

Call for Applications to Become a Project Site

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Application Due Date: 2-15-17

Overview

Staff recruitment and retention are persistent challenges for many child welfare agencies. In addition to tremendous fiscal costs to agencies and cost to individual staff who have invested themselves in the agency, staff turnover can negatively impact the relationship between agencies and families leading to poorer child and family outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being. These challenges are compounded by a lack of research on workforce development frameworks to identify specific agency needs and effective evidence informed strategies to attract and retain child welfare staff.

The Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD) is dedicated to understanding how to improve child welfare workforce outcomes. Ultimately, improvements in workforce outcomes may lead to enhanced child and family outcomes for public and tribal child welfare systems. Over the past three Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs), agencies have noted issues with workforce turnover as strong contributors to their inability to meet federal performance standards. Making an investment in the child welfare workforce is an investment in improved outcomes for children and families. The QIC-WD's ambitious goals, noted below, reflect our intent, in partnership with project sites, to make a difference in the landscape of the child welfare workforce:

1. Use a systematic process and supporting tools that expand upon the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute's Workforce Development Framework (or WDF) to identify, assess, and evaluate child welfare workforce issues
2. Develop a crosswalk of current and future workforce trends impacting child welfare and how agencies can effectively address present issues and prepare for these trends
3. Develop a comprehensive catalog of existing evidence-informed workforce strategies
4. Develop new evidence regarding the efficacy of select workforce interventions for improving agency workforce environment and outcomes
5. Develop new evidence regarding the connections between improved workforce outcomes and child and family outcomes
6. Enhance agency capacity to implement new workforce interventions and sustain a continuous workforce improvement process

The Quality Improvement Center on Workforce Development is a five-year cooperative agreement between the Children's Bureau (2016 –2021) and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in partnership with experts from University of Colorado Denver; University of Louisville; University of Tennessee, Knoxville; CF Parry Associates; CLH Strategies & Solutions; and Great Eastern Consulting.

To build the evidence of effectiveness, the QIC-WD is seeking 5-10 public and tribal child welfare agencies/sites interested in testing evidence-informed workforce strategies. The QIC-WD will partner and provide significant support to the selected sites to implement and evaluate the impact of interventions that aim to improve child welfare workforce outcomes. This document describes: the project goals of the QIC-WD; applicant eligibility; the benefits of becoming a project site; the QIC-WD's approach to supporting project sites over the course of implementation; requirements and expectations of project sites; and the two-phase application process, including site selection. It is our hope that this provides eligible applicants with the sufficient details they need to make a well-informed decision about pursuing this opportunity.

Eligible Applicants

State and county public child welfare agencies (from both state-administered and state supervised, county-administered child welfare systems), and Tribes and Tribal Consortia¹ that are currently receiving Title IV-B grant funds administered by the Children's Bureau are eligible to apply.

Benefits to Prospective QIC-WD Project Sites

There are many benefits to becoming a QIC-WD project site, including:

- Systematically identify and address your agency's specific workforce challenges
- Implement strategies to reduce worker turnover in test sites
- Implement strategies to enhance the delivery of services to children and families served by your child welfare agency
- Participate in an ongoing peer-learning network with other QIC-WD project sites across the nation that are striving to improve the child welfare workforce, where you can share your ideas and accomplishments and identify factors that are unique to your agency
- Gain access to information, resources, training and consultation to increase your capacity to implement and sustain workforce development interventions
- Implement and use the results of a nationally-normed measure of organizational culture and climate to understand your agency's functioning in comparison to other-similar agencies, and help improve culture and climate in your child welfare agency
- Access staff resources (in the form of a Site Implementation Manager and Data Coordinator as described below), and capacity building services and expertise to support the implementation and evaluation of workforce development interventions

QIC-WD Approach

The QIC-WD is dedicated to partnering with sites early in the site selection process and continuing those relationships throughout our implementation and evaluation work with the selected sites. Beginning in Phase 1 of the application process, the QIC-WD will assign a **Workforce, Implementation, and Evaluation (WIE)** team to each prospective project site. The WIE team consists of three individuals from the QIC-WD project team—one with expertise in Workforce, another with expertise in Implementation, and one who is an Evaluation expert. Each WIE team is organized to maximize support, collaborate and partner with its project site to support the implementation and evaluation of the workforce development project that will build evidence regarding workforce interventions and strategies. During the Phase 2 of the application process, the WIE team will work with prospective sites to conduct the workforce needs

