather than dictating them in the RFP, the state may elicit insight into the bidder’s capabilities that responses to a declared list of metrics might obscure.
* The state’s RFP should be clear about what sort of help desk structure the state envisions. A common approach is to have state help desk staff handle Level 1 tickets (login problems and the like) and Level 2 tickets (more complex questions on how to use the system), while escalating Level 3 tickets (suspected software bugs and performance issues) to the vendor. A shared ticketing system is required if this is to flow smoothly.

# Appendix 1: Administrative Requirements

Topic 1: Bidder Qualifications and Relevant Experience

The first set of requirements listed in this topic mostly pertain to risk considerations: they seek to flush out any issues, whether they be financial problems or legal entanglements, that might make the bidder a risky choice. The second batch of requirements solicits information on the key staff and any contractors the bidder proposes to bring to the project.

As with the risk-oriented requirements, state procurement offices and regulations will no doubt have their own boilerplate language for these items. For the Model RFP we have distilled commonly seen provisions into somewhat more straightforward language than is often found in traditional RFPs. We do suggest some enhancements to typical practice along the way, as discussed below.

Topic 1.1: Bidder Structure, Qualifications and History

This section asks the bidder to describe its firm at a high level, with an eye toward the project at hand. It is an opportunity for the bidder to present its organizational value proposition, i.e. the unique qualities that make it the best partner for the State. If of concern, the RFP author may add language here requesting details of offshore ownership and operations.

As discussed elsewhere in this document (see Lowering Contracting Barriers for New Entrants), states are encouraged to weigh the pros and cons of opening their CCWIS procurements to less traditional vendors who may not have been able to compete in the S/TACWIS era. Firms that have solid track records in industries with many of the same structural characteristics as child welfare—healthcare, for example, with its similar mix of concerns regarding regulatory compliance, privacy, outcomes and integration of clinical best practices into service delivery—may prove able to deliver first-rate CCWIS solutions that incorporate ideas, software and delivery approaches cross-pollenated from other sectors.

By the same token, smaller firms that may not have been able to clear financial and other hurdles imposed by S/TACWIS procurements may offer such a strong solution vision or overall value proposition that they ought to be considered serious contenders. In this section and throughout Appendix 1 we suggest ways that states can open the door to a wider range of bidders if they desire to do so.

Topic 1.2: Financial Strength

States can’t risk committing a large project to a company in unstable financial condition. Our model text leaves some flexibility for bidders to select the types of financial documentation they feel will best convince the State that they are fiscally solid and durable enough for the long haul.

The intent here is to give smaller or non-traditional firms latitude to provide documentation that best reflects their financial condition. A privately-held firm, for example, might have a marginal profit and loss statement but substantial venture funding that would help to establish its viability for the State. On the other side of the spectrum, if states want to open the door to nontraditional bidders such as nonprofits, the documentation supplied might be of a different type—an IRS Form 990, for example, rather than the sort of financial statements a for-profit firm would provide.

RFP writers may want to consider cash-on-hand requirements more flexibly than is common, allowing smaller firms to demonstrate that they can access operating funds through means such as lines of credit, grants and other sources. The weight assigned to cash-on-hand requirements may also be adjusted.

The information provided in this subsection is supplemented by other specific financial documents requested in the following section.

Topic 1.3: Fulfillment of Eligibility Criteria

In this section the bidder attests that it has met a set of criteria making it eligible to bid on the procurement. States will have their own statutory lists of such criteria; we have included in the Model RFP the most commonly found items.

We include, as an option for RFP writers to consider, a provision that requires the bidder to furnish evidence of its ability to obtain payment and performance bonds of adequate value. In considering this provision, see our discussion on Lowering Contracting Barriers for New Entrants on page 25. Should the State decide not to require bonds—the cost of which can increase overall project pricing and shut out smaller or foreign-based vendors—it can use contractual mechanisms, such as payment holdbacks, to protect itself against non-performance. The administrative cost of making a claim against a performance bond is certainly higher than that of administering a holdback, if only because a third party (the issuing bank or insurer) is involved in the process.

