



Technical Bulletin #6
Data Extraction
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This Technical Bulletin addresses the extraction of data for submission to the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

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¹ Initial issuance date July 11, 1995 as Technical Bulletin #7.
² Revised format for race categories, see ACYF-CB-PI-99-01, January 27, 1999 and 65 FR 4019.

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)³ 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;

³ 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).

The AFCARS data periods are as follows:

- 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)

When title IV-E agency 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.” Title IV-E agencies may re-submit an AFCARS data file for any AFCARS period. These files are referred to as “subsequent data files.” A data file submission that is 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 #9: AFCARS File Format.)

B. Overview of the Technical Bulletin

This Technical Bulletin supplements Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-95-09 (Revised) issued May 23, 1995, and provides additional information and clarification on extracting the foster care and adoption data files. This Technical Bulletin also addresses the extraction of the adoption file. Finally, this document also includes extraction guidance on submitting subsequent foster care and adoption files.

II. General Information

A. Regulatory Standards

The AFCARS regulation sets forth the requirements of the reporting populations, the timeframes for data, and the data that are to be included on each child in foster care or who has been adopted under the auspices of the title IV-E agency. Paragraph (b) of 45 CFR 1355.40 specifies the foster care and adoption reporting requirements. The information related to the topic of this Technical Bulletin is summarized below.

- The data must be extracted from the data system as of the last day of the reporting period.

- For foster care information, the child-specific data to be transmitted must reflect the data in the information system when the data are extracted. Dates of removal from the home and discharge from foster care must be entered in within 60 days of the event (see next bullet).
- For each child in foster care, a computer generated transaction date must reflect the actual date of data entry and must accompany the date of latest removal from the home and the date of exit from foster care. Ninety percent of the subject transactions must have been entered into the system within 60 days of the event (removal from home or discharge from foster care) or the title IV-E agency will be found in substantial noncompliance.
- Adoption data are to be reported during the reporting period in which the adoption is legalized or, at the title IV-E agency's option, in the following reporting period if the adoption is legalized within the last 60 days of the reporting period.

Additionally, guidance is provided in Appendix D to Part 1355. Below is the relevant information from the appendix.

- The status of all children in foster care is to be reported as of the last day of the reporting period.
- Provide data for all children who were discharged from foster care at any time during the reporting period, or in the previous reporting period, if not previously reported.

B. Background Information

In 1995, the Children's Bureau issued a Program Instruction (PI) on Methods of Extracting Data for Submission to the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) because there had been confusion as to exactly how State title IV-E agencies should extract data from their State systems when reporting on children in foster care for a particular reporting period. Specifically, at the time there was confusion on exactly which foster care records were to be included:

- all records for those children who were in care during the reporting period or
- only those records that had data entry activity during the period.

Additionally, the original PI had to be reissued (ACYF-CB-PI-95-09, Issuance Date, May 23, 1995) because it was brought to the attention of the Children's Bureau that if State title IV-E agencies followed the instructions as written, children who are in care on the last day of the reporting period, but who are discharged from foster care during the time between the end of the report period and the day the State title IV-E agency actually does the extraction, will never be reported. The revised version of the PI was intended to address that error.

In order for the AFCARS submission to reflect the required data as of the end of the data collection period (i.e., March 31st or September 30th), title IV-E agencies must develop selection logic that extracts the correct reporting population and the correct information for each data element for the appropriate time frame. This means incorporating into the selection extraction code certain population criteria *and* the transaction date. If not, the following could occur:

- invalid future dates may be incorrectly included in the file;
- records can be dropped from one report period to the next; and,
- the correct reporting population may not be identified.

Future Dates

A future date means any date that occurs after the end of a report period. The common cause of this error is due to the program code used to extract the data does not limit the extraction of dates to those that occurred on or before the last day of the report period. If the program code does not have this restriction, dates entered between the end of the report period and prior to the extraction of the data are incorrectly included in either the regular report period data file or a subsequent data file. In the case of a subsequent submission, there can be an additional issue that the original data may have been overwritten in the database because the title IV-E agency does not maintain a history of all of the data fields.

Dropped Records

A dropped record does not mean the agency does not know the whereabouts of a child; a dropped record occurs when the child's data record is included in one report period but in the next report period submission the record was no longer included. There are a couple of reasons, at a minimum, for this to occur and generally it relates to the child being discharged from foster care or the child is no longer eligible for title IV-E funds but remains in the title IV-E agency's foster care program. In the case of a child that discharges from foster care, the probable cause is that the caseworker did not enter the information until after the data collection period ended. The record submitted would indicate that the child was continuing in an open removal episode.

