



Technical Bulletin #9
Data File Format
REVISED: February, 2012^{1,2,3,4}

This Technical Bulletin supplements information in 45 CFR 1355.40, and the Appendices to Part 1355. By following the guidance of this Technical Bulletin, title IV-E agencies will avoid file format errors that may cause processing failure by the Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

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¹ Initial issuance date July 6, 1996.

² Revised May 6, 1996 for century date format, see ACYF-IM-CB-96-08, issued April 7, 1996. See also 65 FR 4019.

³ Revised for race categories, see ACYF-CB-PI-99-01, issued January 27, 1999. See also 65 FR 4019.

⁴ Revised for file name May 2001.

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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)⁵ 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;

⁵ 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 exiting foster care to adoption. Appendix C to Part 1355, Electronic Data Transmission Format, describes the transmission criteria that must be met by each title IV-E agency. Guidance for electronic data transmission can be found in Technical Bulletin #11, Electronic Data Transmission. Appendix D to Part 1355 provides guidance on the foster care and adoption record layout. This Technical Bulletin provides additional guidance on the proper format of the AFCARS files, information on the error messages generated by the Federal system, and the proper naming convention to be used for AFCARS files.

II. General File Format Information

A. Requirements for File Format

This section outlines the requirements from the Appendices to Part 1355 and provides additional information for formatting the AFCARS file.

The AFCARS data must be:

- Numeric for all elements except Element #4 (Record Number), which is an encrypted number and may contain characters;
- Dates are to be in a year, month, day order (CCYYMMDD) or, year and month order (CCYYMM);
- The data file that is transmitted must be in ASCII. This format is specified in Appendix C of Part 1355. EBCDIC files will not be processed.
- A Summary File must always accompany a Detail File. This applies to both Adoption and Foster Care files (Appendix E of Part1355).
- Unique delimiters are associated with each particular type of file, and appropriate delimiters must be included with each corresponding data file. If a particular file is not being submitted, DO NOT INCLUDE THE DELIMITER THAT CORRESPONDS TO THAT FILE. For example, if the IV-E agency is not including Adoption Summary and Detail Files, then the Adoption Delimiter (\$) must not be included in the submission.

- Record number field: The record number (Foster Care Element #4 and Adoption Element #3) should be right justified and padded with zeros, if necessary, to fill out the 12 character field.
- Counts and dollars: The counts and dollar amounts should be right justified and padded with zeros to fill out the field. A field filled with zeros indicates a count of zero. A field filled with blanks indicates missing data.

Note regarding adoption element #36 (monthly amount of subsidy): If adoption data element #35 is "no," then 00000 means no subsidy amount. If adoption data element #35 is "yes," then 00000 means the subsidy amount only includes benefits under titles XIX or XX of the Social Security Act.

- Data format standards: For detailed information on format standards of individual elements, see Technical Bulletin #1.

B. File Format Layout

Table 1 includes the files that are to be concatenated, in the proper order, prior to transmission. The shaded row indicates optional information that may be included in the AFCARS data file.

Table 1: File Format Layout

Order	File Name	Character s per Record	Delimiter	Comments
1	Foster Care Delimiter	1	@	
2	Foster Care Summary File	174		One Record per File
3	Foster Care Detailed File	197		One Record per Child
4	Adoption Delimiter	1	\$	
5	Adoption Summary File	174		One Record per File
6	Adoption Detailed File	111		One Record per Adoption
7	Optional Explanatory Footnotes	253		Optional File. Multiple records

III. Foster Care Summary File

A. *Generating the Foster Care Summary File*

This file contains the total number of records in the detail file and the number of children being reported by age group. Each foster care summary file that is submitted will be compared to a foster care summary file that is generated by the Federal AFCAR System. This will ensure that the data has not been corrupted during transmission or that the file was not properly formatted. If the submitted total number of records does not match the generated total number of records, the foster care detail data file will not be processed. The title IV-E agency will be found to be out of compliance and the Data Compliance Summary Report will display an error message similar to the following under the heading "Format Errors":

