



## Technical Bulletin #11 AFCARS Acceptance Test Guidance

**REVISED: March, 2000<sup>1</sup>**

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This Technical Bulletin (TB) provides guidance that should be considered by States that are developing their Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). In following the guidance, States may confirm that their SACWIS will meet the requirements of AFCARS.

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## I. DATA COLLECTION

States that are developing their SACWIS should consider including the following in the systems acceptance test to confirm that the SACWIS will meet the requirements of AFCARS.

**A.** Ensure all data elements listed in 45 CFR 1355.40 are in the system or can be derived from collected data.

**B.** Ensure definitions of collected data elements match AFCARS definitions as presented in the Federal regulation at 45 CFR 1355.40, including the appendices to 45 CFR 1355, and policy guidance issued by the Children's Bureau. Consider including the following:

- Local Agency FIPS Code (foster care element #3) represents the location code of the agency responsible for the child, not the location of child's placement setting.
- Hispanic or Latino ethnicity elements (foster care elements #9, #53, and #55; and adoption elements #8, #26, and #28) are collected so that they can be reported separately from race elements.
- Disability information (foster care elements #10-15 and #33; and adoption elements #10-15) is collected so that the system can differentiate between those disabilities that are clinically diagnosed and those that are not.
- Date of latest removal (foster care element #21) indicates the date when the child was *removed* from the home for the most recent episode.
- Transaction date(s) (foster care elements #22 and #57) are collected according to AFCARS specifications, i.e., they reflect the date that the corresponding information was initially entered into a child's computer record and do not change with updates.
- The system can distinguish conditions that are associated with removal (foster care elements #26-40) *at the time of removal* from those conditions that were discovered *after* the child was removed.
- Information regarding whether a child is receiving title IV-A funding (foster care element #61). Title IV-A should only include income maintenance payments. If the State's title IV-A includes emergency assistance funds, do not include it in determining the response to FC #61.
- The total amount of monthly foster care payment (foster care element #66) includes *all* sources including private.

- The system will not allow a date of latest removal (foster care element #21) to be entered that is prior to the date of discharge (foster care element #56) from the last episode.
- The system will not allow date of discharge from foster care (foster care element #56) to be earlier than date of latest removal (foster care element #21).
- The primary basis for determination of special needs (adoption element #10) is the *primary* reason that the State has determined that the child has special needs.
- A monthly subsidy (adoption element #35) for a child is collected so that the system can detect if a child is receiving regular subsidies (Federal or State) which are to be included in adoption element #36, or receiving other payments that are to be excluded from adoption element #36.
- The system will not allow child's birth date (foster care element #6 and adoption element #5) to be before the parents' birth dates (foster care elements #45, #46, #50, and #51; and adoption elements #16, #17, #23, and #24).

C. Minimum information (including dates of removal and dates of discharge) on all episodes remains in the system or in the archives until the child reaches the maximum age of eligibility for child welfare services, as determined by State law and regulation.

D. State elements map to AFCARS elements properly, including:

- There are no cases where one State value maps to more than one AFCARS value.
- All AFCARS values have *at least one* State value mapped to them.
- Information not collected for a particular record (for whatever reason) is mapped as all blanks (not all zeros, all 9's, etc.).
- Age at previous adoption (foster care element #17) uses birthday and date of legalization of adoption to determine age.
- Date of first removal from home (foster care element #18) is always the date that the FIRST episode began and never changes even if the child has additional episodes.
- Proper use of the AFCARS definition of "episode" when counting number of removals from home (foster care element #19).
- Date of discharge from last episode (foster care element #20) indicates discharge from previous episode, if any.

- Calculates number of previous placement settings during episode (foster care element #24) correctly, i.e., does not count runaway, trial home visit, pre-adoptive home under certain circumstances, etc., and *does* include the current placement.
- Physical abuse (alleged/reported) (foster care element #26) includes alleged and not just substantiated physical abuse.
- Sexual abuse (alleged/reported) (foster care element #27) includes alleged and not just substantiated sexual abuse.
- Neglect (alleged/reported) (foster care element #28) includes alleged and not just substantiated neglect.
- Current placement setting (foster care element #41) maps according to AFCARS definitions, i.e., setting should be coded as group home if 7-12 children are served, institution if more, foster home if less.
- Caretaker family structure (foster care element #44) represents the structure of the family *at the time of removal*.
- Foster parent data (foster care elements #49-55) are left blank if the current placement setting is not a foster home *by AFCARS definitions*.

**E.** Ensure that all date data elements are in the century year format, i.e., ccyymmdd.

## **II. DATA EXTRACTION**

**A.** The system should extract all records to be submitted according to the “Permanent Data Extraction Method” in Program Instruction ACF-PI-CB-95-09, reissued May 23, 1995 (i.e. records are pulled based on the transaction date of discharge).

**B.** For children who are in care as of the end of the reporting period, extract information as of the last day of the reporting period.

**C.** For children who were discharged during the period, extract information on the most recent episode.

**D.** For children that discharged during a report period and were reported once for that report period, do not extract and submit the record a second time the next report period.

**E.** All elements should be extracted.

### III. SUBMISSION FILE CREATION

- A. The file must be created and received at ACF in ASCII format.
- B. Each date element is formatted according to its AFCARS specification, i.e. either ccyyymmdd, ccyyymm, or ccyy).
- C. All elements are right justified and padded with zeros to the left where necessary.
- D. Summary files are created for each file, i.e. foster care and/or adoption, that is being submitted according to instructions in *Technical Bulletin #2*.
- E. Delimiters are included only for files being submitted according to *Technical Bulletin #2*, e.g. if a foster care file is being submitted then include an "@".
- F. Files are concatenated in correct order, according to *Technical Bulletin #2*.
- G. If desired, optional footnotes may be attached in proper format, according to *Technical Bulletin #3*.
- H. The State FIPS code is inserted into each record.
- I. The proper report date (formatted as ccyyymm) is inserted into each record.
- J. It is highly recommended that data be edit checked prior to transmission using the AFCARS Data Compliance Utility software. See *Technical Bulletin #8*.

### IV. TRANSMISSION

- A. Create a file with case record numbers either encrypted (according to guidance in *Technical Bulletin #4* or using the supplied utility) or sequentially numbered. If the State is creating sequential numbers, maintain a crosswalk table for a minimum of six reporting periods
- B. A CONNECT:Direct registration request is submitted to ACF; the communications link is established and tested; and data transmission to ACF is successfully completed.

Note:

All Technical Bulletins and policy guidance referenced in this document are available via the Children's Bureau's AFCARS web page, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/afcars>.