



Responses to Questions and Concerns

Rock County Stakeholders,

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback to our team. We (our Butler team) have heard feedback showing excitement about the process, as well as feedback expressing concerns about the process and stakeholders. Guided by our commitment to the values of transparency and partnership, we will endeavor to respond to each of your questions and concerns in this document.

Collectively, our Butler Institute team has about 150 years of experience in the child welfare field as social workers. As social workers, we are guided by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) [code of ethics](#). Our Butler team has worked with stakeholders in communities, state agencies, county programs, tribal programs and more. We are confident that our review methods and work together during this project will provide information and opportunities that your community can use to inform meaningful and sustained policy and practice change. Butler is housed in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver and is a not-for-profit educational institution. Our mission is: To strengthen child-, youth-, and family-serving systems with evaluation, capacity building, and applied research.

Questions: (questions from stakeholders are italicized and presented as asked; responses are in regular font; names are redacted)

Is there information somewhere about the overall goals and purpose of this assessment and steering committee?

The overall purpose of the case review is: **A comprehensive child welfare case review to assess compliance with county and state policies and best practices in the child welfare field.**

The steering committee consisting of internal and external stakeholders provides high-level oversight, co-creates research questions, and reviews instrument and interview protocol development.

I am curious to how the committee was selected? We identified all key stakeholder groups and then invited people to apply for slots representing those groups. If there were more applicants than slots, we used a random number generator to select stakeholder representatives.

I find it concerning that of the 11 people on the committee, 7 of them report to the HSD Director and an 8th is a County employee. Wouldn't you consider that unethical in a committee whose purpose is to determine whether or not the County is compliant with policies and best practices?

The committee selection was purposeful and consists of a broad range of stakeholders. While there are multiple county staff, there are also six Butler team members (Charmaine Brittain, Ashley Brock-Baca, Brenda Lockwood, Christa Doty, Sommer Purdom, and Emily Campbell) on the committee. We specifically wanted representation at various county staff levels to understand both the system and the



interaction between supervision levels. The committee also includes a birth parent, youth, kin foster parent, and non-kin foster parent. All representatives for the various stakeholders applied as volunteers and if there were more people than slots, they were randomly selected using a random number generator. We chose this method to be as non-biased as possible. All stakeholder representatives are willing to be the “voice” for their group. County leadership is also on the committee to act as a conduit for information (such as connecting to all birth parents, kin foster parents, etc.; accessing the county-wide information systems).

The Steering Committee created the following list of group agreements to guide interactions:

- Communicate with respect
- Speak for yourself
- Honor differences
- Participate intentionally
- Engage in the process
- Call people in (Jesse, we haven’t heard from, what do you think?)
- Have candid conversations
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- It’s okay to disagree, everyone is different
- Maintaining a safe space
- Respect confidentiality when personal and professional experiences are shared and opinions expressed
- Acknowledge power differences and maintain steering committee space as a safe space
- Share ideas and perspectives free from ridicule and retribution by others
- Agree on the takeaways to be shared publicly at the meeting’s conclusion as well as what is confidential

The steering committee uses a consensus-building technique called “5 fingers” (level of agreement/disagreement is expressed by raising 1 through 5 fingers) for any decisions that need to be made. This means that until everyone in the group is in agreement as indicated by voting with at least three fingers, we do NOT move forward. We have used this technique effectively with other groups and it does air concerns and ensures that everyone is on board before moving forward.

My understanding is that there are seven people involved with CPS and only one foster parent and one kinship parent on the committee. I'm questioning whether the committee so heavily weighted with staff (including a manager and her assistant, which could cause people to not speak freely, the whole purpose of an independent review) would be able to come to an impartial conclusion of any sort. Therefore, I feel that more foster and kinship parents should be included in the committee and possibly even a birth parent whose children are currently in the system, it should definitely not be weighted with people that have authority over the jobs of those on the committee. This would allow all sides to be heard and may provide a more rounded review of the CPS program in Rock County.

We (the Butler team) agree with you that the steering committee should be unbiased and independent. There are actually 17 members on the committee including Butler staff. There is a birth parent, kin foster parent, non-kin foster parent, and a youth on the steering committee. Each of these people with



lived experiences have accepted the responsibility of also connecting with their stakeholder group. Butler staff will maintain impartiality and act in the best interests of our project goal.

I feel the irony of [name redacted] being on this committee is especially noteworthy. From firsthand experience, I'm aware she's been involved with case management issues pertaining to knowingly not disclosing her own conflicts of interest. All caseworkers and supervisors were randomly chosen.

To avoid any perceived conflict of interest, this person will not be on the review teams. See above about the inability of one person to decide outcomes. Butler staff constantly monitors the group to ensure all voices are heard and consensus is achieved.

Am I reading this correctly that Butler and a county staff person will do file reviews?