Foster Care # of Records Not Equal to Summary #

of Records in summary file: 1321

Actual # of records in file: 1322

Also, if the number of children being reported by age group does not match the generated number of children by age group in the detail file, the Data Compliance Summary Report will display an error message similar to the following under the heading "Format Errors":

Error Description	Errors
-----	-----
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 1	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 4	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 5	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 6	X

Below are instructions for creating the Foster Care Summary File:

1. Foster Care Summary File Element #1, Number of Records:

a) Represents the count of the number of records in the detail file. It should NOT be calculated by adding together foster care summary file elements #3-#22 (the calculated ages of children) as these calculations will exclude children with invalid birth dates. Therefore, the total number of records will not necessarily be the same as the sum of the number of children in each age group.

b) Right justify the count and add leading zeros.

2. Foster Care Summary File Element #2, Report Period Ending Date:

a) Insert a valid report period end date for submission. This date should be in the CCYYMM format and it should end with either 09 for September or 03 for March.

3. Foster Care Summary File Elements #3-#22, Age Groups:

a) Validate the child birth dates in the detail file. If a child's birth date is either missing or out-of-range (i.e., an invalid date), that record should NOT be included when calculating the age groups. If the file contains invalid birth dates, the total number of records submitted will not be equal to the sum of children in each age group.

b) Definitions of the variables used when calculating the count of children in each age group:

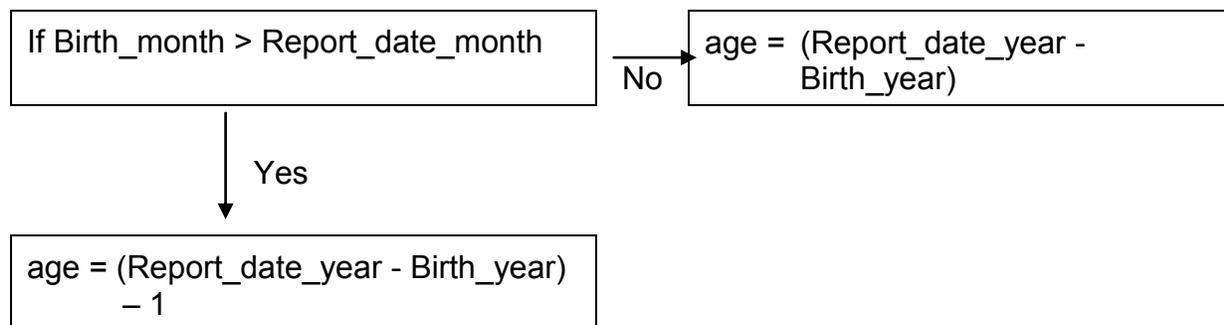
Report_date_month. This variable will have a value of either September (09) or March (03), depending upon which of the two semi-annual reporting periods is relevant.

Report_date_year. This variable should be in the CCYY format representing the four-digit century year (e.g. 1996).

Birth_month. This variable is the month of the child's birth.

Birth_year. This variable is the year of the child's birth and should be in the CCYY format representing the four-digit century year (e.g. 1996).

c) Calculate the ages of children in care for each age group using the following decision rule:



d) Note that an age of zero represents children younger than 12 months (one year) old

e) Right justify the count for each age group and add leading zeros.

B. Foster Care Summary File Format

Table 2 lists the elements of the foster care summary file. The shaded rows indicate that the category is not applicable for the given element.

Table 2: Foster Care Summary File

Element	Foster Care Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
01	Number of records		8
02	Report period ending date	CCYYMM	6
03	Children in care who are under age 1		8
04	Children in care who are age 1		8
05	Children in care who are age 2		8
06	Children in care who are age 3		8
07	Children in care who are age 4		8
08	Children in care who are age 5		8
09	Children in care who are age 6		8
10	Children in care who are age 7		8
11	Children in care who are age 8		8
12	Children in care who are age 9		8
13	Children in care who are age 10		8
14	Children in care who are age 11		8
15	Children in care who are age 12		8
16	Children in care who are age 13		8
17	Children in care who are age 14		8
18	Children in care who are age 15		8
19	Children in care who are age 16		8
20	Children in care who are age 17		8
21	Children in care who are age 18		8
22	Children in care who are over age 18		8
Total Characters			174

IV. Foster Care Detail File Format

If the AFCARS file is not submitted with the correct record length, an error message will be displayed in the data compliance summary report and the file will not be processed by the Federal system. The following error message is an example of how the message may appear:

Incorrect foster care detailed record length. The file contained 182 characters, the correct record length is 197 characters for foster care.

