



# BECOMING A Family-Focused System



Capacity Building  
CENTER FOR STATES

## Assessing Culture and Climate

Child welfare agencies are continually growing and changing to meet the needs of the children and families they serve. These changes may be driven by external forces such as legislative mandates or federal regulations, or by internal forces such as a change in a practice model or agency reorganization. Whether the impetus of the change is external or internal, an organization's culture and climate play a role in its success or failure.

A child welfare agency's culture and climate influence how agency staff at all levels of the organization do their work and how they feel about their work. An agency's culture and climate, whether positive or negative, effects not only the staff but also those with whom they work and partner. Child welfare agencies serve as a hub for the larger system serving children, youth, and families. As the system moves toward a prevention focus, child welfare agencies should assess culture and climate regularly and make course corrections as needed to ensure they are promoting an environment that supports the agency's goals and vision. Assessing the culture and climate of an organization is the first step in making improvements and increasing the chances of success.

This brief provides guidance, tips, and strategies for assessing agency culture and climate. While many of the examples used in this brief focus on family engagement, continuity of relationships, and service array, the content is broadly applicable to assessing all aspects of agency culture and climate.

## Culture and Climate: Key Concepts

Compared to a mission or vision statement that may seem concrete, culture and climate is more abstract and can be harder to identify, define, and explore. So, what is organizational culture and climate? Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group. Organizational culture shapes attitudes and behaviors in enduring ways. When properly aligned with climate, culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and support an organization's capacity to thrive (Groysberg, Lee, Pricel, & Cheng, 2018).

Organizational culture refers to the shared behavioral expectations and norms in a work environment. This is the collective view of "the way work is done" (Glisson, 2015). Indicators of culture include policies, priorities, mission and vision, and practice model.

Organizational climate represents staff perceptions of the impact of the work environment on the individual. This is the view of "how it feels" to work at the agency (Glisson, 2015). Examples of organizational climate include perceptions, beliefs, and prevailing attitudes among the staff.

### Why Assess Organizational Culture and Climate?

An assessment takes time and resources—two commodities often in short supply. But taking the time to assess culture and climate has a significant return on investment. Understanding an organization's culture and climate provides vital information of an organization's capacity and readiness to take on new initiatives and collaborate effectively with stakeholders and community partners (Wichinsky, Thomlison, & Pennell, 2012; Capacity Building Center for States, 2018a).

However, looking at culture or climate alone only shows part of the organizational picture. Culture and climate must be understood in relation to each other. For example, consider an organization interested in strengthening family engagement. If the organization values innovation and continuous improvement (culture) and agency staff feel they

have a voice at all levels of the organization (climate), the organization is well positioned to implement new programs and practices effectively. Conversely, if the organization values innovation and continuous improvement (culture), but agency staff feel their ideas and input are not valued or they are overwhelmed by existing workloads (climate), the organization will struggle to implement and sustain new programs and practices. Sustainable change is built on a foundation of well-aligned culture and climate.

Exhibit 1 describes what culture and climate look like within an organization. Whether looking at culture and climate in a corporate, educational, or child welfare setting, these subdimensions are generally recognized

as indicators of organizational culture and climate (Glisson, 2015; Goering, 2018; Milhauser, 2015). Designing an assessment around these subdimensions helps a team get a better understanding of its overall climate and culture. Consider each of these when developing assessment tools asking specific questions and gathering data for each.



### Exhibit 1. Subdimensions of Organizational Culture and Climate

#### Subdimensions of Organizational Culture and Climate

- ◆ **Leadership vision and commitment:** The view provided from the top. This includes agency leaders' commitment to a new practice or program and their communication of the intended change to stakeholders. How agency leaders prioritize a practice or program, align it with other ongoing initiatives, and dedicate resources to support it also will reflect the commitment and dedication of the agency leadership to the practice or program.
- ◆ **Organizational norms, values, and purpose:** Written and unwritten guidance and expectations for how people behave and how things are done in the organization. These include an agency's stated mission, values, and goals, and how a new program or innovation fits within the overall mission, values, and goals of the agency.
- ◆ **Workforce attitudes, morale, motivation, and buy-in:** Staff perceptions of the agency environment, programs, and practices. This includes workers' commitment to the organization, their motivation and buy-in for desired practices, and their perception of the importance and sustainability of a practice or innovation. This subdimension also reflects staff clarity on their expected roles and responsibilities and their openness to change.

*Capacity Building Center for States, Five Dimensions of Organizational Capacity*

As with culture and climate, mindset and perception affect how the assessment process feels. Exhibit 2 matches common misconceptions about assessment that prevent teams from moving forward with improved mindsets that encourage progress. Shifting mindsets as a team helps break down barriers to change. Teams can review and shift these mindsets together to kick off the assessment process.