Yes, it will be two teams of three, each made up of two Butler staff and a county person. The county person's role is to help us navigate the system, answer questions about specific-county practices, etc. The system of including a local person on case reviews is a model that has been used nationally in the [Child and Family Services Reviews](#) (CFSRs) and also one that Butler has employed in other review sites. Butler staff have the final say in all case review decisions.

Would it make sense to expand the file review group to include an outside stakeholder?

The reviews require deep practice experience. The method of having teams of three including one local person has proved to be efficient and effective.

If a case is reviewed, would a bio parent, foster parent(s) and case workers be interviewed?

We built in the capacity to have up to three interviews per case. Appropriate interviews will be determined for each case.

How many files will be reviewed and will there be a combination of open and closed?

Cases will be selected from the database using purposeful [stratified sampling](#) (approximately 10% of each type of case). The stratified sample will include screened in/out, investigation (substantiated/unsubstantiated), open for services, and permanency case situations.

Can you specify who exactly is proposing the questions/topics for review? Item 1 next to "case review process" seems to imply that this committee (composed of 8 individuals who are on the department/County's payroll and only 3 who aren't) will be proposing the topics to review. I am concerned that the topics presented to research/review will be biased rather than impartial.

Butler and the steering committee are co-creating the questions for review. We start with defining the research questions then move to developing the focus group protocols that will help to answer those research questions. The focus group results, as well as Butler's expertise in best practices, will then inform the case review instrument development. The steering committee will approve the case review instrument.



In regards to the question about the steering committee composition, every person on the committee has veto power. Our aim is to build consensus and move forward only when that has been achieved. Butler co-created the research questions with the steering committee and the full review will address these questions:

1. What are the barriers to timely permanency?
2. What improvements can be made around accountability for all members of the team (bio-parent, caseworker, CASA, legal, GAL, etc.)?
3. How are safety standards balanced with avoiding family separation?
4. Are there disparate outcomes for families of color in various stages of the case, including reunification?
5. What is the level of parental engagement in decision-making and goalsetting in cases?
6. Are reasonable efforts being made to find kin for children of all races and ethnicities?
7. What contributes to placement changes/stability?
8. How frequently are family interactions occurring and how do family interactions impact the outcome of the case?

The focus group protocols and the case review instrument will ask questions in order to address these research questions. It should also be noted that the focus groups will happen first and results from them will inform the development of the case review instrument. For example, we may see a theme in the focus groups that we want to follow up on for the case review.

To summarize the sequence of development is: research questions ⇨ focus group protocols ⇨ focus group results ⇨ case review instrument. Along the way, we will constantly gather feedback and make adjustments. The final report will contain the focus group and case review results.

We are asking for the steering committee’s opinions on what should be asked during the focus groups and case reviews, that Butler staff will then translate into appropriate questions. Butler’s staff members bring their knowledge and deep practice experience to the protocol and case review development process and ultimately, Butler staff will finalize the protocols and case review instruments. Also and most significantly, our research is governed by the University’s [Institutional Review Board](#), meaning that our research plan must meet the rigor of this board and be approved by them before moving forward.

I'm also curious about the upcoming focus groups- would that be an opportunity to include more diverse voices in this process than what I see listed on the steering committee?

The focus group plan is as follows:

Stakeholder Group	Focus Groups	Interviews
Foster parents	2-3 (more as needed)	1-2
Birth parents/families	2-3	---



Court personnel	1	---
Human Service Dept. leadership	---	2-3
Human Service Dept. supervisors	1	---
Human Service Dept. staff	2	---
Providers	1	---
Other interested parties (CASA, law enforcement, schools, etc.)	2	---

Every foster parent who would like to participate in a focus group will have the opportunity to do so, even if it means holding more focus groups than originally planned. We would like to try to limit the focus groups to 10 people so that people have sufficient safety and time to speak, so we will increase the number of focus groups to accommodate the interest. We are attending to your concerns and appreciate the level of interest.

Focus groups will be transcribed and a special qualitative analysis software called Atlas.ti will analyze the data to generate themes. This ensures that the focus groups will be analyzed objectively and without bias.

We will also provide the written interview protocol to foster parent participants, if they would prefer to respond that way, and will enter any written responses into the Atlas.ti software. We will also offer a limited number of one-on-one interviews with foster parents and to be fair, we will ask people to “apply” for them, and then use a random number generator to select the interviews.

I also think it would be very valuable to include a focus group of more foster youth or former foster youth, as well as bio parents. Is this something the focus groups will address or is this not part of the scope of this particular project?

We agree! It is part of our scope and we will offer focus groups to birth parents and youth.

Thank you for expressing your questions and concerns. We will make all steering committee notes available to the public. Please let us know whether we can answer additional questions.

On behalf of the Butler team,

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