

November/December 2023

Monthly Update – FNCFS agencies and First Nations exercising/contemplating jurisdiction

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) is pleased to share this monthly update on its research to support First Nations child and family services (FNCFS) reform.

Workshop Summary: Measuring to Thrive

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) is working with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Caring Society to support the long-term reform of First Nations child and family services (FNCFS). Phase 3 of this work is focused on building budgets, understanding capital needs, and testing performance measurement approaches in anticipation of a reformed program.

Developing and controlling your narrative in child and family services as well as demonstrating accountability to your First Nation(s) requires a solid foundation. This includes a strategy for gathering, organizing, and analyzing your own data.

Ongoing deliberations on long-term reform present an opportunity to test understandings of required resources (e.g., money, people, systems, processes, etc.) to effectively develop and maintain data strategies.

A data organization strategy should build evidence and match the breadth of self-determination and sovereignty.

Overview

On October 24-25, 2023, IFSD convened Phase 3 collaborators in Ottawa to review a data organization strategy for the Measuring to Thrive pilot. The workshop was attended by all 20 collaborators for Phase 3 (a mix of First Nations exercising jurisdiction and FNCFS agencies), with 43 participants contributing to the discussion.

Mary Teegee (Executive Director of Child and Family Services, Carrier Sekani Family Services) set the stage reminding us that *we are the ancestors the next generation of children will remember*. With an emphasis on the power of information to better the lives of communities, Mary focused on the importance of asking how First Nations children are doing and answering that question with data gathered and analyzed by First Nations for First Nations.

Dr. Fred Wulczyn (Chapin Hall, University of Chicago) shared lessons from 40 years of experience in gathering and analyzing child welfare data and linking it to funding. Fred facilitated sessions on data coding and analysis, emphasizing that *knowing is better than not knowing, especially when you hold all of the cards*. License (i.e., permission) from community members is needed if you choose not to know or not to capture data. As a service provider, your accountability is to the people that you serve and there needs to be a way to report back on progress.

IFSD is grateful to the community of collaborators for continuing to share their time, knowledge, and experiences to improve FNCFS.

The workshop had three goals:

- 1) Review best practices in data gathering and analysis;
- 2) Share experiences and lessons in data gathering and analysis;
- 3) Highlight considerations in data gathering and analysis for other First Nations and FNCFS agencies.

It is recognized that First Nations and FNCFS agencies may have different approaches to data gathering, analysis, and evidence building. The event-based approach reviewed in this pilot is well established.

Leveraging the Measuring to Thrive framework, collaborators identified what needs to be measured to monitor change for children, families, and communities. A data structure/file coding system is required to answer questions. Some First Nations and FNCFS agencies may have their own data systems that enable them to report against the indicators but that was not common for all collaborators.

Collaborators were invited to code up to 100 case files from two fiscal years using the event-based approach. Collaborators with their own coded data sets applied the analytic script to their own information. For those without data, a dummy data set was provided for analysis.

A summary of the proceedings (which followed the Chatham House Rule¹) is included below.

Summary of proceedings

Collaborators had the opportunity to participate in a data analysis exercise which provided the opportunity to structure data and analyze it. Collaborators highlighted the importance of measurement in child and family services (CFS) to build evidence and evaluate the efficacy of interventions. When information is being tracked and analyzed, it can be used to create a narrative and understand outcomes for children, families, and communities, as well as to support funding asks.

Participants highlighted key challenges and success across four areas: people, process, strategy, and systems.

People

- *Building Relationships* – Engaging with First Nations to “bring people along” and ensure data reflects community needs.
- *Building Capacity* – Human capacity is a challenge. Collaborators have adopted different strategies, e.g., hiring from nontraditional educational backgrounds, focusing on core positions.

¹ When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

Process

- *Tailoring an Approach* – Collaborators have different priorities and will capture and analyze data differently. The event-based approach can be modified to suit different approaches. Data capture and organization is critical for any approach.
- *Consistency* – Consistent data collection and analysis, aligned with internal standards, is key to building a narrative.

Strategy

- *Evidence* – Analyzing good data to develop evidence is required to justify program changes and decisions, and used as a tool for funding advocacy.
- *Alignment of Data and Evidence with Goals* – Data being collected should align to the mandate. Evidence derived from the data should align with the goals of a service provider. Tools like a data governance strategy, policy framework, data dictionary, are useful supports for an effective data management system. Care must also be taken when developing evidence from data.
- *Transparency* – A culture of information sharing (internally and externally) can help build support and engagement from community members and internal stakeholders on data gathering, analysis and reporting.

Systems

- *Building a Data System* – Collaborators are currently using a variety of data gathering systems. The event-based approach can work across systems by linking mandate and activities to desired outcomes.
- *Structure Over Tool* – Collaborators recognized that it was dedication and coding of the event information rather than the complexity of the tool that is paramount to a well-functioning data system.

IFSD is grateful to its Phase 3 collaborators for their on-going efforts and looks forward to continuing this important work. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch at info@ifsd.ca.