### Exhibit 2. Misconceptions About Assessing Culture and Climate

Limiting Mindset	Improved Mindset
The task of assessing culture and climate is too big.	While it is important to understand the organization's culture and climate on a larger scale for context, the tasks can be broken down into doable steps and the assessment process is manageable.
To change culture and climate, a team must start from nothing.	The starting point depends on where the agency is and what areas of culture and climate need to be assessed.
If you fix the climate, you will fix the problem.	Culture and climate are interdependent, and both need to be considered together
Despite efforts, the culture of the agency will never change.	Organizational culture is always shifting, though the speed at which change happens can seem slow. Maintain a mindset that change is possible. Always assume best intentions.

Using the subdimensions of culture and climate as a starting point, exhibit 3 identifies high-level questions to consider when assessing culture and climate. Using questions such as the examples below helps organizations identify aspects of culture and climate that need to be explored further. These questions focus on service array and family engagement/continuity of relationships; however, the questions are broadly applicable to other aspects of organizational culture and climate.

### Exhibit 3. Sample Questions to Explore During the Assessment

Organizational Culture and Climate Subdimensions	Service Array	Family Engagement/Continuity of Relationships
Leadership vision and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Does agency leadership believe that change is needed to the existing service array?</li> <li>◆ Does agency leadership believe that change is possible and can begin now?</li> <li>◆ Does leadership communicate a clear vision for comprehensive service array?</li> <li>◆ Does leadership prioritize service array?</li> <li>◆ Does agency leadership encourage outside-the-box thinking and the development of creative service array solutions?</li> <li>◆ Does the agency seek input on service array from staff and partners?</li> <li>◆ Has leadership allocated sufficient resources to service array development?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Does agency leadership believe that change is needed in the area of family engagement?</li> <li>◆ Does agency leadership believe that change is possible and can begin now?</li> <li>◆ Does leadership communicate a clear vision for family engagement across the agency?</li> <li>◆ Does leadership model family engagement strategies at the agency level?</li> <li>◆ Do contracts with community partners include language about engaging families in decisions about services?</li> <li>◆ Does leadership expect and reward exemplary family engagement?</li> </ul>
Organizational norms, values, and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Is there a shared resolve and commitment to service array among agency leadership, staff, and stakeholders for change?</li> <li>◆ Are the agency's mission, vision, and goals aligned with the approach to working with community partners to improve service array?</li> <li>◆ How does the agency engage with community service providers to improve service array?</li> <li>◆ What level of priority does the agency place on development and growth of the service array (low, medium, high)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Is there a shared resolve and commitment to family engagement among agency leadership, staff, and stakeholders for change?</li> <li>◆ Are the agency's mission, vision, and goals aligned with and reflective of authentic family engagement at all levels of the organization?</li> </ul>
Workforce attitudes, morale, motivation, and buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do staff believe that building service array is needed? Possible?</li> <li>◆ Do staff believe that building service array is a priority?</li> <li>◆ Is the staff's work on promoting service array valued by the agency? If yes, how is it shown?</li> <li>◆ Do staff have the support they need to do their job effectively? Why or why not?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do staff have a shared understanding of authentic family engagement?</li> <li>◆ Do staff have support, through supervision and coaching, to effectively engage families?</li> <li>◆ Are staff recognized for exemplary work engaging families?</li> </ul>

# How to Assess Culture and Climate

As noted, assessing organizational culture and climate may seem daunting. However, when the process is broken down into smaller logical steps, it becomes more manageable.