Table 3 lists the foster care detail file format. The shaded rows indicate that the category is not applicable for the given element.

Table 3: Foster Care Detail File Format

Element	Data Element Description	Date Format	Number of Characters
01	Agency code		2
02	Report period end date	CCYYMM	6
03	Local Agency code		5
04	Record number		12
05	Date of most recent periodic review	CCYYMMDD	8
06	Child's date of birth	CCYYMMDD	8
07	Sex		1
08	Race		
08a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
08b	Asian		1
08c	Black or African American		1
08d	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		1
08e	White		1
08f	Unable to Determine		1
09	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity		1
10	Disabilities		1
11	Mental retardation		1
12	Visually/hearing impaired		1
13	Physically disabled		1
14	Emotionally disturbed		1
15	Other medical condition requiring special care		1
16	Child ever adopted		1
17	Age at previous adoption		1
18	Date of first removal from home	CCYYMMDD	8
19	Total number of removals		2
20	Date child was discharged from last foster care episode	CCYYMMDD	8
21	Date of latest removal from home	CCYYMMDD	8
22	Removal transaction date	CCYYMMDD	8
23	Date of placement in current foster care setting	CCYYMMDD	8
24	Number of placements		2
25	Removal from home		1
26	Physical abuse		1
27	Sexual abuse		1
28	Neglect		1
29	Alcohol abuse (parent)		1
30	Drug abuse (parent)		1
31	Alcohol abuse (child)		1
32	Drug abuse (child)		1
33	Child disability		1

Element	Data Element Description	Date Format	Number of Characters
34	Child's behavior problem		1
35	Death of parent(s)		1
36	Incarceration of parent(s)		1
37	Caretaker's inability to cope		1
38	Abandonment		1
39	Relinquishment		1
40	Inadequate housing		1
41	Current placement setting		1
42	Placement out-of-State/Tribal Service Area		1
43	Case plan goal		1
44	Caretaker family structure		1
45	Year of birth (1st principal caretaker)	CCYY	4
46	Year of birth (2nd principal caretaker)	CCYY	4
47	Date of mother's termination of parental rights	CCYYMMDD	8
48	Date of legal or putative father's termination of parental rights	CCYYMMDD	8
49	Foster family structure		1
50	Year of birth (1st foster caretaker)	CCYY	4
51	Year of birth (2nd foster caretaker)	CCYY	4
52	Race (1st foster caretaker)		
52a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
52b	Asian		1
52c	Black or African American		1
52d	Native American or Other Pacific Islander		1
52e	White		1
52f	Unable to Determine		1
53	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (1st foster caretaker)		1
54	Race (2nd foster caretaker)		
54a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
54b	Asian		1
54c	Black or African American		1
54d	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		1
54e	White		1
54f	Unable to Determine		1
55	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (2nd foster caretaker)		1
56	Date of discharge from foster care	CCYYMMDD	8
57	Foster care discharge transaction date	CCYYMMDD	8
58	Reason for discharge		1
59	Title IV-E (foster care)		1
60	Title IV-E (adoption assistance)		1

Element	Data Element Description	Date Format	Number of Characters
61	Title IV-A		1
62	Title IV-D		1
63	Title XIX		1
64	SSI or other benefits		1
65	None of the above sources of federal support		1
66	Amount of monthly subsidy		5
Total Characters			197

V. Adoption Summary File

A. Generating the Adoption Summary File

This file contains the total number of records in the detail file and the number of children being reported by age group. Each adoption summary file that is submitted will be compared to an adoption summary file that is generated by the Federal AFCAR System. This will ensure that there has been no corruption of the data during transmission. If the submitted total number of records does not match the generated total number of records, the adoption detail file will not be validated and the title IV-E agency will be found out of compliance for the adoption file. The Data Compliance Summary Report will display an error message similar to the following under the heading "Format Errors":

