



OHIO COMMUNITY RESPONSE GUIDE

Core Team Overview and Responsibilities

PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The decision to report suspected abuse or neglect to child protective services (CPS) has high stakes. A call to CPS has profound effects on a family. Across the United States, American Indian/Alaska Native and Black families are disproportionately reported for neglect, leading to increased inequity and trauma to communities of color. Since a CPS report is a family's initial point of entry into the system, improving reporting practices can have lasting and transformative effects on child welfare systems and the communities they serve, increasing equity, minimizing unnecessary interventions, and helping families thrive in their communities.

Evident Change and Casey Family Programs have partnered with five Ohio metro counties to support more accurate, consistent, and equitable reporting practices through the development of a Community Response Guide.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY RESPONSE GUIDE?

The [Community Response Guide](#) is a decision-support tool to help mandated reporters and others who are concerned about a child or family. The guide helps users decide whether a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is required or if support can be provided in another, less intrusive way. This public tool ensures that clear-cut abuse and neglect concerns continue to be referred directly to CPS while other situations that could safely be handled through less intrusive interventions are directed to preventive supports.

Developing a community response guide is an opportunity for communities to also examine and strengthen the existing local prevention continuum and ensure that users understand and consider the full range of options to help families in need.

THE PROJECT CORE TEAM

To reach its goals, this project requires steering from a diverse group of people connected to Ohio children and families. The Ohio Core Team meets quarterly to guide and support community response guide development activities and implementation recommendations. Typically, a core team includes representation from each of the following groups.

- Former foster youth and parents with lived experience within the child protection system, who are most impacted by the decision to report.
- Frequent reporters, including law enforcement, medical and mental health professionals, educators, and others.
- Key prevention partners and local community agencies serving families in need.
- Representation from state and county CPS agencies, including the Office of Families and Children.
- Tribal representatives.
- Policy, legal, or legislative champions, and court personnel.
- Community leaders who represent the diverse array of cultures and backgrounds of Ohio.

PURPOSE AND WORK OF THE CORE TEAM

Core Team members lead the strategic vision and implementation of this project and make recommendations about implementation and/or other interventions that support more equitable and consistent interventions for families in need.

The Core Team brings together local experts to ensure the project aligns with local values, policies, and practices and that it represents the diverse perspectives of those impacted by reporting. In addition, the Core Team leads communication with the greater Ohio community and shares important information related to project development and implementation.

Core Team representatives with lived experience are eligible for compensation for their work through the Ohio Family Care Association Family Voice Representative stipend policy.

If you are interested in being a part of this work, please reach out to Claire Crowley at ccrowley@evidentchange.org.

We hope you will join us!

SUMMARY OF PROJECT WORK COMPLETED AND NEXT STEPS

In May 2022, Evident Change and Casey Family Programs began working with a group of key representatives across Ohio to conduct an initial review and discovery analysis exploring the context of current child maltreatment reporting trends and practices. The initial discovery work began with three counties: Franklin, Hamilton, and Lucas; Mahoning and Summit joined this effort in 2023.

DISCOVERY ANALYSIS

The discovery period helps build a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of reporting policies and practices locally before developing change efforts to support more accurate, consistent, and equitable reporting practices. In Ohio, Core Team members joined one or more of the following subgroups to support the design and implementation of the following collaborative system review activities.

- **Policy and mandated reporter training review:** State and local policies impacting child abuse reporting practice were identified and reviewed, as well as the existing mandated reporter training curriculum from each jurisdiction.
- **Key community member feedback:** Feedback was gathered through a statewide survey exploring the decision-making and reporting practices of Ohio mandated reporters. A series of focus groups were also held with key community members so they could share their experiences with reporting, including sessions with (1) CPS screening staff; (2) mandated reporters, including education, law enforcement, medical, and social services; and (3) parents and resource families impacted by child abuse investigations and reports.
- **Prevention service inventory:** An inventory of the local prevention service infrastructure in each county was developed, and an initial assessment of the current strengths and barriers to community-based services outside the child protection system was completed. This was informed by focus groups with impacted families, administrative data and policy review, and interviews with prevention providers.
- **Administrative data review:** Ohio's child welfare administrative data related to current reporting trends, including differences in reporting and screening practices by different demographics were analyzed.

From this foundational discovery work, a series of [findings and recommendations](#) was developed to guide the next steps for systems change. The Core Team reviewed these findings and endorsed the development of an Ohio Community Response Guide at a virtual summit in March 2023.

GUIDE TOOL DESIGN

The [tool design phase](#) of the project is focused on the development of Ohio's Community Response Guide tool. This phase has the following goals.

- Design and customize Ohio’s community response guide manual using the thresholds for mandated reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect established in the Ohio Revised Code.
- Support moving forward with discovery recommendations prioritized by the Core Team.
- Continue change-management efforts to ensure local policy, training, and prevention systems align to support reaching the vision described in the guide’s theory of change.

In July 2023, an in-person workgroup was held in Columbus, Ohio, with a group of multidisciplinary representatives for the initial customization of Ohio’s Community Response Guide. The resulting draft manual was shared for wider community member review and feedback in December 2023. Ohio’s tool is planned to be ready for initial testing and refinement in early 2024.

PLANNED PROJECT WORK FOR 2024 AND NEXT STEPS

The Ohio Guide Core Team plays a critical role in providing ongoing project steering. The next steps include the following activities.

- **IRR and field testing:** Testing the draft tool is a critical step to ensuring it supports the foundational design values of increasing the consistency, equity, and accuracy of reporting decisions. To complete testing, the core team will conduct a significant outreach effort to community members, families, and those who work in professions serving children and families. Testers will have an opportunity to “try on” the tool and provide data about their decision-making process and experience using the tool. Results from testing will be used to revise and strengthen Ohio’s tool and inform implementation.
- **Developing the “consult” or prevention pathway:** The design of the local “consult” or prevention pathway is essential to the implementation of a local community response guide. The “consult” pathway ensures that users of the tool can be connected to a meaningful continuum of local prevention services whenever concerns exist but a report to a public children’s services agency is not needed. Ohio’s CRG prevention steering team currently meets bimonthly to make feasible recommendations for the design of Ohio’s consultation pathway.
- **Quarterly core team meetings:** Quarterly Core Team meetings provide ongoing project updates and ensure continued project steering by a diverse group of people. Core Team members will ensure that discovery recommendations are moved forward and will support the previously listed project work in concrete ways.

We cannot make the system changes alone and hope you will continue to join us for these sessions.

PROJECT MATERIALS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For those interested in reviewing the full project materials to date, they can be viewed at the [Ohio Community Response Guide site](#).

For more information on this project, or to nominate another key representative to join the Ohio CRG Core Team steering this project, please reach out to Claire Crowley at ccrowley@evidentchange.org.