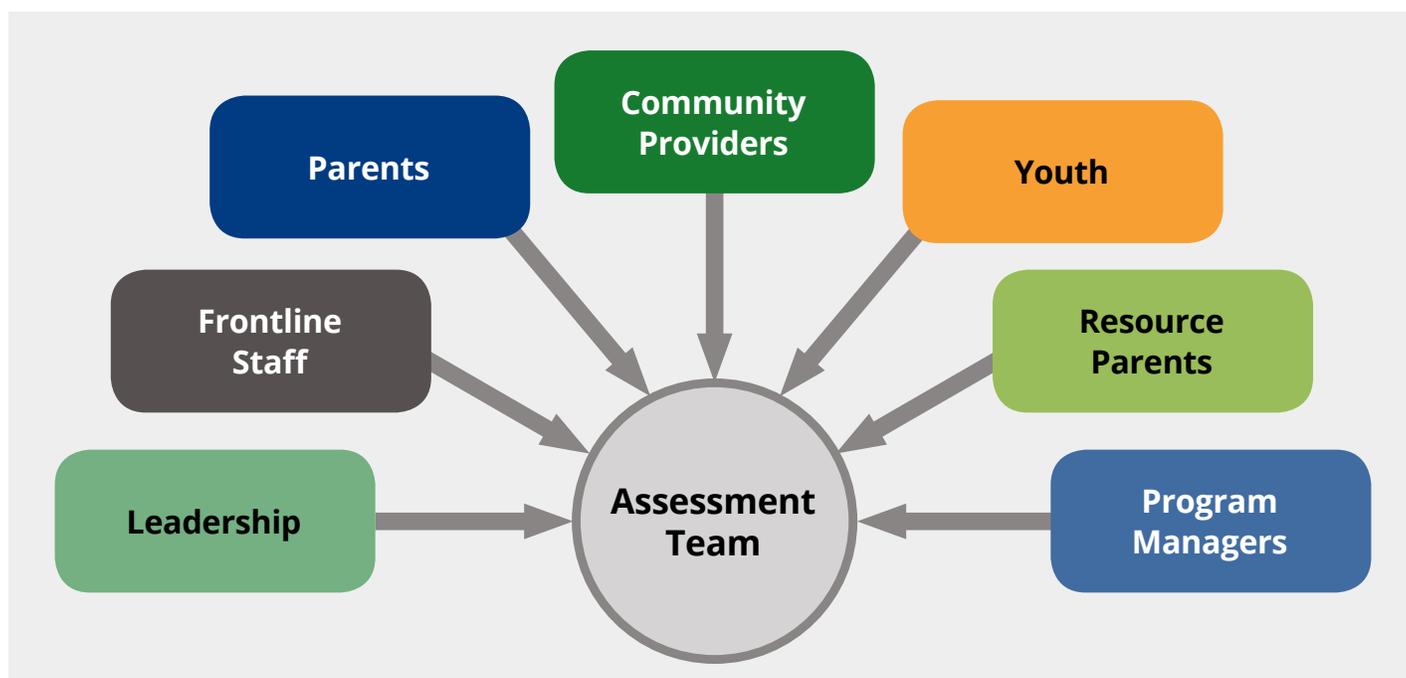
This brief provides step-by-step guidance for completing an assessment of culture and climate:

1. Form a team.
2. Develop an assessment approach.
3. Conduct the assessment.
4. Analyze the information collected.

## 1. Form a Team

A truly representative assessment is the product of a cross-collaborative team. As exhibit 4 shows, a first step in assessing culture and climate begins by forming a team that will be actively involved throughout the assessment process. It is important to strike a balance between including diverse participation and maintaining a manageable size team. An agency may want to hire a facilitator to help the group meet its goals.

### Exhibit 4. Assessment Team Membership



Each team member plays a vital role and brings a unique perspective to the process. Agency staff (leadership, managers, and frontline staff) and stakeholders (parents, kinship caregiver, youth, community providers, and resource parents) should be included from the beginning and should be representative of the broader system and reflective of the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the agency's service recipients.

Having leadership and managers at the table can streamline the process and provide a clear message of commitment to assessing culture and climate. Leadership participation lends credibility to the group and sends a message to the team that the agency is invested in the process. Family and community providers can help ensure that the team has a full picture of the culture and climate being assessed and can facilitate diverse participation in the assessment process. Many of these team members may also have a role to play in improving climate and culture after an assessment is complete.

For more information on authentic engagement of families and youth, see "[Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth in Child Welfare](#)" (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019a).

## Team Charter

A team charter is a formal document that describes the work and processes of the team as well as how the assessment work will be completed. A team charter provides a shared understanding of how the team will operate and helps the team focus on the work at hand (Capacity Building Center for States, 2018b).

A team charter serves the purpose of (Permanency Innovations Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Project, 2016):

- ◆ Focusing the team
- ◆ Documenting the team's purpose
- ◆ Defining the scope and timeframe of the initiative
- ◆ Clarifying team members' roles, authority, and responsibilities
- ◆ Defining the operating rules of the team
- ◆ Establishing working agreements
- ◆ Establishing communication methods and reporting structures
- ◆ Developing a process for conflict resolution and decision-making
- ◆ Facilitating stakeholder buy-in by including key members in the decision-making process and obtaining their agreement throughout the process

A team charter helps build team cohesion and trust and gets everyone on the same page. It is the first task a team takes on before the work begins. A well-developed team charter creates clear expectations for the group and the work (Redbooth, 2016).