In this example, if the title IV-E agency does not use the discharge transaction date when the next period of AFCARS data are submitted, the record will no longer be present (i.e., "dropped") since the child discharged in the prior report period. If the title IV-E agency 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.

Information on the correct reporting population is found in the following sections of this Technical Bulletin on foster care and adoption.

III. Extraction of Data Files for the Regular Submission Period

A. Foster Care

When developing the program code that extracts the AFCARS data there are two steps that need to be included. One step is to assess which children under the title IV-E agency's responsibility for placement and care meet the AFCARS reporting population requirements. The next section addresses some of these criteria. For more information on the reporting population requirements, see the *Guide to an AFCARS Assessment Review, Appendix B*. The Guide can be found on the Children's Bureau's web site under the AFCARS section. This document includes a checklist the title IV-E agency can use as a self-assessment to ensure the correct foster care population is included in the title IV-E agency's file.

The second step the program code must include is the use of the transaction date as required by PI-95-09. Section A.2 provides additional information on using the transaction dates.

A-1. Identifying the Foster Care Population

The AFCARS regulation at Appendix A to Part 1355, section II, requires the title IV-E agency to submit records on children who were part of the foster care reporting population at some point during the AFCARS period. This refers to 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 from foster care during the period.

When a title IV-E agency is developing the requirements for the AFCARS extraction code, consideration needs to be given to how the reporting population is selected. The AFCARS foster care reporting population must include children in the title IV-E agency's responsibility for placement and care and who were in foster care:⁴

- for more than 24 hours;
- who meet the age requirement in the agency's title IV-E plan;
- whose initial placement is within the scope of title IV-E for a foster care setting;
or,
- whose initial placement was not within the scope of a title IV-E foster care setting but the child moves into such a setting prior to the end of the report period.

⁴ Including all children served by other Divisions other than Child Welfare if the designated title IV-B/E agency is the Department and the child is in an out-of-home placement setting.

Another way of approaching these criteria is to have the program code address the following questions:

- Was the child's only placement either a hospital or locked juvenile justice facility setting?
- Was the child's only placement with a non-custodial parent?
- Was the child a runaway at the time the agency received responsibility for placement and care?
- Is the child still receiving foster care services even though he or she is older than the agency's defined age of a child per the title IV-E plan?
- Was the child in foster care for more than 24 hours?

In some instances, such as when a child is placed under "protective supervision," the title IV-E 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.

A-2. Transaction Dates

There are two dates associated with a removal episode: the date of removal (element #21) and the date of discharge (element #56). 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.

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

- If a transaction date of discharge for a record 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 title IV-E agency 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 title IV-E agency extracts the data for submission, it is possible that the record will be reported to the Children's Bureau 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 err 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, duplicate records are removed and the most recent transaction is retained.⁵

B. Adoption

In contrast to the foster care, the selection logic for the adoption program code is simpler. The title IV-E agency must ensure that it is reporting *all* adoptions in which the title IV-E agency had involvement. Section B-1 provides information on which adoptions a title IV-E agency is to include in AFCARS. Section B-2 addresses the extraction of the adoption file to ensure that all adoption records are included in the AFCARS adoption file.

⁵ An annual file is a combined file that is created from either the fiscal year data periods (A/B) or from rolling year's data periods (B/A).

B-1. Identifying the Adoption Population

The AFCARS regulations define the adoption reporting population at 45 CFR 1355.40(a)(3) and in Appendix B to Part 1355. The title IV-E agency is to report on all adopted children who were placed by the title IV-E agency, and on all adopted children for whom the agency is providing adoption assistance (either ongoing or for nonrecurring expenses), care, or services directly or by contract or agreement with other private or public agencies. Listed below are the questions the program code must address.

- Are all children who were adopted from the title IV-E agency's foster care system included?
- Are all other children who were adopted through a private agency (either within the State/Tribal Service Area or outside of the agency's jurisdiction) and for whom the reporting title IV-E agency was involved in the adoption due to an adoption agreement with the adoptive family for subsidy or services included?

Below is another way to assess whether the program code is correctly identifying all the adoptions that are required to be included in the AFCARS adoption file.

