

Child welfare systems commonly issue contracts or grants to community-based agencies to provide the services that children and families may need, such as in-home support, parenting classes, housing, or therapy. The contracting process has evolved over time as increased attention has been placed on objectives and outcomes among children, youth, and families served by child welfare community partners (Chuang, Wells, Green, & Reiter, 2011; Meezan & McBeath, 2011). Evidence-based practices (EBPs) are particularly well-suited for outcomes-focused contracts due to their ability to effectively meet the needs of children, youth, and families; however, placing EBPs into contracts presents new considerations for child welfare policymakers who are designing and evaluating those contracts. The purpose of this resource is to highlight some important considerations for designing and evaluating contracts to support successful implementation of EBPs and provide an example of EBP contracting from one California child welfare system.

## Considerations for Contracting out Evidence-Based Child Welfare Services

- Needs Assessments:** When designing a request for proposal (RFP), it is important to note in the instructions that the applicant's proposal must demonstrate that the recommended intervention is appropriate for the targeted service population and their needs. Data-driven needs assessment can help the child welfare system better understand the needs of the service population. It can also help applicants better understand the underlying issue and guide them toward interventions that effectively address that issue (Walsh, Rolls Reutz, & Williams, 2015). In either case, the child welfare system or the applying agency can use existing data that they already collect or collect new data in order to drill down into the underlying issue.
- Criteria for Evidence:** It is important for the RFP to include the child welfare system's criteria for what constitutes "evidence-based." Interventions can vary in the type of research and number of studies conducted on them. Policymakers can use online EBP clearinghouses, such as the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (CEBC; [www.cebc4cw.org](http://www.cebc4cw.org)), to identify levels of supporting research evidence for interventions that can be included in RFPs. Before including a minimum level of research evidence in an RFP, it is also important to first determine what interventions are currently available that address the identified issue. Some areas within child welfare are not as well-researched as others and may not have interventions that meet certain levels of research evidence.
- Procurement Process:** Changes to the contract bidding method can also influence EBP implementation. Willging et al. (2016) reported concerns among community agencies when their child welfare system moved to a standardized blind contract bidding and review process. These concerns included threats to the sustainability of well-established EBPs already offered by existing community partners, contract reviewers lacking knowledge about child welfare EBPs, and delays in the new bidding process adversely affecting staff and potentially contributing to staff turnover.
- Interagency Collaboration:** Collaborative relationships with, and among, provider organizations is a key process to the success and sustainability of a contracted EBP. Green and colleagues (2016) found that child-welfare-contracted community agencies with fully sustaining EBP sites reported greater levels of collaboration with each other than the nonsustaining EBP sites. Developing relationships across agencies is reported to engender shared commitment and accountability to the model (Aarons et al., 2016). Collaboration with academic researchers is also reported to help improve EBP implementation by providing community agencies with implementation guidance, evaluation services, and access to financial resources (Green et al., 2016).
- Quality Improvement Mechanisms:** EBP implementation requires careful attention to program fidelity in order for agencies to reach the same positive outcomes found in the program's published research. Contracts should require resources to be allocated to monitoring EBP fidelity and outcomes to address any deficits and ensure the contract objectives are met. The Interagency Collaborative Team (ICT) model is one method for child welfare agencies to support their funded partners with EBP implementation (Hurlburt et al., 2014). The ICT model establishes a local



interagency *seed team* to build structural supports for adapting, implementing, overseeing quality control, sustaining, and scaling-up EBP implementation. Chaffin et al. (2016) found positive results among provider cohorts adapting and implementing an EBP using the ICT model, including quick fidelity adherence, fidelity sustainment, and high cultural competency ratings among families who received the culturally adapted services. A detailed description of the ICT model can be found in Hurlburt et al. (2014).



- **System Changes:** The sustainability of a contracted EBP can also be jeopardized by external system-level changes. Aarons et al. (2016) found in one of their study sites that child welfare leaders developed a safeguard to protect their contracted EBP from elimination during major system changes by writing the model into a five-year system improvement plan.

## Contracting Example: Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency

- **Region Description:** Tulare County is centrally located within the state of California, with a population of 460,437, in an area of 4,863 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The general character of Tulare County is rural farmland with three densely populated cities (Visalia, Tulare, and Porterville) and several rural unincorporated communities scattered between the Sierra Nevada Mountains and valley floor neighbors.
- **Agency Description:** Tulare County Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a division within Tulare County Health & Human Services Agency. Tulare County CWS has a total of 279 positions.
- **Contracted Programs:** The box on the right hand side lists research-supported programs in Tulare County (with embedded links to the CEBC program descriptions). This report will highlight Tulare County CWS' contracting of SafeCare®, Nurturing Parent Program (NPP), and Wraparound.
- **Number of providers:** Tulare County CWS contracts with 22 nonprofit agencies for services. Of these, six are Family Resource Centers located throughout the county. There are currently 42 separate contracts being managed.
- **Funding:** SafeCare® has been funded through Mental Health Services Act funds under the Prevention and Early Intervention component since Fiscal Year 2011-2012. Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) began in Tulare County in June 2013 and is funded through Child Abuse Prevention Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT) funds. Wraparound began in Tulare County in FY 2008 and is paid through CWS by redirected foster care funding and through Tulare County's Department of Mental Health for the provision of mental health specialty services in conjunction with Wraparound services.