Topic 1.4: Project References

Here the respondent provides information on past projects similar in size, scope and skill requirements to the CCWIS effort. Choices the RFP author will need to make:

* Whether to permit projects outside the child welfare domain and/or government; consider allowing references from kindred domains such as healthcare
* How many references to require (no more than three is a good guideline)

Topic 1.5: Key Staff Biographies and References

Here the bidder provides brief biographies (or CVs, if the State prefers) for key staff, and references for all or a subset of this staff roster. Questions to consider:

* *Who are the key staff?* The Project Executive is included, obviously, but beyond this the choice of key staff will depend upon the solution type and delivery methodology. For an Agile custom software development effort, for example, the Scrum Master and Lead Developer, among others, would likely be considered key. For a project involving configuration of a preexisting commercial platform, the role of Lead Business Analyst might be so designated. In the Model RFP we leave the list of Key Staff as a placeholder to be filled in by the RFP author.
* *Which key staff require references?* While it is customary to require external references for second-tier contractor staff who will be leading specific project workstreams, it is less common to require references for top project executives. In the Model RFP, we suggest denoting reference-required roles with an asterisk in the list of key staff.
* *How many references should be provided?* In our experience, the usual number is three, but we have left this as a placeholder.
* *Can key staff be anything other than full employees of the bidder?* In some cases, bidders may wish to propose individuals who have a contingent employment or subcontractor agreement with the bidder, rather than full employees. In this scenario, the bidder commits to employing the individual (possibly as a contractor) only if it wins the deal. For some firms, even larger firms, this is the best or only way to fill certain in-demand skilled positions.   
    
  The risk, of course, is that contingent hire agreements can be broken or challenged under at-will employment laws. Generally speaking, individuals can’t be compelled to accept a job. In such an arrangement there is risk for the individual, risk for the firm offering her or him contingent employment, and risk for the State. This said, there is no guarantee that even a full employee won’t quit or become otherwise unavailable before the contract starts.   
    
  A reasonable position here may be to require that key staff be full employees but allow other staff to be contractors or under contingent contract.
* *What commitment should the State require in terms of key staff availability?* This question is typically challenging for both the State and the bidder. While the State would like assurances that the key staff who’ve been bid in the proposal will still be availablewhen the project begins, this can be a commercially unreasonable demand—especially if a procurement drags on through extension periods. Companies simply cannot afford to keep its highest-value staff on the bench awaiting a state’s decision.   
    
  Our suggestion is that states limit the number of individuals considered key staff and require bidders to guarantee their availability only until the projected project start date documented in the *initial* release of the RFP. If the State extends the procurement, it would accept the risk that some key staff may drop off. In this instance, clear procedures should be stated with regard to substitution of alternate staff by bidders. For example, the RFP could state that bidders may propose alternate staff in the event of a significant RFP deadline extension, even if they’ve already submitted their proposal.

The Model RFP contains optional language to implement the scenarios described above. We also provide an example of a reference form to be used in obtaining references from key employees’ prior clients.States have widely varying approaches of such forms; ours is but one example. As a general recommendation, though, for the reference to be meaningful it is advisable to have the form state the specific skills and deliverable types for which the proposed staffmember will be responsible. Our sample form includes this element and a corresponding rating question.

Topic 1.6: Proposed Partners and Subcontractors

This section may be expanded to meet the needs of State evaluators and/or contracting regulations. In particular, the RFP author may want to have bidders indicate which of their subcontractors qualify for set-asides directed to women-, minority- and/or veteran-owned business enterprises.

Topic 1.7: Compliance with Visa Requirements; Background Checks

This section requires the bidder to attest that it accepts responsibility for ensuring that its workers are entitled to work in the United States and that a set of background checks have been passed by each.

Topic 2.0: Additional Statutory and Regulatory Requirements

This section of the Model RFP is where states should place any required attestations, forms or other procurement apparatus not covered earlier. Some examples of typical items include:

* EEO and non-discrimination attestations
* Domicile and place-of-business restrictions (e.g., bidder must be headquartered or do project work in the United States)
* Trade restrictions (e.g. bans on contractors doing business with certain sanctioned countries)
* Code of ethics attestations
* Business licenses or certificates
* Registrations for vendor management system, if any

# Appendix 2: Cost Proposal

This section presents the State’s cost template and instructions to bidders for completing it. Our model cost proposal is provided in the form of an Excel workbook bundled with the Model RFP document.

The objective of the cost proposal is to provide evaluators with sufficient information to substantiate that the proposed cost is realistic, reasonable and complete for the proposed scope of work. The proposal should reflect the bidder’s best estimate of what it will charge the State for the scope of work, and must be consistent with the information provided in the technical proposal, such as deliverables, staff and project schedule. Inclusion of elements such as the Rate Card enable the State to compare the bidder’s proposed labor costs with prevailing market rates and rates bid by other proposers.