## Communication Plan

A communication plan helps team members to stay informed and engaged, and:

- ◆ Ensures the flow of information between and among all team members, so everyone has the information needed to participate fully
- ◆ Clarifies communication protocols and identifies the person(s) responsible for maintaining them, so the "who, how, and when" of communication is clear to all
- ◆ Provides relevant information to all team members, so they have an opportunity to offer feedback, a critical step to the success of the team and its work
- ◆ Accommodates the diverse communication needs of team members including language differences and access to electronic communication
- ◆ Uses several communication mechanisms, including meetings (in-person and virtual), presentations, emails, and written documents (e.g., memos) to accommodate the needs of a diverse group

An effective communication plan helps build trust among team members and provides team members opportunities to share their ideas, thoughts, and opinions and to weigh in on vital decisions (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019b).

### Remember . . .

This may be the first time some members are participating on an assessment team. Provide context and background information to get them started.

Consider possible logistical barriers, such as scheduling and transportation, that impact participation. Be clear about the time commitment and meeting logistics when inviting team members.

Make accommodations whenever possible.

### Remember . . .

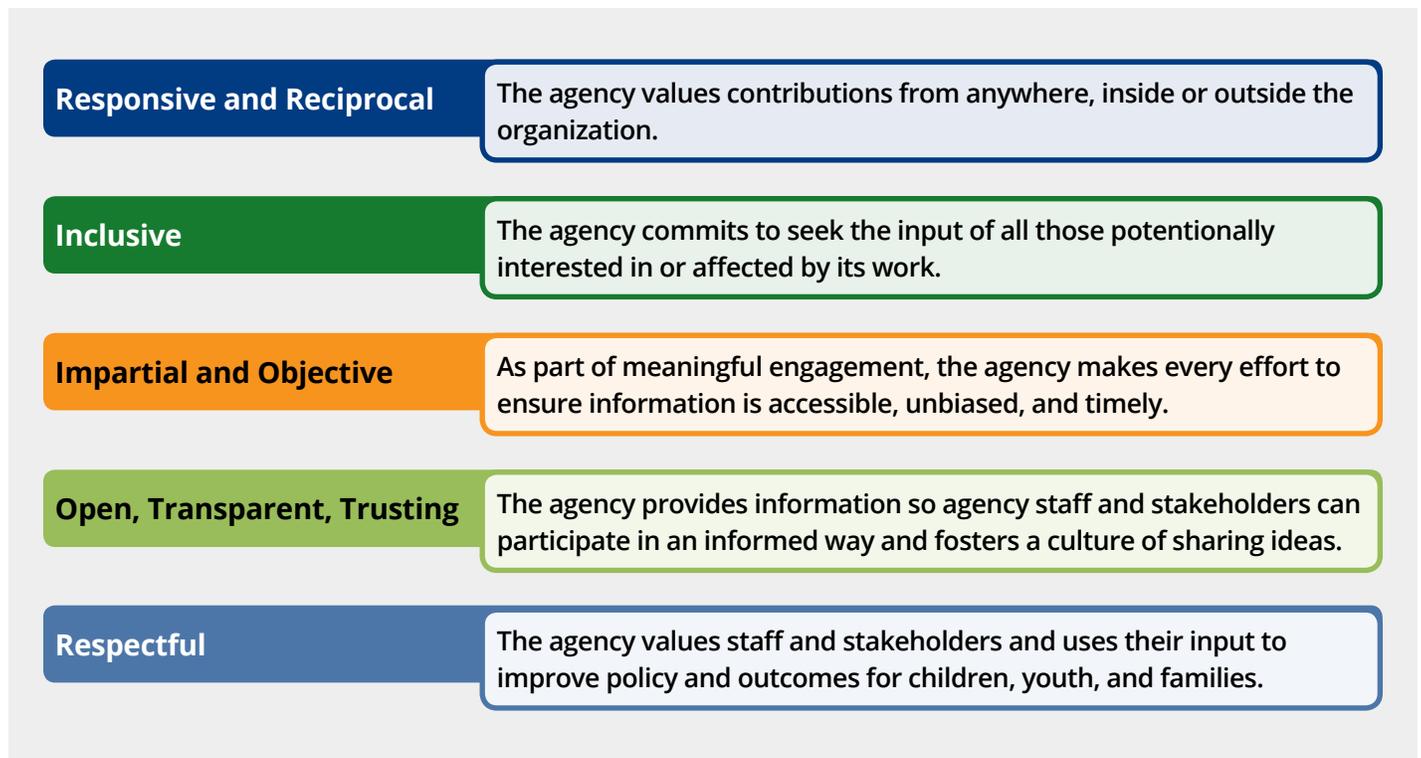
A communication plan is only effective if it is consistent. Stick to the communication schedule. If there is nothing to report (e.g., a planned meeting was rescheduled) communicate that. Team members will appreciate the consistency and the transparency.

