



Alaska Citizen Review Panel

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The Citizen Review Panel is a statewide group of volunteers mandated by federal and state law to provide oversight to the Office of Children's Services.

2016 Kickoff Retreat Notes

September 26-27, 2015 | Anchorage

Present: Diwakar K. Vadapalli, Dana Hallett, Donna M. Aguiniga Jen Burkmire, Margaret McWilliams, Bettyann Steciw, Rebecca Vale, Jessica Holden (Information Insights)

Panel Business: Info Insights introductions, contract overview

- Budget ideas – explore options for receiving/holding funds (Children's Trust, 501©3, etc.).
- Want to make sure we are clear on mandate, how budget relates to work plan goals.

Panel Business: Debrief meeting with Commissioner

- Notes from those meetings included in retreat agenda packet
- Meeting focused on CRP not having an anchor in the department, no teeth to recommendations.
- Need to have checks and balances for OCS and CRP both.
- Commissioner Davidson's immediate response was that the panel would lose its independence. Christy suggested AJJAC as a model.
 - DJJ and OCS are pretty different, not sure that AJJAC is the best model.
 - Panel should be clear about what kind of structure they think would work best.
 - SDS has advisory councils – might be good models there.
 - Challenge – every CRP operates differently, no real best practices.
 - Issue of panel needing an anchor within the division regardless of advisory board issue.
- Report – right now the audience is vague (we send to an email list, some legislators). Commissioner is not really targeted. Need to define who that audience should be. How do we set up a system that checks everybody's work?
- Could CRP be under the Governor's office with Boards and Commissions? Would run the risk of appointments being biased, difficult with changes in administration. Some states have Governor appointments or legislative appointments (legislators appoint reps from their district).
- CRP has the opportunity to build a model on how CRP functions within OCS
- On CRP taking positions on legislations:
 - Potential goal areas could be to work on building partnerships with other child welfare agencies – is CRP's mandate to monitor just OCS or childwelfare as a system.
 - ICWA programs – we approach them as a collateral instead of a primary.
 - Partnership could mean including the "partner" agencies in regular meetings instead of just at site visits.
- Tribal/State group OCS says they have a wonderful relationship with paints a different picture.
- A lot of the Tribes are just getting money and starting programs (Tribal Courts, CHINA), potential goal could be to learn more about these models.
- Improving relationships has been a recommendation in CRP report each year.

- Part of the challenge is that we only show up in places every few years, we haven't distinguished ourselves from OCS.
- Idea – dialogue with ICWA partners at BIA Providers conference
- Ultimate goal (years down the road) is to have a more global capacity to review CPS. Strategic plan to get to that goal would be to start building relationships now (accurate, consistent, ongoing).
- What does “Agencies” mean in the mandate?
 - CACs – OCS is embedded in many of them. CACs must be part of an MDT by mandate.
 - CAC is in the CPS, but they are a neutral entity. If MDT is failing, that should be something the CRP comments on.
- Need to figure out who the audience for the report is as we figure out who to review/evaluate.
- Concern – if we open up our reviews duties to others besides OCS, it might make it easier for OCS to shift blame to them.
- Question – when State has an agreement with Tribes (4E like TCC), who is ultimately responsible? OCS since it is a contract from the State? Some tribes have direct contracts with Feds.

Discussion on Goal Area (evolved from previous discussion)

Proposed Goal 2: Explore the evolving relationships between Tribal organizations and OCS. [to better understand the relationship, tribal programs, practices, and plans; and to build relationships with tribal organizations]

Tasks:

- Get the summary of survey results from OCS.
- Reach out to Tribes
- Survey all Tribal organizations
- Internal goal – help distinguish the CRP from OCS.
- Examine relationships between ICWA and OCS workers.
- Survey heads of agencies (directors) around Alaska. Recognize that it will look different for different regions in the State.
- Talk to Tribal Court judges (can do via survey and/or on site visits).
- Sit in on Tribal/State meeting(s) – approach Tribal side to invite CRP (Bettyann has ideas of people who might invite us).
 - CASA, GAL orgs get invited.
 - Open letter (official) to seek invitation.

