



**Technical Bulletin #11**  
**Electronic Data Transmission**  
**REVISED: February, 2012<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

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The purpose of this Technical Bulletin is to provide information on the Children's Bureau's electronic data transfer (EDT) protocols for the transmission of AFCARS data files by title IV-E agencies. The Technical Bulletin also provides information on the data compliance and data quality report files generated after the data are processed and transmitted to a title IV-E agency site by the Federal AFCAR System.

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<sup>1</sup> Initial issuance date June, 1994 as Technical Bulletin #4.

<sup>2</sup> Revised March, 2000 as Technical Bulletin #1

<sup>3</sup> Technical Bulletin #10: Issued March, 2000.

## I. Introduction

### A. AFCARS Background

AFCARS is designed to collect uniform, reliable information on children who are under the responsibility of the title IV-B/IV-E agency for placement, care, or supervision. The collection of adoption and foster care data is mandated by section 479 of the Social Security Act (the Act). The requirements for AFCARS are codified in Federal regulation at 45 CFR 1355.40. Effective October 1, 2009, section 479B(b) of the Act authorizes direct Federal funding of Indian Tribes, Tribal organizations, and Tribal consortia that choose to operate a foster care, adoption assistance and, at Tribal option, a kinship guardianship assistance program under title IV-E of the Act. On January 6, 2012, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued an Interim Final Rule (IFR)<sup>4</sup> to implement statutory provisions related to the Tribal title IV-E program. The Federal regulations at 45 CFR 1355.40 were amended to apply the same regulatory requirements for data collection and reporting to a Tribal title IV-E agency as are applied to a State title IV-E agency.

AFCARS was established to provide data that would assist in policy development and program management. Data can be used by policymakers at the Federal, Tribal, and State levels to assess the reasons why children are in foster care and to develop strategies to prevent their unnecessary placement into foster care. Specifically, the data include information about foster care placements, adoptive parents, and length of time in foster care, and make it possible to identify trends in particular geographic areas. Also, the data enable the Children's Bureau to administer the Federal title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance programs more effectively. The Children's Bureau and ACF use these data for a number of purposes, including:

- responding to Congressional requests for current data on children in foster care or those who have been adopted;
- responding to questions and requests from other Federal departments and agencies, including the General Accounting Office (GAO), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General (OIG), national advocacy organizations, States, Tribes, and other interested organizations;
- developing short and long-term budget projections;
- developing trend analyses and short and long-term planning;
- targeting areas for greater or potential technical assistance efforts, for discretionary service grants, research and evaluation, and regulatory change; and
- determining and assessing outcomes for children and families.

Additionally, the AFCARS data are used specifically in the

- Adoption Incentives Program;

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<sup>4</sup> 77 FR 896 (January 6, 2012)

- Child Welfare Outcomes Report;
- Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs);
- Title IV- E Eligibility Reviews; and
- Allotment of funds in the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP).

## ***B. Overview of the Technical Bulletin***

In accordance with the AFCARS regulations at 45 CFR 1355.40(a) title IV-E agencies are required to electronically report certain data regarding children in foster care and children who have been adopted. Appendix C to Part 1355, Electronic Data Transmission Format, describes the data file transmission criteria that must be met by each title IV-E agency.

Additionally, this Technical Bulletin includes the supporting guidance that was previously issued as Technical Bulletin #10, State Receipt of AFCARS Summary and Detail Adoption and Foster Care Report Files. The information on electronic data transmission and the reports generated by the Federal AFCAR System was combined into one Technical Bulletin to address the full submission cycle of the AFCARS data file, from the point the Children's Bureau receives the title IV-E agency's AFCARS data file through the receipt by the title IV-E agency of the Data Compliance Summary Report and the Data Compliance Detailed Report files.

This Technical Bulletin also includes guidance for Tribal title IV-E agencies. This guidance, however, does not alter the existing protocols and requirements established with States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

## **II. Electronic Data Transmission**

### ***A. General Information***

Appendix C to Part 1355 addresses the requirement that the AFCARS data are to be in electronic form. Technical Bulletin #9 provides guidance on the format of the data file. Both Appendix C and this Technical Bulletin focus on the electronic data file transfer method used to transmit the data file to the Children's Bureau.