Adoption # of Records Not Equal to Summary #

of Records in summary file: 321

Actual # of records in file: 322

Also, if the number of children being reported by age group does not match the generated number of children by age group in the detail file, the Data Compliance Summary Report will display an error message similar to the following under the heading "Format Errors":

Error Description	Errors
-----	-----
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 1	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 4	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 5	X
Inconsistent Summary File: Age 6	X

Therefore, it is important that the title IV-E agency create summary files in exactly the same way that the Federal AFCAR System generates summary files.

Below are instructions for creating the Adoption Summary File:

1. Adoption Summary File Element #1, Number of Records:

a) This number should represent the total number of records in the detail file. It should NOT be calculated by adding together adoption summary file elements #3-#22 (the calculated ages of children), as these calculations will exclude children with invalid birth dates. Therefore, the total number of records will not necessarily be the same as the sum of the numbers of children in each age group.

b) Right justify the count and add leading zeros.

2. Adoption Summary File Element #2, Report Period Ending Date:

a) Insert a valid report period end date for submission. This date should be in the CCYYMM format and it should end with either 09 for September or 03 for March.

3. Adoption Summary File Elements #3-#22, Age Groups:

a) Validate the child birth dates in the detail data file. If a child's birth date is either missing or out-of-range (i.e., an invalid date), that record should NOT be included when calculating the age groups. If the file contains invalid birth dates, the number of records submitted will not be equal to the sum of children in each age group.

b) Definitions of the variables used when calculating the count of children in each age group:

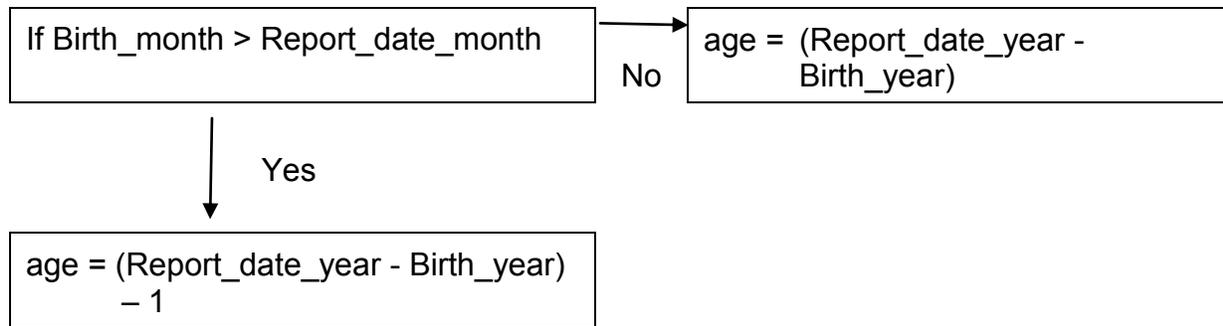
Report_date_month. This variable will have a value of either 09 (September) or 03 (March), depending upon which of the two semi-annual reporting periods is relevant.

Report_date_year. This variable should be in the CCYY format representing the four-digit century year (e.g. 1996).

Birth_month. This variable is the month of the child's birth.

Birth_year. This variable is the year of the child's birth and should be in the CCYY format representing the four-digit century year (e.g., 1996).

c) Calculate the ages of adopted children for each age group using the following decision rule:



d) Note that an age of zero represents children less than 12 months (one year) old.

e) Right justify the count for each age group and add leading zeros.

B. Adoption Summary File Format

Table 4 lists the elements of the adoption summary file with the century date format and number of characters. The shaded rows indicate that the category is not applicable for the given element.