- Does the program code identify all children who had been in foster care under the responsibility and care of the child welfare agency and who were subsequently adopted, whether special needs or not, and whether subsidies were provided or not?
- Does the program code identify all special needs children who were adopted in the State or Tribal service area for whom non-recurring expenses were reimbursed, whether or not they were in the public foster care system prior to their adoption?
- Does the program code identify all children adopted for whom an adoption assistance payment or service is being provided based on arrangements made by or through the title IV-E agency?
- Does the program code identify all children who were adopted and for whom the title IV-E agency only paid the nonrecurring expenses?
- Does the program code identify all children adopted through a private agency, whether the agency was within or outside the State or Tribal Service area and for whom the title IV-E agency has an adoption agreement with the adoptive family?

For more information on the reporting population requirements, see the *Guide to an AFCARS Assessment Review, Appendix B*, on the Children's Bureau website.

B-2. Selection Logic for the Adoption File

The adoption file does not contain transaction dates. Consequently, the most common approach to extracting the adoption file is to use the finalized adoption date (adoption element #21) and check if it occurred within the AFCARS regular 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 title IV-E agency has transmitted the data. For example, if the adoption was finalized on September 25th and the caseworker did not enter the information into the title IV-E agency's 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 title IV-E agencies implement a method that captures all adoptions for reporting. Below are two examples of adoption reporting methods that title IV-E agencies may want to consider using.

- Add a transaction date field for the finalized adoption date: One solution is for the title IV-E agency 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 in the AFCARS adoption file. 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 title IV-E agency extracts the data for submission, then the record could be included in the current report period being submitted. Since the transaction date falls in the next report period, it is possible to submit the record in the next report period. 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 accounted for and the most recent record submitted are retained in the adoption annual file.
- Add a submitted records identifier: Another approach is to add an indicator to the child's record in the title IV-E agency's information system that designates that the title IV-E agency has submitted the record in the AFCARS adoption file. 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 but that it is submitted.

IV. Submission of Subsequent Files (Foster Care and Adoption)

A. Foster Care

When submitting subsequent foster care files, the primary requirement is that the data must be reflective of the time period being submitted. New information applying to a prior time frame is not to be included. For example, if a title IV-E agency is re-submitting the data for the collection period October 1, 2010 – April 1, 2011 (2011A) on February 2, 2012, the data is to reflect the events of the case for the 2011A report

period. Listed below are a couple of examples, including elements with and without dates.

- **Periodic Review Dates:** Periodic reviews were conducted on December 11, 2010 (11A), June 13, 2011 (11B), and December 12, 2011 (12A). In the subsequent 2011A file, the date to be reported for foster care element #5, date of recent periodic review, is December 11, 2010.
- **Case Plan Goal:** During the periodic review held on December 11, 2010 the child's case plan goal was established as "reunification." During the permanency hearing on December 12, 2011, the case plan goal was changed to "adoption." In the subsequent 2011A file, the goal must be reported as "reunification."

In general, the guidelines discussed in section III-A of this Technical Bulletin for extracting the regular foster care file should also work for subsequent files. It is crucial that each element contain a routine in the extraction code to check for information that occurred prior to the end (or equal to) of the report period being extracted.

Another option for extracting a subsequent file is to substitute the dates of the AFCARS report period in place of the routine using the transaction date. 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.

An important aspect to remember is that if a discharge from foster care date (element #56) is entered late (i.e. more than 60 days after the child actually discharged from foster care) the extraction of the record must meet the criteria listed below even if the title IV-E agency is also submitting a subsequent file. An example of when this may occur is also listed below.

If a transaction date of discharge for a record occurs during the reporting period, these records must be included in the submission.

Example:

A child is discharged from foster care on August 1, 2011 but the caseworker does not enter the event until December 1, 2011. The transaction date (element #57) occurs in the 2012A report period. The title IV-E agency identified errors in the 2011B file that have been corrected and the agency is submitting the 2011B file as a subsequent submission on February 1, 2012.

- The record will be included in the 2011B file reflecting the child was discharged on August 1, 2011.
- The file must be reported in the 2012A regular file submission. The record will be marked as being out-of-compliance with the timeliness standard associated with element #57.

Therefore, in the above example, the record is reported to AFCARS twice.

B. Adoption Files

Submissions of subsequent adoption files vary somewhat from foster care file submissions. The regulation stipulates that an adoption that is finalized in the last 60 days of a report period can be included in the following report period (45 CFR 1355.40(b)(3)). These adoption records should be reported in the report period that the information is entered into the system. If a title IV-E agency also submits a subsequent file for the time frame that the adoption legalization date actually occurred, then it would be reported twice. This is similar to the example noted above for foster care. Regardless of which method the agency uses, the adoption will only be counted once in the final adoption annual file for the fiscal year in which it was finalized.