## 2. Develop an Assessment Approach

When developing an assessment approach, consider the subdimensions of culture and climate. These subdimensions will help guide decisions about who, what, and how to approach the assessment.

After forming a team, an assessment needs a clear scope (i.e., what is being assessed), and a clear approach (i.e., how it will be assessed and measured). For instance, if you want to examine your culture and climate around family engagement, it is helpful to begin with an understanding of the qualities of agency culture that support engagement. Exhibit 5 outlines these qualities and provides descriptions of how they look in practice (Capacity Building Center for States, 2019b).

### Exhibit 5. Qualities of Agency Culture That Support Engagement



### Scope of the Assessment

Developing the scope provides team members with parameters for the assessment. A scope should convey the breadth, depth, and purpose of the assessment. For example, the overarching purpose may be to understand culture and climate as it relates to supporting family engagement, continuity of relationships, or service array. The scope of the assessment takes this overarching purpose and creates a map for the work to be completed. Elements of the scope include:

- ◆ An overall description of the work to be completed
- ◆ Goals and objectives
- ◆ The background, rationale, and purpose of the assessment
- ◆ Results of previous assessments
- ◆ Who will be involved
- ◆ Duration, milestones, and schedule of the assessment
- ◆ Products or outputs of the assessment

## Example of Scope

A child welfare agency is developing its Program Improvement Plan. Child and Family Services Review results suggest the agency needs to improve connections between the child's parents and resource families and provide continuity of relationships to help meet the child's needs in order to improve the likelihood of reunification. Though the agency agrees this is an area in need of improvement, it first wants to understand the agency's culture and climate as it relates to engaging families. The goal of the assessment is two-fold:

- 1) Inventory existing strengths and resources relative to family engagement.
- 2) Inventory gaps and barriers relative to family engagement.

The assessment will be led by a diverse team composed of agency leadership, managers, and staff; community service providers; and family and youth with lived experience within the child welfare agency. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected and analyzed in a timely manner. Families, resource families, kinship caregivers, and youth will be actively involved in all aspects of the assessment. This allows the agency to lead by example and model meaningful family engagement.

Milestones include: 1) convening a working team; 2) developing a team charter; 3) identifying who will be participating in the assessment; 4) collecting and analyzing the data; and 5) determining next steps.

## Identify Information Sources

To gain a true understanding of organizational culture and climate, assessment information sources should represent all facets—internal and external—of the agency's work. Team members can help identify potential sources of information and assist in reaching out to individuals and groups as needed. To identify these sources, think about the following questions:

- ◆ Who is directly affected by the agency's work? (Families, youth, resource parents, kin.)
- ◆ Who interacts with the agency regularly? (Courts, schools, Court Appointed Special Advocates, guardians ad litem.)
- ◆ Which community providers routinely work with the families the agency serves? (Mental health providers, developmental services providers, community action programs, housing services, drug treatment programs.)
- ◆ Which community organizations have a stake in the agency's work? (Charitable organizations, city government, local law enforcement.)
- ◆ What existing data sources can inform the assessment?

### Remember . . .

While it may be tempting to gather input from sources who have a positive relationship with the agency, seek out organizations and individuals who will give you honest, thoughtful, and meaningful feedback. Consider allowing feedback to be provided anonymously.

## Select or Develop Information Gathering Tools

Teams can use a variety of tools to gather information from sources. When considering an information gathering tool, teams should keep the scope of assessment in mind to determine if the tool, or aspects of the tool, meet their unique needs. Whatever tool the team chooses, make sure that accommodations are made for non-English speaking respondents.

A team may decide to modify or develop its own tool(s). Below are descriptions of common information gathering tools that work well when soliciting input from diverse groups. Tips, reminders, and examples are provided for each.

## Surveys

Surveys can be a useful way to gather a lot of information in a short period of time. Surveys should be brief, clear, and targeted. Surveys can be particularly useful when gathering information from community providers, state partners, federal partners, and funders. Web-based survey tools such as Survey Monkey are readily available and can streamline the process of developing a survey and gathering the data.

Tips:

- ◆ Keep the language clear and straightforward.
- ◆ If using a scale, keep the ratings consistent and easy to understand.
- ◆ Limit the use of “other.” When “other” is used, ask for an explanation.
- ◆ Limit the number of open-ended questions that require a narrative response.
- ◆ Set a timeframe for responses, and send reminders.
- ◆ Ask questions one at a time. Combining questions, even when directly related, can muddy survey results.