Table 4: Adoption Summary File Format

Element	Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
01	Number of records		8
02	Report period ending date	CCYYMM	6
03	Children adopted who are under age 1		8
04	Children adopted who are age 1		8
05	Children adopted who are age 2		8
06	Children adopted who are age 3		8
07	Children adopted who are age 4		8
08	Children adopted who are age 5		8
09	Children adopted who are age 6		8
10	Children adopted who are age 7		8
11	Children adopted who are age 8		8
12	Children adopted who are age 9		8
13	Children adopted who are age 10		8
14	Children adopted who are age 11		8
15	Children adopted who are age 12		8
16	Children adopted who are age 13		8
17	Children adopted who are age 14		8
18	Children adopted who are age 15		8
19	Children adopted who are age 16		8

Element	Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
20	Children adopted who are age 17		8
21	Children adopted who are age 18		8
22	Children adopted who are over age 18		8
Total Characters			174

VI. Adoption Detail File Format

If the file is not submitted with the correct record length, an error message will be displayed in the data compliance summary report, and the file will not be processed by the Federal system. The following is an example of how the error message will appear:

Incorrect adoption detailed record length. The file contained 96 characters, the correct record length is 111 characters for adoption.”

Table 5 lists the adoption detail file format. The shaded rows indicate that the category is not applicable for the given element.

Table 5: Adoption Detail Revised File Format

Element	Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
01	FIPS code		2
02	Report period end date	CCYYMM	6
03	Record number		12
04	IV-E agency involvement		1
05	Date of birth of child	CCYYMM	6
06	Sex		1
07	Race		
07a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
07b	Asian		1
07c	Black or African American		1
07d	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		1
07e	White		1
07f	Unable to Determine		1
08	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity		1
09	Special needs		1
10	Primary basis for special needs		1
11	Mental retardation		1
12	Visually or hearing impaired		1
13	Physically disabled		1
14	Emotionally disturbed		1
15	Other medically diagnosed condition requiring special care		1

Element	Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
16	Mother's year of birth	CCYY	4
17	Father's (putative or legal) year of birth	CCYY	4
18	Mother married		1
19	Date of mother's termination of parental rights	CCYYMMDD	8
20	Date of father's termination of parental rights	CCYYMMDD	8
21	Date adoption legalized	CCYYMMDD	8
22	Adoptive parents family structure		1
23	Mother's year of birth	CCYY	4
24	Father's year of birth	CCYY	4
25	Adoptive mother's race		
25a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
25b	Asian		1
25c	Black or African American		1
25d	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		1
25e	White		1
25f	Unable to Determine		1
26	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity mother		1
27	Adoptive father's race		
27a	American Indian or Alaska Native		1
27b	Asian		1
27c	Black or African American		1
27d	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		1
27e	White		1
27f	Unable to Determine		1
28	Hispanic or Latino ethnicity father		1
29	Stepparent		1
30	Other relative		1
31	Foster parent		1
32	Other non-relative		1
33	Child was placed from		1
34	Child was placed by		1
35	Child receiving a monthly subsidy		1
36	Monthly amount		5
37	Title IV-E adoption assistance		1
Total Characters			111

VII. Optional Explanatory Footnote File Format

Table 6 lists the optional explanatory footnote file format. For additional information on submitting footnotes, see Technical Bulletin #10. The shaded rows indicate that the category is not applicable for the given element.

Table 6: Footnote File Format

Element Number	Data Element Description	Century Date Format	Number of Characters
01	Header (“%%”)		2
02	Title IV-E Agency code		2
03	Report period end date	CCYYMM	6
04	File reference “A” for Adoption “F” for Foster Care		1
05	Data element reference		2
06	Footnote text		240
Total Characters			253 ⁶

VIII. AFCARS File Creation

A. *Creating a Data File From a PC*

1. Create an ASCII data file using the file format listed in Section I above. Be sure all records end with a carriage return/line feed. This is the standard format for DOS ASCII files. Note that the carriage return/line feed will not appear if the file is edited on the PC using a standard editor.
2. Do not include spaces after the delimiter in the first record. All other records may contain spaces prior to the carriage return/line feed.
3. Transfer the data file from the PC, as a binary image file, to the mainframe where Cyberfusion resides.⁷ Use either a fixed length or variable length record format. Any LRECL (record length) size is acceptable for either record format.