Panel Business: Length and frequency of regular meetings (CRP and with OCS); public vs. work sessions

- Now – some decisions are being made outside of meetings (used to all be done in meetings).
- Decision making processes should be predictable and accountable, but don't need consensus during a meeting.
- Operational decisions – happen via email between coordinator, chair/vice-chair
 - There are different kinds of decisions that require input from the Panel.
 - Media contact in bylaws – needs reworking
 - Consensus was that the Chair should come back to the panel if it's something the Panel has discussed.
 - Need to clarify what the chair can and can't do by themselves
- Need to have time when the panel is talking amongst ourselves.
 - Can go into Executive session



- Work sessions don't need to be public
- We aren't a decision making body, so there are no ramifications
- Focus quarterly meetings on agenda items that are relevant to the public.
- After site visits, some feel it is important to have panel meet before meeting with OCS.
 - Diwakar – not sure the panel needs to deliberate before meeting with OCS.
 - Consensus – if the report goes out to the panel before the OCS meeting, panel can ask each other questions and dialogue via email.
- Consensus – panel stays on for 30 minutes after call with OCS.
- 90 minutes with OCS (30 minutes with just panel after 60 with OCS).
- Public Meetings – one hour
 - Update for the public as standing agenda item.
- First Tuesday – public meeting 12:00-1
- Second Tuesday is OCS meeting – 12-1:30
- * Jess check with OCS on second Tuesdays, send out calendar invites
- Looked for ways to condense to one meeting a month, group preferred to keep both as scheduled and cancel if needed.
- Consensus – give a statement at the beginning of public meetings articulating meeting's purpose
- Discussion around education – some support for passively educating the public; concern around being too active with education. Consensus – passive education, by Panel understanding what OCS is.
- *Jess send out calendar invite after confirming with OCS, also send in an email

Goal Area Discussion: ORCA and ensuring accurate tracking upon which decisions are made

Some members feel it is a waste of the panel's time to focus on it because they know it's broken and trying to get it fixed. Our time is better spent on trying to focus on resources for families and children.

- ORCA is used differently across different regions, and it's a user-based system so it depends on how people are putting in data.
- Diwakar clarified the Panel wasn't intending to focus on the database and software, we were more interested in making sure they can provide us with useful and accurate outputs. There was some work on database specifics when Ben was on the panel to try to engage in the conversation better.
- Discussion – what is the Panel's role in identifying failures in the database system? Need to frame those specific issues, we need to talk about the impact of that failure on providing good services to families and children.
- Most managers don't know how to use ORCA, or it can't provide them with what they need.
- It becomes a punching bag on site visits – ORCA becomes the "out" for people.
- ORCA is supposed to send out notifications to all legal entities (doesn't always)

Proposed Goal 2: Identify [and review] the data and case management systems and practices by region, including but not limited to ORCA.

- Data and case management systems need to be defined by OCS first
- Question for site visits – what do you track and how? How do you keep track of how many kids are in your system? Then lead in to the broader question with them.
- Challenge in some areas – bandwidth/computer capacity
- Practices are variable – why? What are people's reasons for not using ORCA?
- Maybe a standing goal for the Panel?



- Important to understand not only what the regional people identify data as, also important to identify what State level data people consider data and case management
- At the end of the year, have a broad understanding of who gathers what data
- Discussion on whether to dive into one segment's data collection, decision not to do that.

Panel Business: Review operating guidelines (membership composition, residence of panel members)

- Adjust guidelines to create succession from vice chair to chair, stagger vice and chair elections.
- Need more members, need to be more representative
 - Need professional expertise diversity as well as geographic diversity
 - Bylaws include community members, foster parents
- Site visits – opportunity to recruit potential members, need to be more intentional.
- At this point, geography is more important than professions.
- Diwakar's goal for membership - Three representatives from each region. Discussion on whether people can be neutral in their own regions. Also concerns about community members talking honestly with local people.
- Site visit question – “Do you have Panel member recommendations?”
- Consensus - Focus now on one person from each region.
- Residency is a requirement in bylaws – let Jessica know to apply when she gets back permanently.
- Discussion around creating a structure that allows people to be Panel members in a variety of capacities. Maybe have people who are resource members, etc. Discussion on having “auxillary” members who could do small projects, etc. Concerns around accountability
- Recruitment/interview team
- *Website change – be broader in locations in which we're recruiting.