Components of the Cost Proposal Workbook

The Model RFP includes a prototype Cost Proposal workbook (issued as a separate Excel document) that details the elements of the proposed cost. The workbook contains five worksheets: Instructions, Cost Summary, Software, Deliverables and Rate Card. The worksheets may need to be adapted depending upon the State’s preferred contract type, e.g. firm fixed priced, time and materials, or cost-plus.

Cost Summary Worksheet

This tab contains rolled-up data from the other sheets. Formulas should be modified with care, though it should not be necessary to do so.

Software Worksheet

As technology is ever-evolving, so are software vendors’ pricing models. In an effort to harmonize the wide variety of software pricing models found in the wild, RFPs often dictate a software pricing structure based on predefined metric(s) such as the number of concurrent users. While the goal of this approach is to achieve an “apples-to-apples” comparison across the various software products, this approach often results in proposals that misquote the true price (usually unintentionally) or present software that is not adequately scoped or sized. From an evaluation point of view, it is difficult in these cases to ensure that a fair head-to-head comparison is being made, since some bidders must force their usual pricing scheme into a model that doesn’t reflect it.

We recommend that CCWIS RFPs allow bidders to quote software costs in a manner that reflects their own standard licensing model. This helps ensure that the software being quoted correctly covers the scope of work, and provides a more reliable basis for understanding the solution’s total cost of ownership (TCO) over time. While bidder proposals may diverge in the way they license and price their wares, the total cost of ownership is really what matters, and comparing them on this basis essentially neutralizes differences in licensing models.

The software worksheet provided with the Model RFP presents a table that includes license type and quantity as open fields for bidders to complete in a manner that aligns with their model. The State should anticipate receiving questions from the vendor community during the Q&A period on a variety of metrics bidders may needed in order to provide accurate and complete software scope. One bidder, for example, might need a count of concurrent users as an input to its licensing model, while another might need to know projected counts for various types of transactional events (e.g. eligibility determinations). In responding to these questions, bidders should be urged to focus on providing an accurate total cost of ownership whatever their particular licensing scheme might be.

Deliverables Worksheet

The deliverables listed in this worksheet will vary depending upon the State’s preferred implementation methodology. As States embrace more Agile methodologies, we encourage the use of deliverables that align with that approach. Traditional “waterfall” projects often require lengthy lists of paper deliverables, many of which are static documents that may or may not be properly updated over time; the iterative and collaborative nature of Agile methodology, by contrast, implies a more fluid approach to project deliverables.

In Agile, requirements are continuously generated and assessed, then reprioritized and re-planned for each iteration. The process is guided and monitored through such performance measures as *story points*, *velocity*, and *Definitions of Done*. Payment and performance milestones may be more naturally associated with these metrics. This is not to say that an Agile project produces no concrete deliverables, however. As evidence of its performance, states may require a vendor to furnish user research artifacts (requirements, user stories, use cases, etc.); design artifacts (conceptual, logical, visual designs); code and test artifacts (plans, cases, scripts); or management products (plans, acceptance, etc.). Not to mention—most importantly—working software and “release candidates.” Any or all of these items may be considered deliverables for purposes of contract performance measurement and payment gatekeeping.

RFP authors should tailor the Deliverables Worksheet to include deliverables consonant with their delivery model.

Rate Card Worksheet

The Rate Card tab is where bidders provide rates associated with all proposed staff roles. Regardless of whether the bid is time and materials or firm fixed price, we encourage states to include a rate card in the cost proposal so that they can project the budget impact if new scope emerges in the course of the project.

Narrative

The Narrative provides the bidder with an opportunity to discuss its cost proposal and any underlying assumptions. While a workbook with fixed fields and formulas enables the State to review and compare dollar amounts in a systematic fashion, there is great variability in how bidders arrive at their cost estimates. Accordingly, we encourage RFP authors to allow vendors to describe their approach and thinking so that the State has solid insight into the underpinnings of the cost proposal. There is always a story behind the numbers.

# Supplements

## Supplement 1: Document Mechanics: Styles, Formatting Conventions and Custom

Many readers can safely skip this section. It is of interest mainly to those who will be doing the hands-on work of merging text from our Model RFP into an actual RFP. It presumes familiarity with some more advanced features of Microsoft Word.

## Properties

*Microsoft Word styles* To facilitate the extraction of text from the Model RFP, the document utilizes a small number of Microsoft Word styles. The primary styles of interest are: Normal; Body (set to be identical to Normal); Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3 and Heading 4; Numbered Heading 1 and Numbered Heading 2. A few specialized styles, prefixed with “RFP\_”, define other document elements.