The Children's Bureau's standard for file transmission is via a secure direct electronic connection between the title IV-E agency (or its designated information technology agency) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Computer Information Center in Bethesda, Maryland. While an Indian Tribe may be able to transmit data electronically using the Children's Bureau existing secure direct file transfer method, the Children's Bureau learned through discussions and consultations with Indian Tribes in the Spring of 2009 that some Indian Tribes have limited technical resources to develop or upgrade a data reporting system and face technological barriers to submitting data via electronic data transfer, including limited access to software and systems that will transmit data. The Children's Bureau believes that the inability to transmit data via secure data transfer software should not be a barrier to Tribal operation of a title IV-E program. In

order to meet the electronic transmission criteria, the regulation allows the Children's Bureau and title IV-E Tribes flexibility to negotiate a secure transmission best suited to the Tribal title IV-E agency. While there is flexibility, certain conditions must be met in order to ensure that the file is transmitted in a secure method and that the file has met specific format criteria. These criteria are in Appendix C to Part 1355 and are listed below. We also will provide technical assistance to Indian Tribes in order to assist in building the capacity to submit AFCARS data files via a secure direct file transfer in accordance with Appendix C and 1355.40(b).

- (1) Records must be ASCII standard character format;
- (2) All elements must be comprised of integer (numeric) value(s);
- (3) All foster care and adoption records must be a fixed length, accordingly; and,
- (4) All State and Tribal title IV-E agencies must inform the Children's Bureau, in writing, of the data transfer method they intend to use.

The requirements for title IV-E State agencies remains the same as it has been since the publication of the AFCARS regulation in 1993. State title IV-E agencies must transmit the AFCARS data file using a secure data transfer connection between the State's information system and the Federal system described in section B-1 below.

### ***B. Data Transfer Methods and Characteristics***

This section includes two approaches to transmit the AFCARS data files to the Federal AFCAR System. The first approach is the one used by State title IV-E agencies. This method utilizes the software identified by the Children's Bureau for secure electronic data file transfers. Tribes are encouraged to transmit their data files using the same software. If a Tribe is not currently able to electronically transmit the AFCARS data files using this software, the Tribe may use the second method listed below.

#### ***B-1. Electronic Data Transfer***

Title IV-E agencies that transmit the AFCARS data file via a secure electronic transfer must use the software identified by the Children's Bureau. Title IV-E agencies must submit the AFCARS Registration Form for File Transfer to the Children's Bureau. The registration form and instructions are attached to this Technical Bulletin as Appendix A. The Federal AFCAR System also transmits report files back to the title IV-E agency via the same transfer protocol. The purpose of the registration process is to ensure the electronic transfer is established and tested and the data/report file transmissions to/from the Children's Bureau are successfully completed.

#### ***B-2. Non-Electronic Data Transfer***

Consideration will be given to Tribal title IV-E agencies to submit the AFCARS data file to the Children's Bureau via an alternative method. The data file must still meet the criteria listed in Appendix C of Part 1355 and listed above in section II-A of this Technical Bulletin.

Tribes who initially do not have the IT resources to electronically transmit the AFCARS data file via a direct transfer method must submit a letter to the Children's Bureau requesting an alternate approach, a description of the proposed approach, and a timeline to fully implement a direct electronic transfer protocol.<sup>5</sup> Tribal agencies can change their submission/transmission method with proper notification to the Children's Bureau. An outline of the information to include in the letter is attached in Appendix B of this Technical Bulletin. Note that in order to maintain a minimal level of security, the AFCARS data file CANNOT be submitted via email or the U.S. Postal Service.

### **III. Receipt of AFCARS Reports**

#### **A. General Information**

When a title IV-E agency transmits their regular AFCARS data file to the Federal AFCAR System, it is generally processed within 24 hours of being received.<sup>6</sup> During non-regular transmission time frames (i.e., May 16 - October 1 and November 15 - April 1), it may take longer before the data file is processed. The processing of the data is a manual process and does not include an automatic notice that files have been received. Additionally, during the periods between the regular transmission periods, server maintenance is performed along with other related tasks.