¹ All tribes that are part of a consortia application need to be recipients of Title IV-B grant funds.

assessment. After a project site is selected, each WIE team will work closely with the site's identified Site Implementation Manager (SIM) to support all aspects of the project. In doing so, the QIC-WD, through the WIE team structure and other staff within the QIC infrastructure, will perform the following functions:

- Provide implementation and capacity building services to the project sites to support effective implementation of the workforce interventions, including intensive, ongoing support, guidance, coaching, and technical assistance (TA) to sites in project implementation, data collection, and evaluation
- Support, through resource allocations and capacity building services, a strong infrastructure to support implementation in each of the project sites
- Conduct robust site and cross-site evaluations to assess the implementation, outputs, workforce environment, workforce outcomes, child welfare practice, child welfare outcomes, and costs for the workforce intervention(s) in each of the project sites
- Disseminate learning to target audiences, helping project sites share knowledge gained with local stakeholders
- Collaborate with each site to develop a detailed plan for sustaining an integrated workforce development process with the agency's strategic planning, human resource, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) processes

Requirements and Expectations of QIC-WD Project Sites

The QIC-WD's approach to project site selection, implementation and evaluation is based on various implementation science frameworks. The requirements and expectations of QIC-WD project sites reflect these frameworks and what research has shown to be essential to successful implementation efforts.

Establish an Implementation Team Structure. The QIC-WD will provide capacity building services to support sites in establishing an implementation team structure, inclusive of the broader community, to guide the site. The QIC-WD recommends a broad-based set of representatives to serve on the team(s), including professionals representing: human resources, continuous quality improvement and evaluation, training, child welfare leadership, supervisors, front line service providers, tribal leaders and elders, and community partners.

Appoint a Site Implementation Manager (SIM). As noted in the Financial Resources section below, the QIC-WD will provide partial salary support for the SIM, up to 0.5 FTE. With the support of the QIC-WD team, the SIM's responsibilities will include:

- finalizing membership of the Implementation Team(s);
- completing a project charter for all teams as necessary;
- leading the development of the site implementation plan over the course of the project;
- conducting stakeholder meetings as needed;
- ensuring the development and review of an annual site work plan;
- managing project responsibilities (e.g., guiding workforce intervention and evaluation installation, sustainability and dissemination activities); and
- implementing a timeline to ensure the tasks are completed in a timely manner.

Appoint a Data Coordinator. As noted in the Financial Resources section below, the QIC-WD will provide partial salary support for the Data Coordinator, up to 0.25 FTE. The Data Coordinator's responsibilities

will include: obtaining and transmitting the necessary child and family administrative data files to the QIC-WD; obtaining and transmitting to the QIC-WD the necessary human resources data files; helping process the evaluation through the agency Institutional Review Board (IRB), if applicable; and ensuring new data are collected throughout the project per the agreed upon evaluation plan.

Enter into a Binding Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the QIC-WD. These binding agreements will detail the mutual roles and responsibilities of the lead child welfare agency and QIC-WD, including such aspects as data collection, confidentiality, access to and retention of data, dissemination, anticipated time frames for project milestones, and establishing and managing internal and external stakeholder relationships to ensure successful project implementation and evaluation.

Co-Develop and Execute a Data Sharing Agreement. This agreement will describe required data elements; data transmission processes; data storage; and issues of data protection, confidentiality, security, and publication. The data sharing agreements will be executed between the site and the QIC-WD evaluators.

Select and Implement a Workforce Strategy and/or Intervention. With the support of the QIC-WD team, and supporting materials (such as the catalog of workforce interventions), each site will select a workforce strategy and/or intervention(s) that will be the cornerstone of their project's implementation and evaluation activities.

Participate in the Evaluation of a Workforce Strategy and/or Intervention. Each site commits to collaborate with the QIC-WD to build a body of knowledge for comprehensive workforce planning and development. Each project site commits to utilizing the most rigorous evaluation that is appropriate for the type of workforce intervention chosen, given the site's capacity, organizational and community culture. Based on the intervention selected, the project site and evaluation team will co-create an evaluation plan for implementation, outcome and cost components. At a minimum, data collection/evaluation activities will include: (1) an Organizational Social Context (OSC) measure that focuses on organizational culture and climate which will be administered three times: before intervention, implementation mid-point and at the end of the implementation; (2) surveys, interviews and focus groups involving staff administered multiple times; (3) submission of child welfare information system data (SACWIS and/or CWIS), which may also include linked data to staff and/or other organizational entities, and (4) submission of workforce cross-sectional and longitudinal turnover/retention data and other relevant workforce metrics.

