

# USING DATA TO ENHANCE THE WORK OF CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS

Data is the “lifeblood” of Citizen Review Panel (CRP) work. Without access to timely, accurate data from the state’s public child welfare system, the CRPs cannot engage in their federally mandated evaluation of this system. This tip sheet gives several recommendations for how CRPs can use data to strengthen their work.

► ***Data requests need to flow from a strategic plan.***

**Some of the complaints levied by public child welfare administrators relate to CRPs taking a “shotgun” approach to how information is requested and used (Collins-Camargo, Buckwalter, and Jones, 2016).** As noted in Tip Sheet #2, *Working Successfully with Child Welfare Agencies* (July 2015), nothing undermines trust and thwarts communication more quickly than for a CRP to go on a “fishing expedition.” Panels should ask only for data, reports, and other information that can logically be linked back to the topics they are evaluating. A brief explanation for the request should also be included, as it may prompt the child welfare agency to think of additional information that might also be useful.

► ***Remember the human element of data mining.***

Previous tip sheets and research have discussed the importance of relationship building between CRPs and public child welfare agencies (Bryan, Collins-Camargo, and Jones, 2011; Jones, 2004). Panel members should remember that for every data request, a person (or people) on the other end of that request are responsible for delivering

the data. This can take hours of valuable time and lead to considerable frustration if the information is not used.

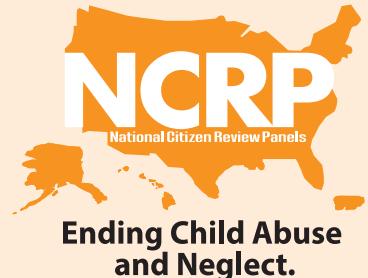
In this vein, it might be useful to talk with the local child welfare agency about a process for requesting data. This would include identifying the point of contact, what information is needed, and a reasonable timeframe for response. Establishing a clear process may help to limit frustration on both sides and foster a more positive relationship. This could be part of a memorandum of understanding or agreement with the child welfare agency.

► ***Be careful about how information is interpreted.***

Mark Twain famously said, “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.” CRPs have wide latitude when it comes to requesting information. However, they need to remember that some information can be used against the child welfare system to undermine its credibility or damage its reputation in other ways. A discussion with a representative of the child welfare agency (preferably the person who pulled the data) in advance of the CRP meeting is useful to review the information/analysis prior to the CRP meeting, provide context, and gather additional data (if needed) to address anomalies or other issues. This collaborative review before the public meeting helps to ensure that the CRP has all the information it needs and that it understands the data. It also enables the child welfare agency to prepare effectively for the meeting and support the CRP in carrying out its work effectively.

► ***Data should be seen as ONE source of information.***

Having credible statistics to bolster a CRP recommendation is a good approach. Panel members can include statistics related to their chosen topic (such as staff retention rates, reoccurrence of child maltreatment, and the engagement of parents in service planning). However,



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statistics only paint a part of the picture. One of the values of a citizen panel is that it can engage in qualitative evaluation such as focus groups or personal interviews. The richness of a personal story can go a long way with legislators, child welfare administrators, or other child advocates.

## Sources of Information

### ► Child Welfare Information Gateway

[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

*Child Welfare Information Gateway promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families by connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more.*

### ► American Humane Association Child Welfare Fact Sheets

<http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/fact-sheets/>

*The American Humane Association keeps statistics not only on animal abuse, but on state-specific indicators around child abuse and neglect.*

### ► The Center for Statewide Child Welfare Data

<https://fcda.chapinHall.org/>

*This site contains reports from many years' worth of child welfare research projects and other state-specific data.*

## References

- Bryan, V., Collins-Camargo, C., & Jones, B. (2011). Reflections on citizen-state child welfare partnerships: Listening to citizen review panel volunteers and agency liaisons. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(5), 612–621.
- Collins-Camargo, C., Buckwalter, N., & Jones, B.

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# STATE SPOTLIGHT

KENTUCKY



In 2010, the State of Kentucky instituted a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Kentucky's CRPs. The MOA spelled out a protocol for obtaining information from the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS, which is Kentucky's public child welfare program). The program coordinator at the time, Blake Jones, says, "As a CRP, we were guilty of asking for a lot of data and not using it. We were also asking for the wrong information, or waiting until the last minute. This led to a lot of strain between our panels and DCBS. The data request protocol has cut down on a lot of confusion and has led to a better partnership."

L. (2016). Perceptions of state child welfare administrators regarding federally-mandated citizen review panels. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 62, 83–89.

► Jones, B. L. (2004). Effectiveness of Citizen Review Panels. *Children and Youth Services Review* 26(12), 1117–1127.