These styles can be easily modified in the Word Format > Style editor to conform to the procuring agency’s standard typographic conventions (font, font size, colors, heading formats, layout, and so on). We highly recommend taking this styles-based approach over doing mass search-and-replace updates, which are apt to miss certain elements and can result in a poorly formatted document. Please see the documentation for your version of Word if you’re not sure how to use styles.

*Document properties* Each RFP that uses content from the Model RFP will of course contain information specific to the procuring entity—the RFP number, title, governing agency and so on. To simplify the process of embedding such information in an actual procurement document, the Model RFP includes a number of Word *document properties* that hold such specifics; once the variables are assigned values, these values are used to automatically populate each reference to the item in question.

For example, the value of the v\_Title variable should be set to the agency’s specific RFP title; throughout the Model RFP this value will be referenced and displayed via a DocProperty field. It is not necessary to do a search-and-replace operation to update these values; Word handles updates automatically once the initial values are set.

Accordingly, one of the first things a user of the Model RFP should do is specify values for these properties. To do so, access the File > Properties dialog in Word and update the placeholder Value for each property that begins with a v\_ prefix. E.g., replace v\_IssuingAgency with the name of the agency that is issuing the RFP and press the [Enter] key to save your value. Replace v\_State with the name of your state, and so on, until all v\_ variables have been updated. Click OK when done. References to these items will then be updated throughout the document. (It maybe be necessary to print the document once—a “print to PDF” is sufficient—in order the force Word to update all references.)

A screenshot of a social media post

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: Word Properties dialog

The accompanying screen shot shows the dialog used to set property values in the Mac OS version of Word. Please see the documentation for your version of Word for further information.

Note: We recommend that RFP authors search their final draft for square brackets and chevrons to ensure that all placeholders for localized content, as described in the preceding section, have been resolved.

## Supplement 2: The CCWIS Final Rule Outlined

The CCWIS Final Rule, as found in the Federal Register[[27]](#footnote-27), is organized according to an orderly outline system. Unfortunately, the outline structure is quite difficult to parse because the Final Rule, like all laws, was published in continuously running text, without indentations reflecting the underlying outline levels.

As a resource for readers, the following pages present the CCWIS Final Rule outline headings in an easier-to-read format.

The CCWIS Final Rule was published in the Federal Register here:  
  
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-06-02/pdf/2016-12509.pdf>

1. Create a system that is efficient, economical, effective
2. Appropriate management of data (see more on that below)
3. Avoid duplication in terms of system development or software maintenance
4. Use technology where and how it makes sense to
5. Spend money on the system appropriately

* Maintain the necessary data effectively

1. Title IV-B and Title IV-E data
   1. Child welfare reports
   2. Eligibility determinations, service authorizations and expenditures
   3. Compliance with child welfare laws, policies and regulations
   4. Federal audits and monitoring
2. State/tribal compliance with its laws, policies, reporting, etc.
3. Compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act
4. Provide Data for National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)

* Meet data reporting requirements

1. Federal IV-E and IV-B
2. State/tribal

* Have high quality data

1. For federal and state/tribal data reporting requirements above
   1. Complete, timely and accurate
   2. Consistent and uniformly collected
   3. Exchanged and maintained confidentially
   4. Support child welfare practice and approach
   5. “Not be created by default or inappropriately assigned.”
2. Title IV-E agency automation requirements
   1. Monitor data quality
   2. Alert staff to enter, update and correct data as appropriate
   3. Request current and historical data from other agency systems that should be accessible
   4. Avoid duplicate data entry, whenever possible
   5. Generate data quality reports
3. IV-E biennial data quality reviews
   1. To test data report and automation requirements above
   2. To test data exchange requirements below
4. Correct data quality issues regarding data exchanges as they are identified
5. Develop and implement a data quality plan to be submitted as part of APD
   1. Define the data quality strategy
   2. Report on data quality status

* Bi-directional data exchanges

1. Efficient, economical effective
   1. Financial payments and claims related to IV-B and IV-E
   2. Child welfare contributing agencies with relevant data
   3. System calculating IV-E eligibility determinations
   4. Any external system used to by IV-E staff to collect relevant data
2. Bi-directional data with each of the following is required if practical
   1. Child abuse and neglect system
   2. IV-A system
   3. Title XIX
      1. Medicaid Eligibility
      2. Medicaid Management
   4. IV-D
   5. Court systems
   6. Education systems
3. Automated eligibility determinations
   1. States must use the same function/group of functions for all IV-E eligibility determinations
   2. Tribals should, to the extent practicable, use the same function/group of functions for all IV-E eligibility determinations
4. Software provision requirement. States must provide government with agency-owned system and documentation (if paid for with FFP) at federal request