Sample survey questions (five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree):

- ◆ Agency leadership prioritizes family engagement at the case level.
- ◆ Supervisors routinely recognize staff for exemplary work with families.
- ◆ The agency engages community providers to improve and expand service array.
- ◆ The agency seeks input from families and youth when considering gaps in service array.
- ◆ Case workers encourage and support resource parents to partner with the child's parents.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups provide opportunities to gather information from and promote discussion among stakeholders such as resource families, parents, and youth. Barbour (2018) suggests that focus groups are “especially attractive [when] seeking to widen engagement” (p. 16). Focus groups work well when gathering input from larger groups (from 8 to 14 participants) and can be scheduled at different times of day and in different locations to accommodate attendees. Involving members of the assessment team who can facilitate the discussion and reflect the group being engaged (parents, resource parents, youth) may also create a sense of security and encourage dialogue. When conducting multiple focus groups, keep the questions consistent from group to group so the assessment team can identify themes in the feedback.

Tips:

- ◆ Ask open-ended questions that encourage discussion.
- ◆ Use open-ended statements such as, “Tell me about a time when . . . ” or, “What would it look like if . . . ”
- ◆ Encourage diverse input from the group without singling out any participants.
- ◆ Use cofacilitators and, if possible, have one facilitator be a representative of the focus group, e.g., cofacilitate with the child's parent if the focus group is for families.
- ◆ Plan ahead. Have interpreters and translators available when needed.
- ◆ Take notes!

### Remember to . . .

Provide context for why the information is being gathered.

Let participants know how the information will be used and how it will be shared with them.

Encourage participants to engage in the agency's efforts to improve family engagement and service array.

Ask questions clearly and respectfully, free of assumptions.

Be consistent to ensure the accuracy of the information you collect.

### Additional Examples of Facilitated Discussion

**Charette:** An intensely focused activity intended to build consensus among participants and develop specific goals and solutions for a project. For more information: <https://www.tools4management.com/article/the-charette-procedure-for-brainstorming-great-content/>

**World Café:** A structured, conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically. For more information: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

**Open Space Technology:** A purpose-driven approach for hosting meetings and community summit events that begins with the group co-creating the agenda. For more information: <http://www.liberatingstructures.com/25-open-space-technology/>

Sample focus group questions:

- ◆ (Resource parents) How did your licensing training prepare you for working collaboratively with the child's family?
- ◆ (Resource parents) What opportunities do you have to provide input to the agency on issues related to your role?
- ◆ (Parents) How involved are (were) you in the development of your case plan?
- ◆ (Parents) How open is the agency to parents' input?

## Interviews

Interviews are generally done one-on-one and may be preferred when seeking specific examples or discussing sensitive topics. Interview questions should be consistent from interview to interview. Interviewees should be told at the beginning how the information will be used and whether their input is confidential. This type of information gathering works well for agency staff, managers, and leadership.

Tips:

- ◆ Ask open-ended questions to encourage dialogue.
- ◆ Ask for clarification to avoid making assumptions.
- ◆ Keep the questions free of bias to get the most authentic feedback.
- ◆ Take notes to document the feedback shared.

Sample interview questions:

- ◆ How did your agency training prepare you for working in partnership with the child's families? Resource families?
- ◆ What communication avenues do you have to provide feedback to leadership?
- ◆ How are the agency's vision and values communicated to the workforce?
- ◆ In your opinion, what are the three top priorities of the agency?

## Examples of Established Assessment Tools

The agency may decide to use an established assessment tool. Below are two tools commonly used to assess culture and climate in child welfare. Both tools are examples of surveys used to gather information.

### Organizational Social Context (OSC) Measure

Organizational social context is another term for organizational culture and climate. The OSC measure is a 105-item survey that measures culture, climate, and work attitudes that has been used specifically in child welfare and mental health agencies. This survey typically is given to frontline staff. The language of the survey is worker-specific and therefore would need to be adjusted to survey a more diverse group.

Things to consider:

- ◆ This tool has been used and tested in child welfare agencies.
- ◆ The tool is designed for surveying frontline staff.
- ◆ The tool would need to be modified to work with a broader audience.
- ◆ The tool is available for purchase.
- ◆ For more information: <http://cbhr.utk.edu/osc/>

### Appreciative Inquiry (AI):

An interview strategy based on the idea that focusing on what's working is a better way to fix what's wrong.

For more information:

<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/what-is-appreciative-inquiry-ai/>

## Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA)

The COHA is a 300-item staff survey that includes interview models for families and community providers. The COHA evaluates and addresses issues related to workforce retention.