Recommendation: For efficient use of space, use a fixed length record format with the following parameters:

RECFM = FB

LRECL = 255

BLKSIZE = 22950 (must be an even multiple of LRECL)

B. *Creating a Data File From a Mainframe*

1. Create an ASCII data file using the file format listed in Section I above. Do not include a carriage return/line feed at the end of each record.
2. Use either a variable length or fixed length record format.

⁶ This total does not include the carriage return/line feed.

⁷ Cyberfusion is the file transfer software used by the Children's Bureau.

Recommendation: For efficient use of space use a variable length record format.

a) If using a variable length record format, be sure to use an LRECL that is 4 bytes longer than the largest record in the data file. The extra 4 bytes are for the RDW (record descriptor word), which gives the length of the record. The following format will accommodate the largest possible footnote:

```
RECFM = VB
LRECL = 257
BLKSIZE = any large number, e.g., 20000
```

b) If using a fixed length record format, be sure to use an LRECL that can accommodate the largest record in the data file. Do not allow extra bytes for an RDW. The following format will accommodate the largest possible footnote:

```
RECFM = FB
LRECL = 253
```

IX. File Name

A. *Naming the AFCARS Data File For Transmission*

1. The filename must include the date and time the title IV-E agency is transmitting the AFCARS data file, not the date and time the AFCARS data file(s) were created.
2. The data file should be named according to the type of submission being made: Regular (R), Subsequent (S), or Test (T).
 - a. Regular Data File: An AFCARS data file for a current report period that is submitted during the appropriate transmission time frame, April 1- May 15 and October 1-November 14.
 - b. Subsequent Data File: Submissions that are transmitted after the AFCARS due dates for a regular report (May 15 or November 14) are considered subsequent data files.
 - c. Test Data File: An AFCARS data file that is submitted for testing purposes and is not to be used for the Federal AFCARS database. Examples may include: testing the connection between the title IV-E agency's system and the Federal system, testing the extraction and transmission process, record format, etc.
3. The AFCARS data filename is:

VVG1YY9.PAFC.NDM.ss.Zyyyy.Xyymmdd.Thhmm

or
VVG1YY9.PAFC.SIM.ss.Zyyyy.Xyymmdd.Thhmm

Where,

NDM or SIM refers to the mode or type of transmission, with NDM the Cyberfusion (C:D) identifier and SIM the identifier for Kermit transmissions
 ss is the State or Tribe abbreviation
 Z = report period A or B, yyyy is the report year
 X = type of submission R, S, or T
 yymmdd is the year, month, and day
 hhmm is the hour and minutes the agency transmits the data file

B. Guidelines

The following are general guidelines title IV-E agencies should follow when naming the AFCARS data files.

- Regular data files should always be concatenated.
- If the IV-E agency modifies and plans to re-transmit only one file for a subsequent transmission, then only that file should be transmitted.
- The date and time in the filename must reflect the date and time the files are transmitted.

C. Examples of Types of Submissions

The following are examples of different submission types:

1. Indiana submits its AFCARS data for the report period ending March 31, 2001 on May 10th at 4:15 p.m. The IV-E agency must submit a concatenated foster care and adoption data file. The filename would be:

VVG1YY9.PAFC.NDM.IN.A2001.R010510.T1615

2. The State of Connecticut's foster care and adoption data file were compliant with the AFCARS standards for the report period ending September 30, 2001. Connecticut makes corrections to both the adoption and foster care data files and submits a subsequent file on December 10, 2001 at 1:00 p.m. The filename of the resubmitted file would be:

VVG1YY9.PAFC.NDM.CT.B2001.S011210.T1300

3. The State of Maryland has fully implemented its Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). In order to check the extraction routine, the staff want to submit an AFCARS test data file. The State extracts the first full report period from the SACWIS, which is the report period ending September 30,

2002. The test file is submitted December 10, 2002 at 1:00 p.m. The filename would be:

VVG1YY9.PAFC.NDM.MD.B2002.T021210.T1300

If further information is required please contact the Children's Bureau at afcars@acf.hhs.gov.