What is the ideal number of Panel members?

- What are the moving parts that need to be handled?
 - Practice models – need to review each one each year
- Some feel we need to iron out some of the details of the group before adding more.
- Potential goal – iron out policies/details?
 - Panel size
 - Criteria for being on the panel and what we need

Decision on current applicants – residency is required, and the Panel is not interested in adding more Anchorage members at this time. *Jess will follow up with them.

Goal Area Discussion: Strengthen panel's skills and organizational policies and capacities.

- Revise/manage operating guidelines review – Rebecca & Jen
- Develop board recruitment matrix

Proposed Goal 3: Strengthen panel's skills and organizational policies and capacities.

- Revise/manage operating guidelines review – Rebecca & Jen
- Develop board recruitment matrix
- Question for site visits – potential member ideas?
- Jen and Rebecca will meet within a month
- Determine ways non-panel members can contribute to the Panel's work meaningfully.



Panel Business: Recruitment Subcommittee, additional topic: Background Checks

- Does the panel want to identify members to conduct the interviews each time, or just have a standing committee so it moves faster?
- Have a standing member of the Panel be a lead person.
- Rotation of panel members by alphabetical order – use Doodle Poll.
- Do we interview Randy Ashford?
 - Consensus – Tell Randy no for now, we are Anchorage heavy at the time.
 - *Need to revise guidelines to reflect quotas for each region and that we’re “full” in Anchorage right now.
 - *Jess respond to Randy.
- Want to recruit from Northern and Western.

Background checks for new members

- Could run Courtview for new applicants.
- Reasons to have them: We may not want certain criminal backgrounds on the Panel. Gives us more credibility/extra weight.
- *Decision: Have background checks for panel members who don’t have background checks for their jobs.

Goal Area Discussion: Exploring OCS contracting

- Alaska Children’s Alliance reached out to the CRP with concerns about CACs with OCS. Complaints began as more broad/general, eventually honed in. Diwakar and Jen met with ACA board members and ED to hear their take on the situation.
- Issues boiled down to this: OCS has granted funds to CACs around the State. Money is partially for operating the CACs (big source of funding for CACs). Also, State had a contract with ACA to provide TA to the CACs throughout the state. Several years ago, the contract was given to someone else without the expertise. ACA appealed the award and lost.
- This year, ACA board members and OCS had a mediated conversation about the funding and relationships between ACA and OCS. After that meeting the four managers of the CAC members who met with OCS had their grants significantly cut. In prior years, all cuts to CACs were made across the board.
- Issue appears to be one of power – OCS wants to control the CACs. ACA has written to the Commissioner and Governor to address the control issue (OCS trying to control the MDT when no one agency should control it).
- If CRP wants to address this, it needs to be at a systematic level.
- CACs are part of the National Children’s Alliance. OCS wrote special conditions into their grant funding to disallow them from attending the Western Region training, they have to go through the Child Welfare Academy
- Broader issue is OCS contracting issue
- Does the Panel have the capacity to take this issue on?
 - Broader issues: Contracting, OCS involvement with CACs, MDTs.
 - Feels overwhelming, over our heads, not sure if the Panel has the expertise
 - Panel doesn’t necessarily need expertise; could look at it more broadly.
- Need to be very careful because something is going on where OCS is targeting ACAs and CACs, and we don’t want to make it worse.
- Goal area would be to look at OCS agency contracts generally



- Washington had a similar issue and the State OCS got in trouble.

Goal Area Discussion: Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

Proposed Goal 4 (based on retained goal from last year): Engage with current and former foster parents to learn about their experiences, motivations, and challenges with the aim of better understanding issues and strengths around retention of foster parents as a first priority, as well as recruitment.