Things to consider:

- ◆ This tool has been used and tested in child welfare agencies.
- ◆ The tool includes interview models for family and provider input.
- ◆ The tool is designed to assess workforce retention.
- ◆ The tool may require an evaluator.

For more information: <https://ncwwi.org/index.php/resource-library-search-3/resource-topics/organizational-environment/item/1277-comprehensive-organizational-health-assessment-coha-overview>

For more information on related tools, see “Change and Implementation in Child Welfare: Readiness,” at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation/readiness/>

### 3. Conduct the Assessment

With the team in place, the information sources identified, and the method selected or tools developed, the agency is ready to begin its assessment. Depending on the approach, the assessment may take several weeks to several months. Take the time to complete a thorough assessment and remember, it will be worth the investment!

The assessment itself will generate buzz and questions from the community and individuals connected to the agency. Keep agency staff and stakeholders informed about the progress of the assessment through frequent communication and a transparent process.

#### Inventory of Strengths and Resources

As information is gathered from the assessment, begin to inventory the organization’s strengths and resources, as well as gaps and barriers.

When possible, collect examples of positive culture and climate and the stories that go along with them. These stories provide opportunities to celebrate the successes, identify tangible examples of the vision and values of the organization in practice, and build interest and enthusiasm to move forward. If an agency is assessing family and youth engagement, some examples of strengths and resources might include:

- ◆ Exemplary engagement by including family voice on policy committees
- ◆ A strong youth advisory board that is involved in state-level work to help youth aging out of care
- ◆ Family and youth involvement in staff training as co-trainers, panelists, and consultants
- ◆ Staff and resource parent celebrations of reunifications
- ◆ Effective strategies to engage families at the case level
- ◆ Resource parent interest in improving relationships with the child's parents

#### Remember . . .

Leadership buy-in is critical at each step of the assessment process. Buy-in may be demonstrated through participation on the assessment team and communication about the importance of the assessment and the value placed on everyone’s input.

Leadership buy-in is also demonstrated through the allocation of resources to support the assessment, such as:

- ◆ Hiring an evaluator
- ◆ Purchasing an assessment tool
- ◆ Providing incentives for participating in the assessment

## Inventory of Gaps and Barriers

The assessment will also reveal organizational gaps and barriers. Keep an inventory of these areas in need of improvement. During the assessment, community providers and families may identify gaps or barriers unknown to the agency. If an agency is assessing family and youth engagement, some examples of gaps and barriers might include:

- ◆ Providers feel they do not have input into agency decisions that impact their work
- ◆ Resource parents are discouraged by agency staff from building relationships with the child's family
- ◆ Staff report a lack of training on family engagement
- ◆ Caseload volume makes family engagement a lower priority
- ◆ Staff do not feel empowered to work creatively with community providers to improve service array

## 4. Analyze the Information Collected

Once the assessment is complete, the work of analyzing the data begins. The team may choose to work together to analyze the data or may choose to assign this task to a smaller committee that reports back to the assessment team. While the use of a smaller committee is efficient for this part of the assessment, it is important that there are clear lines of communication and reporting expectations between the committee and the team. In addition to the strengths, resources, gaps, and barriers discussed above, themes will begin to emerge in the data. Importantly, what does the data reveal about:

- ◆ Leadership style, receptivity, and buy-in to a family-focused system
- ◆ Openness of communication and transparency within the agency and outside the agency
- ◆ Degree of alignment of organizational culture and climate
- ◆ Agency morale
- ◆ Recognition and celebration of milestones and exemplary work
- ◆ Shared understanding of the vision, mission, and values of the agency as it relates to engagement, collaboration, and partnership
- ◆ Differences between family and community provider feedback and internal agency feedback

The report of the assessment will include the themes, areas of alignment and misalignment of culture and climate, an inventory of strengths and resources, and an inventory of gaps and barriers. The data collected will include both quantitative data (survey questionnaires) and qualitative data (interviews, focus groups). The assessment team may want to engage an outside evaluator to assist with the analysis.

### A Note About Qualitative Data

Qualitative data, by definition, is subjective. When analyzing qualitative data it is helpful to group the data into themes such as narrative data from focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

Qualitative data:

- ◆ Focuses on text/narrative from respondents
- ◆ Answers the questions why, how
- ◆ Seeks to explain and understand
- ◆ Captures elusive evidence of perception, opinion, feeling

Considerations when analyzing qualitative data:

- ◆ Know yourself, your biases, and your preconceptions.
- ◆ Know your question.
- ◆ Consult others and keep looking for alternative interpretations.
- ◆ Be flexible.
- ◆ Celebrate anomalies. They are the windows to insight.
- ◆ Get critical feedback.
- ◆ Be explicit. Share the details with yourself, your team members, and your audiences.