Participate in a Community of Learning. The 5-10 QIC-WD project sites will have multiple opportunities to come together as a learning community, including: monthly phone calls of the SIMs; and two in-person annual gatherings. The QIC-WD will support participants' travel expenses.

Plan for Sustainability and Engage in Dissemination. The QIC-WD will work with each site to develop a realistic, feasible site-specific dissemination plan to support sustainability goals, share lessons learned, implementation progress, and evaluation findings with community stakeholders. Dissemination and sustainability activities will start early in the project and involve information sharing and relationship building. Materials to support dissemination may include webinars, conference presentations, manuals, articles, etc.

Financial Resources

No monetary awards will be made. However, the QIC-WD will cover expenses related to the implementation and the evaluation of the selected workforce intervention/strategy. Specific amounts will vary per site, based on total number of sites, unique site needs, and scope of each project. Expenditures at the site level can include administrative and programmatic expenses, and must be approved in advance by QIC-WD. Expenses will either be covered by the QIC-WD in advance or approved expenses will be reimbursed with the submission of required documentation.

A plan for estimated expenses will be developed each year with each site. Examples of allowable expenses that would be covered by the QIC-WD include: Partial salary support for the SIM and Data Coordinator; training resources (not IV-B or IV-E claimable) needed for the intervention; travel to meetings and conferences, both in and out of state; consultants identified by the site or the QIC-WD staff and approved in advance; and costs associated with implementing a workforce intervention.

Phase 1 Application Process: Timeline and Format

Phase 1 Timeline

Step 1.1 – December 2016: Project Site Announcement Webinar and Application Released

The QIC-WD team will hold two webinars, announcing the process and application for becoming a QIC-WD project site. You can register for a webinar at the QIC-WD website. These webinars will be recorded and be downloadable from the QIC-WD website (www.qic-wd.org).

- States & Counties: **Dec. 14th @ 3pm Eastern/2pm Central/1pm Mountain/12pm Pacific Time**
- Tribes: **Dec. 15th @ 3pm Eastern/2pm Central/1pm Mountain/12pm Pacific Time**

Step 1.2 – By January 15, 2017: Email Notice of Intent to Apply

The QIC-WD requests that interested applicants send an email to info@qic-wd.org to signify their interest in applying to become a project site. This email does not bind a prospective applicant to submit an application, but will allow the QIC-WD team to follow-up with those who have expressed interest. Submitting a Letter of Intent via email is strongly encouraged, but not required.

Step 1.3 – Submitting Questions

Up until February 1, 2017, if applicants have questions, they can be emailed to info@qic-wd.org. A *Questions and Answers* document will be updated as needed and posted on the QIC-WD website to provide consistent up-to-date information to all potential applicants.

Step 1.4 – On or before February 15, 2017: Applications due

Using the requirements and criteria detailed in this application document (see Phase 1 Application Format below), eligible applicants can apply to the QIC-WD until February 15, 2017 at 11:59pm Central Time. To apply, send an email to apply@qic-wd.org and attach the following documents: 1) cover sheet; 2) cover letter(s); and 3) the application. Within 72 hours of receipt, the QIC-WD will send an email to each applicant confirming the application has been received and is complete.

Step 1.5 – By March 6, 2017: Application review and invitations made to selected agencies to participate in Phase 2 of the Application Process

QIC-WD leadership will contact all applicants on or before March 6, 2017 about the QIC's decision, including an invitation to a group of potential sites to participate in Phase 2 of the Application process. During these communications, the QIC-WD will discuss the timeframes and next steps for Phase 2 applicants.

Phase 1 Application Format

To submit a complete Phase 1 application, the QIC-WD requires the following three components:

Cover Sheet

The cover sheet is downloadable from the QIC-WD website. It is a fillable Microsoft Word document and must be submitted with the application.