- Retention is a huge issue – foster parents who don’t get the support they need, they quit.
- Last year we looked at the policies of OCS and people working at OCS and found out they don’t track their outcome or have clear goals. This year, we’re looking at the parents’ side of things –
 - Are there other ways (besides OCS) of getting names of Foster Parents to meet with?
 - Alaska Center for Resource Families – piggyback on their trainings to get a more random selection. *If contact ACRF before site visits to get them together to meet Panel.
 - Need to make sure sample is representative
 - Should be able to survey entire foster parent population through ACRF – add some additional questions to their existing survey (ACRF was open to that).
 - Engagements with foster parents is an opportunity to recruit as well
- Parent advocacy organization for birth parents – Alaska Youth and Family Advocates(?), CITC has a similar entity, Father’s Journeys similar. Could talk to parent attorneys. Facing Foster Care in Alaska is a good way to engage with foster kids.
- Meet with parents who were foster parents who quit to find out why, what would have made them stay (GALs a good resource). Try to pull out people aiming to help a specific kid. Department of Licensing might be able to access former foster parents – could send Licensing a letter asking them to send it to former foster parents to ask them to contact us.

Goal Area Discussion: Administrative Review Process

- Review process has been restructured
- Tribal/State group is upset with the change – they aren’t including foster parents, grandparents, people who can give a good idea of how the child is doing.

Proposed Goal 5: Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the new administrative review process.

- Talk to people about how they were functioning before, how they’re happening now
- If there’s going to be a goal change for the agency, it happens during these reviews.
- Have they been in place long enough to examine it? The longer we let it go, the more institutionalized the new process will become.

Goal Area Discussion: Employee Evaluation and Support

- Concern is feedback mechanisms going to frontline staff.
- We already know the caseload and lack of supervision is one of the key reasons for turnover.
- Maybe it is more than evaluation, but also support – don’t throw new staff out to communities and with tough caseloads
- Trust/communication issue – supervisors tend to be unavailable to talk to their staff.
- Supervisors sometimes complain that front line workers aren’t doing what they should, but they don’t want to push them and lose them

Proposed Goal 6: Examine whether employees are being adequately supported to do their jobs

- Site visit question: Ask and confirm whether evaluations are being done, what they look like, how often,



- Site visit question: Do you know who you could talk to if you feel like you've been assigned cases outside your training?
- Idea – survey supervisors
- OCS has some surveys like this
- Look at OCS data
- Housing could fall in here

Dinner

Members had dinner with partners, stakeholders, and community members interested in learning about the Panel.

Goal Selection

The Panel selected four goals to focus on this year. The detailed workplan is in a separate document.

GOAL 1

Explore the evolving relationships between Tribal organizations and OCS.

GOAL 2

Strengthen panel's skills and organizational policies and capacities.

GOAL 3

Determine whether current and former foster parents and agency partners' experiences align with OCS foster care policies.

Goal 4

Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of the new administrative review process

Panel Business: Calendar for the year

- Look at sending Panel members to Rural Providers conference, interview community members when they come to the conference
- See table for final decisions

Other Panel Business Items

Consensus on the Annual Report – post June 30, no public comment

Request for additional money:

- *Diwaker will touch base with OCS about how to request the additional funds.

Agenda Template – use May as standing example. Add Executive Session afterwards (Panel will call back in).

*Diwakar will follow up with ACA regarding Panel's decision.



2015-2016 CRP Calendar

Month	CRP Public Meeting	Meeting with OCS	Travel	Work Session
July 2015				
August 2015				
September 2015	X	X	Work plan (ANC 18-19)	X
October 2015: Dana, Diwaker, Margie, Bettyann		X	NRO visit (10/27-30)	
November 2015		X		
December 2015	X	X		
January 2016: Donna, Rebecca, Diwaker, Bettyann		X	ARO visit (1/13-16)	
February 2016		X	Juneau—legislative visit	
March 2016				
April 2016: Donna, Dana, Rebecca and Bettyann		X	SCRO (4/13-16)*	
May 2016		X	National Conference	
June 2016	X	X	Retreat (Anchorage)	x

**Dana and Donna to King Salmon/Dillingham April 13-16; Jen and Margie to Kena/Homer/Mat-Su April 13-16; Rebecca/Donna daytrip to Seward; One from each team plus Diwaker meet with SCRO office in Mat-Su.*

