Adoption and Foster Care

AFCARS

Analysis and Reporting System

Technical Bulletin #13
AFCARS File Extraction
May, 2007

This technical bulletin addresses the extraction of data for submission to the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

This document is organized into the following sections:

1. **Background**

2. **Foster Care Extraction**

3. **Adoption Extraction**

4. **Extraction of Subsequent Files**

1. Background

This Technical Bulletin supplements Program Instruction (PI) ACYF-CB-PI-95-09, Revised, issued May 23, 1995 and is being issued in order to emphasize and clarify the requirement for extracting the foster care file. The PI provides instructions to States on which records are to be included in AFCARS foster care submissions, and how to extract data from State information systems for the semi-annual reporting to AFCARS. States have been required since the transmission of data for the period April 1, 1997–September 30, 1997 to extract data from their systems using the transaction date of discharge (foster care element #57), or the date of latest removal (foster care element #21), if the child has not been discharged. This technical bulletin also provides guidance on extracting the adoption data file. The adoption file does not have transaction dates, and as such has a different set of considerations for extraction. (See section 3.) Finally, this document also includes extraction guidance on submitting subsequent foster care and adoption files. (See section 4.)

As a result of AFCARS Reviews, AFCARS Technical Assistance (TA), and analysis of States' data, it was found that not all States are extracting cases based on the guidance in the PI. Besides being required for data extraction, the extraction routine ensures that there are not unintended fluctuations from one AFCARS period to another and ensures the quality of the data. In order for the AFCARS submission to reflect the required data as of the end of the data period, the State must correctly implement the extraction routine.

One significant issue encountered by States that either do not use the extraction routine described in the PI, or use it incorrectly, is that records are "dropped" from one AFCARS data period to the next. A dropped record does not mean that the agency does not know the whereabouts of a child, but that the computer code used to extract the records failed to extract the record. A record may be "dropped" because the child was discharged during the data period, but the worker did not enter the information until after the data period ends. The record submitted would indicate that the child was continuing in an open removal episode. If the State does not use the discharge transaction date, when the next period of AFCARS data is submitted the record will no longer be present (i.e., "dropped"), since the child discharged in the prior report period. If the State used the discharge transaction date, the record would have been extracted for the next data period with the discharge properly recorded, thus ensuring that all information for all records is complete and had not been "dropped."

An AFCARS data period is one of the following:

- October 1–March 31 (A Data Period)
- April 1–September 30 (B Data Period)

Transmission periods for the data are:

- A Data Period: April 1–May 15 (A Transmission Period)
- B Data Report Period: October 1–November 14 (B Transmission Period)

The AFCARS data are required to be transmitted to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) no later than May 15 and November 14. However, ACF encourages States to submit AFCARS files as early in the transmission time frame as possible. Early transmissions ensure that the State transmits its data on time and, if there are problems with transmitting the file, that there is adequate time for ACF and the State to resolve the issues related to file transmission.

When State data for a current report period are submitted during the appropriate transmission time frame, April 1–May 15 and October 1–November 14, this is considered a "regular data file." States may re-submit an AFCARS data file for any AFCARS period. These files are referred to as "subsequent" files. Submissions that are received after the AFCARS due dates for a regular report (May 15 or November 14) are considered subsequent data files. (For additional information regarding file format and naming, see Technical Bulletin #2.)

2.   Foster Care Data Files

The AFCARS regulation at Appendix A to 45 CFR 1355, section II, requires that States submit records on children who were part of the foster care reporting population at some point during the AFCARS period. For AFCARS purposes, a States' foster care population is defined as children who:

- have entered and exited foster care during the six-month period (once, or more than one time during the six-month period);
- entered foster care during the report period and remained in foster care as of the end of the report period;
- entered foster care prior to the AFCARS period and remain in care during the period, or who may be discharged during the period.

The data submitted to AFCARS should be extracted based on removal episodes and not on placement information. In AFCARS, the two dates associated with a removal episode are the date of removal (element #21) and date of discharge (element #56). The date of removal is the actual day the child was removed from his/her home[1], and the discharge date is the date the agency no longer has responsibility for care and placement of the child[2]. Each of these dates is to have a computer-generated non-modifiable transaction date. The transaction date for the date of removal (foster care element #22) reflects the date the case worker actually enters the date of removal. The date of discharge transaction date (foster care element #57) reflects the date of data entry of the "date of discharge."

In some instances, such as when a child is placed under "protective supervision," the State agency may also have care and placement responsibility for the child, but it was determined the child did not need to be removed from his/her parents. In this case, there is no removal episode and the child is not part of the AFCARS reporting population.

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[1] For "constructive removals" refer to the Child Welfare Policy Manual, section 8.3A.11, question 11.
[2] For the discharge date of children placed in their own home (i.e., "trial home visit") see the Child Welfare Policy Manual, Section 1.3, question 11.