### Tulare County Child Welfare's research-supported programs:

- [SafeCare®](#)
- [Nurturing Parenting Program](#)  
- Skills for Families  
- Parents & Adolescents
- [Wraparound](#)
- [Parenting Wisely](#)
- [Family Connections](#)
- [1-2-3 Magic](#)
- [Parent Child Interaction Therapy](#)
- [Differential Response](#)

### What factors led Tulare County CWS to bring evidence into the contracting process?

In Fiscal Year 2009-2010, Tulare County joined with Fresno and Madera County to form a Central Valley Cooperative and entered into a 5-year agreement between the Chadwick Center at Rady Children's Hospital and the Foundation, Inc. Central California Regional Child Welfare Training Academy (CCRTA) to implement the Safe Kids California Project (SKCP). This project targeted the prevention of child neglect by leveraging existing funding streams to transform services from untested models into culturally robust evidence-based service delivery systems. The Chadwick Center provided on-site implementation support and SafeCare® training and coaching to home visitors, through the National SafeCare® Training and Research Center. This partnership was instrumental in training service provider staff to become skilled in SafeCare®, develop and train SafeCare® coaches, and provided training for trainers in SafeCare®. In essence, this allowed Tulare County to be able to not only maintain this evidence-based practice but to *cascade* SafeCare® to additional service providers and increase the number of families this highly effective program could serve. Furthermore, in January 2012, Tulare County CWS collaborated with the CEBC to participate in an Evidence-Based Assessment and Planning Initiative,

an assessment and planning process developed by the CEBC to help increase the use of EBPs in their community. The project had two phases: 1) Community Assessment and Data Collection, and 2) Development of a Road Map based on data collection and analysis. In January 2013, a road map document was provided to assist with the county's implementation of targeted evidence-based programs.



### **How does Tulare County CWS use evidence when designing contracts or RFPs?**



When designing a contract or RFP, it is Tulare County CWS' practice to first research what EBPs are available to fit the need. They research and compare programs, often using websites such as the CEBC. The Nurturing Parenting Program is an example of how they used an evidence-based program to fit the service gap needs in a RFP released in 2012. This RFP instructed applicants to address the need for an EBP Parenting Classes Program so as to meet the needs of the target population: Families at-risk of child abuse or neglect

in Tulare County. The applicants that responded were required to research EBPs and include in their proposal submission the selected program along with a description of how this EBP fit the service gap need. The RFP included selection criteria that ensured only EBP programs that fit the service gap need would score high enough to be considered for funding.

### **Does the contract or RFP include stipulations on EBP implementation supports?**

Tulare County CWS EBP contracts contain stipulations on implementation and maintaining fidelity and include outcome monitoring. The RFP for Wraparound is a good example of stipulations that ask applicants to demonstrate commitment to the model (see box on left hand side). The RFP awarded 46 points total to the description of the program model for Wraparound which emphasized Wraparound philosophy and best practice standards.

#### **RFP Stipulations for Supporting Implementation of Wraparound:**

- Families as full partners with access, voice, and ownership at all levels of planning and implementation
- Unique child and family teams
- Culturally competent services tailored to family culture, values, norms, strengths, and preferences
- Flexibility in location, time, planning, service response, and funding
- Perseverance in support and assistance to families
- Life domains and needs-driven planning
- Care provided in the context of home and community
- Strengths defined from first conversation
- Commitment to Permanence
- Strategies linked to family/community strengths

### **How has Tulare County CWS addressed any challenges with contract providers providing EBP services?**

It is CWS' practice to develop a collaborative partnership with their service providers and closely monitor contracts. They meet monthly or quarterly with most service providers to review performance, spending patterns, and discuss any strengths or challenges that have been observed. An example of a close working partnership with a contract provider is their Wraparound program. In the beginning, there were some challenges with communication flow, setting them up for invoicing, and record keeping. A mid-year and a follow-up audit were conducted where they addressed any deficiencies and the service provider has subsequently corrected these issues.

### **What has been Tulare County CWS' successes and were there any lessons learned from their contracting process?**

Tulare County CWS has put a high priority on ensuring regular, systematic meetings occur with their service providers and that communication is open, allowing all people at the table to be heard. They have learned that the "devil is in the details." When an issue arises, it is important to gather all the details so that they can look at the real problem and develop well-thought-out solutions. Often, there is a tendency to blame the other party for any issues that arise. The truth often lies in the middle and requires transparency and a willingness to humbly listen to all parties to come up with solutions. Regular monthly meetings occur with the service providers of these evidence-based programs, thus providing the venue to have these conversations. Their Wraparound program is an example of the importance of having regular monthly meetings. Each month, a Wraparound Community team meeting occurs with the right people at the table. Per Tulare CWS, another helpful tip is to be connected with the statewide Wraparound collaboration through the California

regional hub meetings. The hubs serve to bring awareness across counties regarding different Wraparound structures, legislation, and best practices.



## References

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