## Identify a Pathway Forward

The final work of the team is to make recommendations for changes and next steps. Exhibit 6 provides some examples of recommendations. These recommendations will be fully informed by the data collected. The team may want to work with a facilitator or evaluator for this part of the assessment. It is important that the team comes to consensus on the findings and recommendations. Remember, the purpose of collecting this data was to assess agency culture and climate. The team's recommendations should reflect that purpose outlined in the scope.

### Exhibit 6. Examples of Team Recommendations

Area in Need of Improvement	Recommendation
The agency's values are not embedded in the culture and are not communicated to the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop a communication plan to highlight organizational values (include messages from leadership, managers, and supervisors).</li> <li>◆ Celebrate examples that embrace the mission, vision, and values of the agency.</li> </ul>
The agency currently does not have well-understood expectations of priorities (e.g., no shared understanding of family engagement).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ If looking at family engagement, add family engagement activities to job descriptions.</li> <li>◆ Use engagement as a metric of job performance.</li> </ul>
There is no shared understanding of stakeholder engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Include information on stakeholder engagement in new staff training.</li> <li>◆ Leadership messaging should include the agency's shared understanding of stakeholder engagement.</li> </ul>

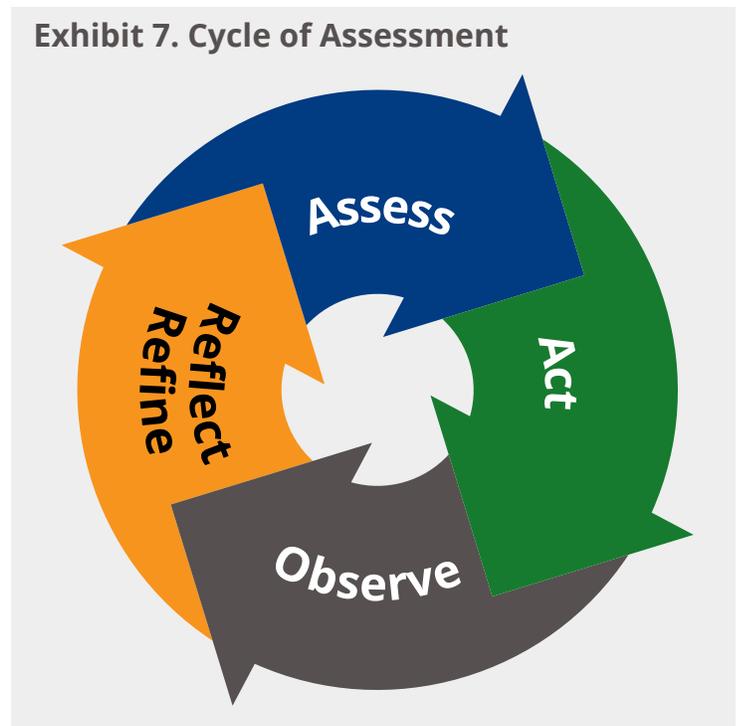
## Reflect and Debrief

The team should have an opportunity to reflect and debrief at the end of the assessment. This can happen as part of a regular meeting or as a facilitated discussion. Debriefing gives team members an opportunity to reflect on the team process and offer feedback on their experience. Some questions may include:

- ◆ What worked well? What didn't?
- ◆ What were the lessons learned?
- ◆ Were the right people at the table?
- ◆ Did team members feel their input was valued?

Asking for feedback from the team on the process demonstrates that the agency cares about improving the participation process.

When assessing culture and climate, remember that assessment is an iterative process intended to provide useful feedback, identify strengths, resources, gaps, and barriers. Once an assessment is completed, a plan of action is developed, implemented, and evaluated, and the cycle begins again. In a learning organization the process of assessing, acting, observing, and refining is continuous. Exhibit 7 shows an ongoing cycle of assessment.



## Now What? Ready to Take Action

How can the agency use the information gathered to improve practice? Armed with assessment findings and team recommendations, the agency will be poised to put this information into action. The assessment process has been inclusive and transparent, and communication has been timely and consistent. Information has been gathered from internal and external stakeholders. From the diversity of the assessment team to the thoughtful questions asked, the agency has modeled meaningful engagement. Carry this forward.

The process of assessing culture and climate in itself can generate interest and enthusiasm about what comes next. It can also create concern that the status quo has or will change. Either way, continued communication and transparency is critical to the success of whatever actions come next.

More information on becoming a family-focused system can be found at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/family-focused-system>. In addition to this brief, additional tip sheets are available for those interested in resources on culture and climate to improve service array, family engagement, and continuity of relationships.



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