2a.   Foster Care Extraction for Regular Submission

The discharge transaction date is used in the AFCARS extraction code to identify the foster care reporting population. The reason for using the transaction date is to ensure that a record is submitted only one time per period and to ensure that all required records are included. States' program code must identify and extract the foster care records using the "Permanent Data Extraction Method" described in Program Instruction ACF-PI-CB-95-09. The foster care file is to include the AFCARS data for each child's episode for the period being reported.   Data that were entered after the last day of the collection period are not to be included in the report file.

When developing the extraction code for the foster care file, the selection logic is to check:

- For a transaction date of discharge for a record that occurs during the reporting period. These records must be included in the submission.

- If the transaction date of discharge is after the last day of the reporting period, but the same day or prior to the date the State extracts the data for submission, AND the date of latest removal is equal or prior to the last day of the reporting period, then the record must be included.

- If the transaction date of discharge is absent AND the date of latest removal is equal or prior to the last day of the reporting period, then the record must be included.

- If the transaction date of discharge is present, but does not fall within the dates of the reporting period AND the date of latest removal is after the last day of the reporting period, the record must not be included.

The coding logic, as provided in the PI, is as follows:

```
IF
        (Transaction Date of Discharge >= 1st Day of Reporting Period
        AND
        Transaction Date of Discharge <= Last Day of Reporting Period)
        OR
        [(Transaction Date of Discharge is Null OR Transaction Date of Discharge is > Last Day
        of Reporting Period)
        AND
        Date of Latest Removal is <= Last Day of Reporting Period]
THEN
        Include
ELSE
        Exclude
```

In the instance where the transaction date of discharge is after the last day of the reporting period, but prior to the date the State extracts the data for submission, it is possible that the record will be reported to ACF twice. For example, if the child discharged from foster care on September 20th, but the worker did not enter the information until October 5th, this record would be extracted in both the B and A report periods. We recognize this will occur, but believe it is better to error on the side of a record being reported twice than not at all; the Children's Bureau expects that few records will fall in this category. Additionally, when the Children's Bureau creates an annual file[3], duplicate records are removed.

3. Adoption Extraction for Regular Submission

In contrast to the foster care file, in which certain data must be entered in a timely manner, finalized adoptions reported in the adoption file may be submitted at any time. Therefore, the adoption file does not contain transaction dates. Consequently, States' selection routines for extracting the adoption records are generally based on the finalized adoption date (adoption element #21) occurring within an AFCARS period.

A problem can occur with the adoption selection logic when the finalized adoption date is entered into the information system after the end of the AFCARS period and after the State has transmitted the data. For example, if the adoption was finalized on September 25th and the case worker did not enter the information into the State system until October 31st, the adoption may never get reported. In order to ensure that all adoptions are reported, the Children's Bureau recommends that States implement a method that captures all adoptions for reporting. This section will provide some methods for doing this that are being used by States.

The program code would:

- Add a transaction date field for the finalized adoption date: One solution is for the State to add a transaction date field in its own information system to the field used to record the date of the finalized adoption. The transaction date would not be reported to ACF. In this case, the extraction routine would work much like that of the foster care extraction routine. If the transaction date is after the last day of the reporting period, but prior to the date the State extracts the data for submission, then the record would be included. It is possible for an adoption record to be reported twice using this method. However, as in the construction of the foster care annual file, duplicate records are only the most recent records submitted that are retained in the adoption annual file.

- Add a submitted records identifier: Another approach taken by States has been to add an indicator to the child's record in the State's information system that designates that the State has submitted the record to ACF. The records are pulled based on the indicator. If there is no indicator in the record, the extraction code extracts the record. This method ensures that the record is only submitted once.

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[3] A file that is created from either the fiscal year data periods (A/B) or from rolling year's data periods (B/A).

4.   Submission of Subsequent files (foster care and adoption)

For the foster care file, the primary issue to be aware of when submitting subsequent files is that the data must be reflective of the time period being submitted, not new information applying to a different time frame. For instance, if a State is re-submitting the data for the period April 1, 2004 – September 30, 2004 (2004B) on July 2, 2007 the data is to reflect the events of the case for the 2004B report period. If the child had a periodic review that occurred on May 5, 2004, that is the date to be reported for foster care element #5, date of recent periodic review. If the child's case plan goal was reunification at that time, but as of July 2, 2007 it is adoption, the case plan for 04B must be reunification. Chronologically, the subsequent submission's data should be reflective of the end date of the AFCARS file being re-submitted.

In general, the extraction routine for the foster care file should also work for subsequent files. The parameters for the report period are all that need to be adjusted. It is also possible to set the file up to extract a subsequent file based on the report period and not the transaction dates. While this will result in transaction dates of discharge that are after the end of the report period being submitted as missing, there are no compliance determinations made on subsequent files.

The situation for the subsequent submission of adoption files is somewhat different. Finalized adoptions can be submitted in any file after the finalization date. In many states, the finalization date for an adoption will not be entered into the information system until the final paperwork is received from the court. This may occur a year or more after the AFCARS reporting period. Therefore, it is critical that these adoptions are eventually submitted either as part of a subsequent submission of the appropriate AFCARS report period data or as part of the submission of the most current data. Either way, using the methods described above, the adoption will only be counted once in the final adoption annual file for the fiscal year in which it was finalized.