* Submission of APD requirements include:

1. Before claiming funding, an APD must be submitted with the following
   1. Description of how CCWIS requirements will be met
   2. List of automated functions
      1. Indicate whether each function meets a requirement
      2. Indicate if the function is duplicated elsewhere
      3. Indicate if function meets design requirements
   3. Annual updates to APD that
      1. Indicate whether each function meets a requirement
      2. Indicate if the function is duplicated elsewhere
      3. Indicate if function meets design requirements

* A CCWIS must promote faster and less expensive development of reliable systems, consistent with CMS system rules, by following industry standards:

1. Build independent plug-and-play modules
2. Modules may be shared and reused by other states, tribes,and agencies

## Supplement 3: CCWIS Solution Criteria and Self-Assessment Questions

CCWIS as an Opportunity for Self-Assessment

The purpose of this Supplement is to provide RFP team members with thought questions, spurred by CCWIS requirements, that might help them tailor the ultimate RFP to the specific needs, challenges and concerns of their stakeholders.

A second objective is to stimulate discussion of organizational processes and how they might be improved or rethought in anticipation of the CCWIS implementation process. Bringing in a new solution is a good time to do some organizational soul-searching; the self-assessment in this section seeks to help with that.

Note that the self-assessment tools in the following pages are distinct from the Children’s Bureau’s forthcoming (as of this writing) *CCWIS compliance* self-assessment tools. See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/06/05/2020-12125/proposed-information-collection-activity-generic-clearance-for-the-comprehensive-child-welfare> for further information.

CCWIS Criterion: Efficient, Economical and Effective

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Appropriate management of data | How will the new system improve the way data is: Captured? Stored? Accessed? Used for decision-making? |  |
| Avoid duplication in system development and maintenance | Is there an opportunity to consolidate functions from multiple systems into a single system, or to share data between systems non-duplicatively?  Is there a way to find efficiencies and reduce data reconciliation requirements by identifying tasks that are being partially or fully completed in two different systems? |  |
| Use technology where and how it makes sense to | Is there an opportunity to reduce manual effort by automating functionality (without jeopardizing other criteria/values such as accuracy, relationship building, judgment, etc.)?  Are there workarounds that workers employ because the system is not accomplishing a task in a reliable way (e.g., flagging due dates, capturing family relationships, generating forms)? How could these workarounds be minimized with the new system?  Are there system characteristics that interfere with workers’ ability to make important connections or use their judgment (e.g., the ability for a supervisor to override an automated recommendation or an overly-restrictive foster home licensing workflow)? |  |
| Spend money on the system appropriately | What processes have been put in place to minimize the possibility of cost overruns during implementation or ongoing operation of the new system? (For example, duplicate data storage to facilitate efficient disaster recovery can be a large hidden cost if an effective plan is not in place.)  Is there a plan for features and functions to be prototyped and user-tested before large investments are made in development and maintenance? Does the CCWIS planning process provide opportunities for the agency to prioritize features and functionality with insight into the rough level of effort/cost required for each feature, so that money is being allocated with an operational ROI mindset? The least expensive time to make system changes is during the planning/prototyping phase. |  |

CCWIS Criterion: Maintain data effectively

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Title IV-B and Title IV-E data   * Child welfare reports * Eligibility determinations, service authorizations and expenditures * Compliance with child welfare laws, policies and regulations * Federal audits and monitoring | How can the new system minimize the amount of data entry and data cleanup required before calculating eligibility and/or submitting federal reports? Are there validations and checks to ensure that accurate data is being entered/calculated?  Are the algorithms used to calculate eligibility designed to maximize revenue (without overreaching)? Are there gaps in this process that a new CCWIS solution could address? How? |  |
| State/tribal compliance with its laws, policies, reporting, etc. | Are there required state/tribe-specific reports that need to be accounted for in the CCWIS design?  What types of real-time data would help agency leaders devise and implement policy?  Are agency leaders being engaged to understand their priorities with regard to dashboards, reports, compliance, etc.?  How can the system provide data necessary for agency leaders to answer questions about program efficacy? (For example, how will the new system support pilots? How will it support new program initiatives?) |  |
| Compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act | What data needs to be available to ensure that the new solution complies with ICWA with regard to services, placements and notifications? |  |
| Provide Data for National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) | Are there process difficulties in collecting NCANDS data, apart from any system issues?  Are there issues with the fatality tracking/reporting process that a new CCWIS might help with? |  |