Cover Letter(s)

- *State applicants:* State applicants are required to submit a letter from the State child welfare director, consenting to the application and confirming that the State agrees to allow the QIC-WD access to state-level data for evaluation purposes.
- *County applicants within state-supervised, county-administered states:* County applicants are required to submit a letter from the State child welfare director (see above), AND a letter from the county child welfare director, consenting to the application.
- *Tribes or tribal consortia applicants:* Tribal applicants are required to submit a letter from their leader responsible for administering child welfare programs. Tribal consortia applicants will need to submit a letter of agreement between the co-applying tribes.

Application

Interested applicants are asked to submit an application narrative. The application narrative may be entered into the second page of the Cover Sheet fillable form or may be uploaded as a separate Word or PDF document. The application should provide sufficient information in the following categories: (1) agency profile; (2) description of workforce needs; and (3) organizational and evaluation readiness. Applications should be no longer than 15 pages, double spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman. Graphs, tables and footnotes/endnotes can be single spaced, 10-point font, Times New Roman. However, we set that page limit as a maximum, not a minimum. Applicants should ensure that their responses are comprehensive which may require less than 15 pages. The letter(s) and cover sheet do not count towards the 15 page maximum. Applicants' responses will be used by the review committee to recommend up to 15 public and tribal child welfare sites to move onto the second and final stage of the site selection process.

1. **Agency profile.** We are interested in understanding your agency, particularly the services your agency delivers, your structure and your workforce.
 - a. Organizational structure
 - b. Size of the agency (# of staff; # of frontline staff across units; # of supervisors across units)
 - c. Services the agency is responsible for delivering
 - d. Other, including but not limited to: is your workforce unionized? Is your agency under a consent decree? The degree of privatization of your child welfare system workforce?
2. **Description of workforce needs**
 - a. Tell us ***your story*** about your workforce. For example, we would be interested in knowing such things as: What are your most pressing needs? What were the most prominent workforce issues identified in your State's CFSR or PIP? What organizational barriers and facilitators do you believe account for your workforce trends? What workforce strategies or interventions has the agency implemented in the past five years, or is planning to implement, to address workforce development issues? You may wish to discuss your needs regarding: recruitment, hiring, training and professional development, salary and benefits, performance management, caseload/workload, vacancies and turnover, workforce attitudes, physical work environment, or supervision. It is NOT necessary to discuss all of these areas, only those you believe are relevant to your particular workforce challenges.
 - b. Tell us about ***your data***. The QIC-WD recognizes that applicants may not have a robust set of data related to their workforce. We ask that you provide any workforce related data that are available, and explain any challenges you have with accessing or submitting the data which are not readily available. In addition to sharing relevant data, we ask you to explain or interpret what these data mean to you. The following types of data will help us better understand your workforce needs:
 - a. Minimum qualifications for frontline staff and supervisors
 - b. Description of the applicant agency's hiring process, in particular who has authority over your agency's hiring process
 - c. Summary results from any previous employee surveys or culture/climate surveys within the past three years
 - d. Turnover rate, including movement within the agency ("churn") if known, trends in turnover data over the past three years, and the formula used to calculate turnover
 - e. Annual vacancy rate
 - f. Workload/caseload statistics
 - g. Tenure data for as many staff categories as possible, including leadership, middle managers, supervisors, and frontline workers
3. **Description of organizational and evaluation readiness**, including a description of:
 - a. Willingness, readiness, and capacity to meet the requirements and expectations of QIC-WD for project sites as listed above
 - b. History of working on similar implementation and evaluation projects (e.g. Implementation Center projects, Title IV-E Waiver projects, previous QIC projects, Demonstration projects)

- c. Successful collaborations with external capacity building, technical assistance, and evaluation service providers
- d. Other large reform efforts currently underway or being planned
- e. Leadership's ability and willingness to be actively involved with the project
- f. Data collection and/or analysis capacity within your organization (or through a partner organization such as a university or evaluation unit), including: your Human Resources Information System, CWIS or SACWIS, and your agency's capacity to collect additional data that might be needed for the project

Phase 2 Site Visit and Discernment Process: Timeline and Format

Phase 2 Timeline

Step 2.1 – March – April 2017: Next Steps with Phase 2 Applicants

The QIC-WD will assign a liaison from its team to work with each applicant lead to plan the next steps of the process, including but not limited to:

- Requesting additional administrative data, human resources data, and other contextual reports, e.g., State CFSR and APSR reports.
- Introducing and co-creating a plan to administer the Organizational Social Context (OSC) with a cohort or sub-unit of agency staff.
- Planning for the on-site visit.