Title IV-E agencies are required to submit AFCARS data semi-annually to the Children's Bureau in accordance with 45 CFR 1355.40.<sup>7</sup> Reports are generated by the Federal system that provide feedback to the agency on its compliance with these standards. The reports are electronically transmitted to the title IV-E agency host site that transmitted the title IV-E agency's AFCARS data file to the Children's Bureau. The following four report files are transmitted:

1. Summary Data Compliance and Data Quality Adoption Report File
2. Summary Data Compliance and Data Quality Foster Care Report File
3. Detail Adoption Data Compliance Report File
4. Detail Foster Care Data Compliance Report File

These reports confirm that the Children's Bureau received the title IV-E agency's data file and the file was processed by the Federal AFCAR System. The title IV-E agency should review these reports as soon as they are received to check if there are data errors that need to be corrected.

Additional information and guidance on the title IV-E agency utilities, including the checks used by the Federal AFCAR System, can be found in Technical Bulletins #4,

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<sup>5</sup> Note that all title IV-E agencies will be required to use an electronic data file transfer protocol as prescribed by the Children's Bureau at the time AFCARS.2 is published and implemented.

<sup>6</sup> See Technical Bulletin #9 for more information on file names.

<sup>7</sup> AFCARS report periods are based on the Federal fiscal year. Report periods are October 1 – March 31 (data are due by May 15) and April 1 – September 30 (data are due by November 14).

#5a, and #5b. Title IV-E agencies are strongly encouraged to incorporate the usage of these utilities as part of the agency's ongoing quality control procedures. The agency should run these reports on a regular basis (monthly or quarterly) to monitor the timely entry of data and its accuracy.

For Tribal title IV-E agencies that do not transmit their data file using the electronic direct transfer protocol, the time frame between the time the Tribe sends the data file to the Children's Bureau to the time the report files are sent back to the Tribe will be longer than 24 hours. It may be several days (up to five to ten working days).

### ***B. Report File System Requirements***

For each title IV-E agency to receive the AFCARS report files, the agency should have sufficient storage space allocated on its hosting site for the four report files that are transmitted from the Federal system. Each title IV-E agency should provide the Children's Bureau with its unique file naming convention for each of the report files that are transmitted. If the title IV-E agency is not sure whether this has been done, contact the Children's Bureau at [afcars@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:afcars@acf.hhs.gov).

The record length is required when allocating space for a file; it specifies the size of the logical record. The Summary Report Files should have a minimum record length of **105 (lrecl=105)** and a minimum blocksize of **1050 (blksize=1050)**. The Detail Report Files should have a record length of **86 (lrecl=86)** and a blocksize of **860 (blksize=860)**.

The title IV-E agency may use this recommended record length or use what is most efficient at their hosting site.

Below is an example of the parameters the title IV-E agency may use when allocating the report file:

```
DSN=(State/Tribe's dataset name for the adoption summary report file)
DCB=(LRECL=105,RECFM=FB,BLKSIZE=1050)
DISP=(NEW,CATLG,DELETE))
```

**Appendix A:**  
**Instructions for Completing the AFCARS Registration Form**

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE AFCARS REGISTRATION FORM FOR FILE TRANSMISSION

Tribes not transmitting the AFCARS file via secure data transfer exchange are to complete items 1 through 4.

1. **Date:** Date the form is faxed or emailed.
2. **IV-E Agency:** Name of the State or Tribe requesting connection to NIH.
3. **AFCARS Program Office Contact:** The person that is the primary AFCARS contact in the title IV-E agency program office.
4. **System Contact:** The person responsible for maintaining/setting up the data transfer software. (The Children's Bureau will contact this person if there is a connection problem such as an incorrect IP address.)
5. **Network Contact:** The person responsible for maintaining/updating VTAM network definitions and connection. (The Children's Bureau will contact this person if there is a network problem.)
6. **Platform:** Indicate the type of platform where specified data transfer software is hosted.
7. **State or Tribe IP address:** IP address used for establishing connection.
8. **State or Tribe PORT #:** The PORT number.
9. **Compression (optional):** Identify compression if used by the State or Tribe.
10. **Encryption:** As configured by NIH – HIPPA encryption.
11. **ID and Password:** Check Yes or No if the State or Tribe requires an ID/Password. If yes, then the Children's Bureau will contact the System Contact Person listed above to obtain the information.
12. **Data Set Name (DSN) for Reports transmitted from the Children's Bureau to the IV-E agency:** Specify the filenames of the report files the Children's Bureau will transmit to the agency. The State or Tribe needs to provide the Children's Bureau with the disposition (DISP=), and volume/serial (VOL=SER=). The Children's Bureau suggests that the files be created as a Generation Data Group (GDG).