CCWIS Criterion: Meet data reporting requirements

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Federal IV-E and IV-B | What is the planned mechanism for defining the necessary reporting cohorts (e.g., all youth, served youth, baseline youth, followup youth)?  Are all necessary data elements available? Are there known challenges that a new CCWIS solution could assist with?  How will you keep track of and stay connected to youth to ensure there is an effective method for participation in youth surveys, as required? |  |
| State/Tribal | Are there additional state or tribal data requirements that bidders should consider?  Does your state have different data reporting standards (by policy or regulation) than the federal government does (e.g., how a runaway is defined or how frequently home visits need to occur)? |  |

CCWIS Criterion: Have high-quality data

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| For federal and state/tribal data reporting requirements above:   * Complete, timely and accurate * Consistent and uniformly collected * Exchanged and maintained confidentially * Support child welfare practice and approach * Not be created by default or inappropriately assigned | Do you have organizational mechanisms for monitoring and adjusting data quality operations as needed?  Are there clear staff/departmental roles and responsibilities with regard to managing elements of a data quality plan?  Have there been data lag issues in the past (i.e. excessive gaps between the actual time of events and the time the data is entered/collected)? Could a new system help address them (e.g., by allowing for data entry directly from the field, or utilizing metadata from phones/cameras to capture time/location information)? Are organizational changes needed instead of or in addition to technology solutions?  What process is in place for defining rules around data access and sharing?  What process is in place to ensure that individuals/roles throughout the agency have access to the decision-making data they need?  What can be done to improve the level of trust staff have in system-held data so that they don’t feel compelled to keep information in insecure shadow systems such as spreadsheets or notebooks?  Based on your understanding of current data quality issues, what features in a new CCWIS solution might help minimize the need for data cleanup aimed at addressing inconsistencies or gaps in the data?  What practices can be put in place to eliminate the inclusion of “placeholder” data created automatically when an answer is unknown (e.g., January 1 birthdate or “noon” placement time)?  Based on your knowledge of your staff’s typical workload and workflow, what would be the optimal way to alert them when required data is incomplete?  Are there administrative procedures to minimize the accidental creation of duplicate person records? How could a new solution support them?  How should the new system determine that two persons are potentially the same person (e.g., which data elements should be compared to determine unique identity at the time of intake)? | [Data Reporting Requirements Presentation](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_data_reporting_requirements.pdf)  [Data Quality Requirements Presentation](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_data_quality_reqs.pdf) |

CCWIS Criterion: Have high-quality data (continued)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Title IV-E agency automation requirements   * Monitor data quality * Alert staff to enter, update and correct data as appropriate * Request current and historical data from other agency systems that should be accessible * Avoid duplicate data entry, whenever possible * Generate data quality reports | If/when there are inconsistencies in data, are they flagged (e.g., a placement end date that is before the placement start date or a contact date that is in the future)? Any special or state-specific rules that should be required in a new CCWIS?  Are there particular issues with the old system that make it difficult to maintain quality IV-E data? Which features would you want to see in a new system to address these deficiencies?  Does the same data have to be entered multiple times (vs. auto-populated as appropriate)? Are there specific CCWIS solution features that would help with this problem? Are there organizational process constraints that would prevent any system from addressing it?  How much historical data (i.e. how many years worth) should the vendor be prepared to convert for import into the new solution?  Are there fraud prevention and detection mechanisms the new system needs to provide explicit support for? | [IV-E Eligibility Requirements Presentation](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_iv_e_eligibility_requirements.pdf) |
| IV-E biennial data quality reviews   * To test data report and automation requirements above * To test data exchange requirements below | What system features would make it easier to do automated and manual data quality reviews?  What specific audit trail capabilities would help the agency prepare for data quality reviews?  Is there a data “sandbox” that enables the agency to investigate and experiment with data quality issues? |  |

CCWIS Criterion: Have high-quality data (continued)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Correct data quality issues regarding data exchanges as they are identified | Is there an interagency process for prioritizing and addressing integration issues as they relate to data quality?  Is it clear which data system is the system of record for each data element? Will there be MOUs to codify these decisions when there are interagency stakeholders? |  |
| Develop and implement a data quality plan to be submitted as part of APD   * Define the data quality strategy * Report on data quality status | Do you currently have a data quality plan that covers all CCWIS data quality requirements?  Does the data plan address the following: data governance, roles and responsibilities, training, management and stewardship, data conversion strategies? | [Technical Bulletin #6](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_tb6.pdf)  (Data Quality Plan)  [Data Quality Plan Presentation](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_data_quality_plans_presentation.pdf) |