Step 2.2 – May – July 2017: QIC-WD Visits with Phase 2 Applicants to conduct an all-day on-site visit

The QIC-WD team will work with each applicant lead to develop a site visit agenda that includes:

- Visits with Site Agency Leadership, representatives from human resources, training systems and CQI systems and others whom leadership envisions as critical to the effort (including middle managers, supervisors, and workers) to discuss becoming a QIC-WD project site.
- A review of the baseline OSC data results (during the site visit) that may provide child welfare agencies with an indication of their possible baseline culture and climate which could serve as a change motivator.

In advance of the site visits, the QIC-WD will provide its review framework to the applicants so they can prepare and invite team members who they deem most critical to their workforce efforts to participate in the on-site visit.

Site Visit – Agency Workforce Needs, Capacity, and Readiness Assessment

The QIC-WD will use an expanded version of the Workforce Development Framework and pieces of the Workforce Development Toolkit (both developed by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute), a structured interview protocol, and a readiness assessment tool to guide each potential site in a transparent conversation about workforce needs, strengths, and interests. The QIC-WD WIE team will work with Phase 2 applicants in the process of co-creating workforce projects that can be successful in implementation and evaluation. As such, the QIC-WD team will assess the following categories of readiness:

1. Workforce Needs. At the conclusion of the site visit, is there:

- A clear understanding of the primary workforce needs?
- An understanding of how agency culture/climate has impacted the workforce?
- Clarity on the agency's desired objectives/outcomes of a potential workforce project?
- Sufficient evidence and workforce data to support the need for a potential project?

2. Implementation Readiness. At the conclusion of the site visit, to what degree:

Organizational Drivers

- Do key staff/stakeholders/collaborators have an identified role in planning and implementation of project activities or related workforce initiatives?
- Is the proposed project aligned with the agency's strategic plans, such as Child and Family Services Plan, Child Welfare reform initiatives, CSFR, or PIP?
- Can the agency identify and address potential challenges and barriers to successfully implement workforce development practices?
- Can the agency apply both implementation and workforce frameworks to their work and to this project?
- Does the agency have a well-functioning CQI system?
- Can the agency identify their strengths and challenges to implementing innovative, promising, or evidence-based practices?

Leadership Drivers

- Is the agency's leadership team engaged in this opportunity?
- Does this agency have active involvement of key agency leaders and staff in implementing the project?
- Does the proposed project fit with the agency's mission and vision?
- Is there commitment of other partnering organizations in supporting project implementation?
- Does leadership have experience in institutionalizing and sustaining systematic change?
- How well does leadership cultivate an organizational environment that promotes continuous quality improvement, open discussion, and effective problem solving?

Competency Drivers

- Does the agency successfully use technical assistance and capacity building services?
- Does the agency have training and coaching structures to embed new evidence-based/-informed interventions and strategies?
- Is the administration and workforce ready to engage in a change process?
- Is the administration and workforce open to embracing evidence based or evidence informed practices and enacting them with fidelity?

3. Evaluation Readiness. At the conclusion of the site visit, is there:

- Capacity and interest to partner with a third party evaluator/researcher?
- Openness at the administration and workforce levels to testing for fidelity to intervention models and linking fidelity to practice behaviors as well as workforce and client outcomes?
- Willingness to engage in the most rigorous research design possible, including a randomized control trial, if possible?

- Clarity on the agency capacity and infrastructure to support data collection, to share data, to measure implementation change and meet desired outcomes?
- Identification of some of the significant questions the agency wants an evaluation to address?
- A description of the desired change, how it will impact the problem/issue, and how it will result in systemic change for the workforce and positively impact children and families?

Project Site Selection Process

At the conclusion of each on-site visit, the QIC-WD team will compile its observations, focusing on the prospective site's readiness to implement and evaluate a potential workforce intervention. The applicants' written application will also be used as a foundational document. The QIC-WD will recommend a final pool of applicant sites to the Children's Bureau for approval. In making its final recommendations, the QIC-WD will take into account applicant sites': (1) workforce needs and potential best matched interventions to meet those needs; (2) structure (e.g., state-supervised or county-supervised, tribe), size, and geographic location; (3) administrative and logistical challenges; and (4) capacity building services needed to support the potential project. Sufficient variation will be sought in the final project sites that will allow the QIC-WD to build more advanced knowledge on workforce development.

Contacts

Please contact us at info@qic-wd.org with any questions.