**The form must be signed by the primary AFCARS State/Tribal Program Office contact.** Once the form is completed and signed, email it to [afcars@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:afcars@acf.hhs.gov). When the form is received, the Children's Bureau will send the identifiers to set up the connection to the mainframe at NIH to the system contact.

**AFCARS Registration Form for File Transmission**

**Items 1-3 are to be completed by the primary State/Tribe Program Office contact for AFCARS. Tribes not initially using Cyberfusion should complete items 1 through 4**

- 1. DATE: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
- 2. IV-E AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. PROGRAM STAFF NAME: \_\_\_\_\_
- TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Items 4-12 are to be completed by a State/Tribe System contact.**

- 4. SYSTEM STAFF NAME: \_\_\_\_\_
- TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. NETWORK STAFF NAME: \_\_\_\_\_
- TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. CYBERFUSION PLATFORM (circle one or write in): MVS or UNIX or \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. IP ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. PORT #: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. COMPRESSION (optional): \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. ENCRYPTION: Set encryption parameter to HIPPA according to what NIH has enabled.
- 11. Does your Agency require ID and Password: YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
- 12. DSN FOR REPORT FILES TRANSMITTED FROM THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU TO STATE/TRIBE:

DSN \_\_\_\_\_

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DISP= \_\_\_\_\_ VOL=SER= \_\_\_\_\_ GDG: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Signature: State Program Contact \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE EMAIL THE SIGNED FORM to [afcars@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:afcars@acf.hhs.gov).

**FOR Children's Bureau ACF USE ONLY**

Children's Bureau Contact \_\_\_\_\_ Rec'd Date  
 \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

OIS Contact \_\_\_\_\_ Rec'd  
 Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B:**  
**Guidelines for Requesting Alternate Data Transmission Method**

## **Suggested Content for the Letter Requesting to Transmit the AFCARS Data Other than Through Direct Data Transfer**

Tribal title IV-E agencies must inform the Children's Bureau, in writing, of the method of data transfer they intend to use to submit their AFCARS data file. Tribal title IV-E agencies can change their transmission methods, provided that proper notification is provided. The letter should include, at a minimum, the following information. If the agency has questions, send an email to [afcars@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:afcars@acf.hhs.gov)

1. Describe the system the Tribal title IV-E agency intends to use to collect the AFCARS data. Examples of the method the Tribal title IV-E agency may be using with a brief description of the system:

- An Access database
- An Excel spreadsheet
- Another type of a tracking system that only collects AFCARS data
- A tracking system that collects data other than AFCARS
- A comprehensive case management system
- A simple case management system for foster care and adoption only.

2. Indicate if the Tribal title IV-E agency is currently using the above described system, or if not, the estimated date for implementation.

3. Does the Tribal title IV-E agency intend to directly transmit the AFCARS files via direct electronic data transfer beginning with the first AFCARS transmission?

4. If the answer to number 3 is no, how will the data file be sent to the Children's Bureau and what is the estimated date for implementing the electronic data transfer method?

5. If the Tribal title IV-E agency is not currently prepared to directly transmit its AFCARS data file, the letter must include a statement certifying that the Tribal title IV-E agency will extract its data in accordance with the standards outlined in 45 CFR 1355.40, including the Appendices to Part 1355, and all AFCARS issued guidance. The letter must include a statement that the Tribal title IV-E agency recognizes that non-electronic submission is not an optimum secure method of data transfer and accepts all risk associated with this method.