CCWIS Criterion: Bi-directional data exchanges

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Efficient, economical effective   * Financial payments and claims related to IV-B and IV-E * Child welfare contributing agencies with relevant data * System calculating IV-E eligibility determinations * Any external system used to by IV-E staff to collect relevant data | Which partner systems can accommodate real-time data exchanges? Which can support only batch exchanges? With the new CCWIS system coming in, are there opportunities to move toward more real-time exchanges where this would be preferable?  How do IT staff work across agency boundaries to plan and manage interfaces? For example, when one system changes its data model, what is required of other systems in order to continue to exchange data without interruption? Is there anything you think bidders should know about this process? | [Technical Bulletin #2](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_tb2.pdf)  (Data Sharing between CCWIS and Child Welfare Contributing Agencies) |
| Bi-directional data with each of the following is required if practical   * Child abuse and neglect system   - IV-A system  - Title XIX   * IV-D * Court systems * Education systems | What will it take to ensure that the system can achieve bi-directional integration with each of the CCWIS-required systems?  If this isn’t possible/feasible, why not?  Are there existing data exchange agreements outlining the ground rules for exchange of data between systems operated by different agencies?  For each data element in the CCWIS-required data exchanges, is it currently clear which system is the system of record?  Have you defined what “rights” users of other systems have to change data in the child welfare database (indirectly, through an integration) when corresponding data changes in their system? | [Courts Data Sharing Toolkit](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/data_sharing_toolkit.pdf)  [Data Exchange Requirements Presentation](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/ccwis-data-exchange-requirements) |

CCWIS Criterion: Bi-directional data exchanges (continued)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Automated eligibility determinations   * States must use the same function/group of functions for all IV-E eligibility determinations * Tribals should, to the extent practicable, use the same function/group of functions for all IV-E eligibility determinations | Is there a uniform process for calculating eligibility determinations?  Are the determinations fully automated?  Are there desired process improvements that should be mentioned in the CCWIS RFP? |  |
| Software provision requirement. States must provide government with agency-owned system and documentation (if paid for with FFP) at federal request | How will the agency provide a copy of the software (excluding COTS/SaaS) to the federal government? Are there administrative steps or requirements that must be anticipated at procurement time, or that bidders should be made aware of?  How will the agency and/or its vendor maintain up-to-date and accurate documentation on the system? |  |

CCWIS Criterion: Submission of APD requirements

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Before claiming funding, an APD must be submitted with the following   * Description of how CCWIS requirements will be met * List of automated functions   (Indicate whether each function meets a requirement)  (Indicate if the function is duplicated elsewhere)  (Indicate if function meets design requirements)  -Annual Updates to APD on the above | Will each automated function support at least one requirement?  Will that function be duplicated anywhere? If so, why?  How will each function comply with design requirements? | [Technical Bulletin #1](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_tb1.pdf)  (Identifying and Reporting Automated Functions) |

CCWIS Criterion: Modular design

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Requirement | Guiding Questions | Relevant Links |
| Build independent plug-and-play modules | Based on your experience with the current system, are there particular aspects of CCWIS functionality that would benefit from the separation of business rules from core programming?  Does your IT environment pose any challenges to the objective of deploying the loosely-coupled design described in CCWIS Technical Bulletin #3? Conversely, are there elements of the current IT environment that will facilitate this—e.g., the existence of an enterprise service bus? | [Technical Bulletin #3](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/ccwis_tb3.pdf)  (Modular Design and Review Guidance) |
| Modules may be shared and reused by other states, tribes,and agencies | How can state-specific rules/functions/requirements be captured in a way that would allow them to be easily adapted by another state?  Will there be a data map/architecture of each module? |  |

## Supplement 4: Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal License

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## Supplement 5: LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

**LIMITATION OF LIABILITY**

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## Supplement 6: Contributing Organizations and Project Team

Contributing Organizations

In the fall of 2019, the Annie E. Casey Foundation provided a grant to Case Commons to create the CCWIS Model RFP. Founded in 2010, the original Case Commons was the creator of the Casebook case management platform, built through a strong partnership with caseworkers and human service professionals with the goal of providing human service agencies with the advanced technologies and analytics needed to help them meet their vital mission of serving children and families well.

