



Child welfare agencies continually strive to achieve better outcomes by developing, implementing, and evaluating practices and programs. How can you be sure you are addressing the right problems to overcome challenges and achieve outcomes? This workbook and video series are part of a collection of resources designed to help agencies use data to explore problems, identify root causes, and choose where to direct efforts to achieve their goals for change and improvement. Use this workbook to further your understanding of concepts and prepare to move learning into action with your team.

Cultivating Skills – Problem Exploration

Getting Started and Understanding the Problem Exploration Brief

This workbook is designed to support knowledge and skills development as you listen, reflect, and discuss what you have learned throughout the process. Use this workbook to spark ideas and collect your thoughts as you move through the following training activities:

- ◆ Reading the “Change and Implementation in Practice: Problem Exploration” brief
- ◆ Watching video series on the essential functions of problem exploration
- ◆ Viewing recorded problem exploration webinars and discussing with your team:
 - ◆ Part 1 – “Looks Can Be Deceiving: Using Data to Explore Agency Performance”
 - ◆ Part 2 – “Look Before You Leap: Using Data to Avoid Common Missteps When Asking, ‘Why?’”

What’s in the “Problem Exploration” brief?

The brief offers an overview of steps 1 and 3 in the Capacity Building Center for States’ 12-step Change and Implementation Process, including:

1. Why problem exploration is important and key terms
2. How to identify a problem and root cause
3. How to develop a data plan and then gather and analyze the data needed for problem exploration
4. How to assess, explore, and validate root causes and contributing factors
5. Steps and considerations in selecting the root causes to address

How can it help you in your work?

The “Change and Implementation in Practice: Problem Exploration” brief offers user-friendly guidance on implementation concepts and their use to support child welfare system and practice improvements. The brief may be used as a foundational tool to explore problems, identify root causes, and choose where to direct efforts to achieve goals.

Linking the concepts in the series to your everyday work and experiences is an important element of understanding how to use this knowledge and these skills in practice. **Please review the following questions and consider your responses before viewing the videos.**

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| Think about a time when you needed to know more about a problem or issue. What did you do? How did you know when you had the answer or information you needed? | |
| If you could not find the answer or information you needed, what did you do about it? | |
| Think about a time when data have supported what you do in your everyday work. How did you know that you needed these specific data? | |

Video Series:

As you work through each video in the series, use the questions in each section to reflect on what you have learned.

Function 1: Identify a Problem

Before viewing the videos, consider your responses to the following questions:

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| Have you ever used data in your work? | |
| Do you know if you have used quantitative or qualitative data in your work? | |
| How have you used data, and what was the reason that you needed the data? | |
| What are your strengths or limitations in using data? | |

After viewing "Function 1: Identify a Problem," please answer the following additional questions before moving on:

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| Consider the example used in "Function 1: Identify a Problem": <i>Agency is not meeting performance standards providing services that meet the needs of children and families.</i> What would look different for the state if the problem did not exist? | |
| What considerations will be important for a full understanding of the problem? | |
| What strategies could you see yourself using to help jurisdictions identify a problem? | |

What questions, if any, do you have about how to identify a problem?

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Function 2: Create a Data Plan to Explore the Problem

After viewing “Function 2: Create a Data Plan,” please answer the following reflection questions before moving on:

Consider the research question examples used in “Function 2: Create a Data Plan to Explore the Problem”: Does service receipt differ across populations? Who is most at risk for unmet service needs? Does the problem affect all case types? How might the research questions help the agency identify the root cause?

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What data sources might the agency have readily available to help answer its research questions? How might the agency find additional sources?

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What strategies from “Function 2: Create a Data Plan to Explore the Problem” can you envision using?

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What questions, if any, do you have about creating a data plan?

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Function 3: Collect and Analyze Data

After viewing “Function 3: Collect and Analyze Data,” please answer the following reflection questions before moving on:

Consider the example in “Function 3: Collect and Analyze the Data.” How did the agency analyze its data to drill down on the problem?

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What other questions or considerations might the agency look into further to determine the root cause?

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Where could you find strategies, resources, or support to help understand the data that the agency has collected to address the problem?

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What questions, if any, do you have about collecting and analyzing data?

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Function 4: Identify Possible Contributing Factors and Root Causes

After viewing “Function 4: Identifying Possible Contributing Factors and Root Causes,” please answer the following reflection questions before moving on:

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| Consider the example in “Function 4: Identify Possible Contributing Factors and Root Causes.” How do the possible contributing factors influence the problem? | |
| How did using the 5 Whys method help get to the root cause of the problem? | |
| Consider your own experience. How can you prepare yourself to better understand the difference between contributing factors and root causes? | |
| What questions, if any, do you have about identifying possible contributing factors and root causes? | |

Function 5: Explore and Validate Possible Root Causes

After viewing “Function 5: Explore and Validate Possible Root Causes,” please answer the following reflection questions before moving on:

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| Consider the example in “Function 5: Explore and Validate Possible Root Causes.” How can additional data validate what the agency has identified as a root cause? How might the agency go about finding additional data if they are not readily available? | |
| When multiple root causes are discovered, what factors must the agency consider before it chooses the root causes to address? What are some examples of these factors? | |
| What strategies might you use to determine the feasibility of addressing the root causes identified? What resources do you have that might support your efforts? | |
| What questions, if any, do you have about exploring and validating potential root causes? | |

Function 6: Isolate the Root Causes to Address

After viewing “Function 6: Isolate the Root Causes to Address,” please answer the following reflection questions:

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| Consider the example in “Function 6: Isolate the Root Causes to Address.” What information gathered during problem exploration will help the agency to develop a strong theory of change? | |
| What considerations will be important when deciding what, if any, root causes should be addressed? | |
| What Center for States resources can help your agency through the process of problem exploration? | |
| What questions, if any, do you have about isolating the root causes to address? | |

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