The Casebook product and staff have since moved to a separate public benefit corporation, Casebook PBC. Casebook PBC is a software company solely focused on delivering human service solutions based on the Casebook Platform. Case Commons in its present form is a group of seasoned professionals in child welfare, juvenile justice and mental health who focus on providing assistance to state and local governments and nonprofit agencies seeking to achieve the best outcomes for children and families. It has no technology focus other than this project.

In keeping with the authors’ strict commitment to independence and to creating an unbiased work product, Casebook PBC was not consulted or provided with access to the CCWIS Model RFP team or any work in progress during the project.

Text

Description automatically generatedUnder contract to Case Commons, the Model RFP and Guide were developed by independent consultants affiliated with the Human Services Technology Circle. Visit [www.humanservicestech.com](http://www.humanservicestech.com) to learn more.

States, tribes, vendors or other interested parties who would like assistance in applying the Model RFP to their projects can contact the Circle team at [CCWIS@humanservicestech.com](mailto:CCWIS@humanservicestech.com).

Project Team

| Team Member | Title and Affiliation | Project Role |
| --- | --- | --- |
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| Edward Hamlin | Independent consultant | Project Executive, subject matter expert,  lead author |
| Jacque Gombach | CEO, Captuva, Inc. | Subject matter expert, contributing author |
| Kathleen Feely | Independent consultant | Subject matter expert |
| Heather Weston | Independent consultant | Subject matter expert, contributing author |
| Doris Tolliver, Esq. | Managing Director of Equitable Impact, Foster America | Subject matter expert |
| Patricia Rideout, JD | Independent consultant | Subject matter expert, contributing author |
| Ann Flagg | Senior Director, Policy and Practice, APHSA | Primary reviewer |
| Christina Becker, JD | Manager, Knowledge Mobilization, APHSA | Primary reviewer |
| Meghann Dygert | Policy Associate, Child Welfare and Family Well-Being, APHSA | Primary reviewer |

1. See <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/ccwis-status> for the latest official status information. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See <https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/smd16010.pdf> for CMS regulatory guidance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The CCWIS Final Rule is here: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-06-02/pdf/2016-12509.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-DisasterPreparednessResourceGuide-2009.pdf#page=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/some-states-may-be-able-to-increase-foster-parent-payments-during-covid-19/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/covid-19-resources> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewSection&issueID=218&subsectionID=99> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, for example, <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/opinion/accounting-racial-bias-applying-predictive-analytics-child-welfare/27074> and <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ki-predictive-analytics.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Chadwick Center & Chapin Hall. (2018). Making the most of predictive analytics: Responsive and innovative uses in child welfare policy and practice. San Diego, CA & Chicago, IL: Collaborating at the Intersection of Research and Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Principles%20for%20Predictive%20Analytics%20in%20Child%20Welfare-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://mhealth.jmir.org/2019/3/e11306/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. There are no federal requirements governing procedures for conducting investigations of alleged child abuse and neglect, but states are required to adhere to their own protocols and timelines for contact, safety and risk assessments and other investigative procedures. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://www.nccdglobal.org/assessment/structured-decision-making-sdm-model [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has published valuable analysis and research on TDM. See, for example, <https://www.aecf.org/blog/team-decision-making-a-better-way-to-assess-child-safety/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The Annie E. Casey Foundation offers dozens of research-based publications on foster care outcomes; see <https://www.aecf.org/topics/foster-care/>. The ACF Children’s Bureau aggregates research and best practices at its Child Welfare Information Gateway; see, for example, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/placement/stability/> for publications on the topic of placement stability. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/extensionfc.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Improving%20Foster%20Care%20Licensing%20Standards.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Model%20Licensing%20Standards%20FINAL.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A well thought-out toolkit for child welfare finance professionals can be found at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/ntaec/soctoolkits/finance/#phase=cqi>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For a thoughtful articulation of a strategic approach to data, see this 2011 presentation by Erwin McEwen, Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services: <https://www.cwda.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mcewen-strengthening-families.pdf?1447784482> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/public\_html/programs/cb/laws\_policies/laws/cwpm/policy.jsp?idFlag=6 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See, for example, the Project Management Institute’s effort to apply its traditional PMBOK methodology to Agile: Sliger, M. (2008). Agile project management and the PMBOK® guide. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2008—North America, Denver, CO. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/agile-project-management-pmbok-waterfall-7042> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. https://www.fedramp.gov/ [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.niem.gov/communities/human-services> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/agile-project-management-pmbok-waterfall-7042> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <https://www.infoq.com/articles/agile-teenage-crisis/> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-06-02/pdf/2016-12509.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)