White Paper #3: Implementation Drivers

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This paper summarizes the results from interviews with CCR&R and the Utah Office of Child Care (OCC) about the implementation of Care About Child Care (CAC) relative to implementation drivers. As was discussed in the first white paper, implementation drivers describe groups of behaviors that build and maintain the program. Drivers are split into three categories including competency drivers that support the capability of staff; organization drivers that support the infrastructure necessary to implement a program; and leadership drivers, or characteristics of those who successfully manage the program implementation.

Competency Drivers

Staff Selection.

There is very little turnover in the OCC and the CCR&R offices, and assigning current employees to new tasks requires little deliberation due to the small number of employees involved. The following information about staff selection was provided by the CCR&R interviewees:

⬚　　Those in charge of staff selection are identified; no one is confused as to who is charge of hiring.

⬚　　Job descriptions are usually fairly vague because the CCR&Rs feel that their work is constantly changing.　One CCR&R office that puts an especial emphasis on meeting goals constantly updates job descriptions to reflect the nature of staff duties.

⬚　　Those in charge of staff selection have a fairly clear and consistent picture across CCR&R regions of what they would look for in hiring (see the list of important employee qualities in Appendix A).

⬚　　Those in charge of hiring have had experience with CAC and other CCR&R activities, providing them with a good understanding of what is needed to fill a position.

⬚　　Those hiring a new employee are also the ones who train the person. Through this integration offers the trainer understands the specific strengths a new employee already has and where he or she needs additional training.

⬚　　At both CCR&R and OCC levels, those in charge of hiring appear to be satisfied with the results of current hiring procedures.

⬚　　The CCR&R interviewees said that hiring should take place with the requirements of the job in mind. Interviewees cited qualities that are especially important for themselves and for others to do their jobs well (Appendix A)

Training

Interviewees felt that formal training has not heretofore been a prominent part of CAC. Most CCR&R staff did not see this as problematic, citing their experience and the open communication channels they have between other CCR&R offices and the OCC as sufficient for them to understand all that they need to do. Other interviewees saw the lack of training as problematic. One CCR&R person said that training would have been especially helpful prior to the time that CAC went "live." Some interviewees hoped that training might increase once the program is more settled and CAC becomes better defined. Some interviewees suggested that CAC should be based on adult learning principles. Other interviewees mentioned the importance of measuring the fidelity of training.

Coaching

Coaching is described as on-the-job feedback to help improve performance. Many of the CCR&R staff said this was the way they help new employees understand their duties. Most CCR&R interviewees said that OCC uses coaching to provide feedback on CAC validation (OCC interviewees stated that this was not coaching but performance assessment). CCR&R Interviewees said the following about OCC's CAC coaching:

- Since a lead person for validation coaching has been selected, CCR&R interviewees would now like to see that person's workload in other areas decreased so she can give CAC validation the attention it needs.

- A written CAC coaching plan would be helpful. Coaches should also directly observe in some those that they are coaching.

- Satisfaction surveys from those being coached would help to enhance coaching.

Performance Assessment

There are several ways of measuring CAC performance. OCC checks quarterly to ensure that CCR&R offices are meeting specified goals. One CCR&R office wished to have a little more (but not too much more) direction and accountability for CAC. Another CCR&R office mentioned they would like a mechanism in the CAC reporting system for providing feedback about their experiences in the field.

OCC assesses all validation requests for the entire state, providing feedback on whether the approval of certain items is accurate. OCC looks at the CCR&R offices' newsletters, which has helped the OCC resolve inconsistencies and misinformation on CAC.

Organization drivers

Systems Intervention

Providers. Providers are especially important to the proper functioning of CAC because of its voluntary nature. As one CCR&R put it, success happens through the providers.

CCR&R. Interviewees felt it was important that providers have confidence in their regional CCR&R and suggested the following activities to promote provider-CCR&R friendships: being available and caring; giving consistent good service; attending community outreach events; providing ice cream socials; being diplomatic; having a good knowledge of the CAC program and especially of its benefits; being able to explain research-based advantages to providers; and having actual childcare experience. One CCR&R with a large number of providers sets aside a day each month for providers to receive walk-in assistance; another has found that asking providers with positive CAC experiences to talk about the program at provider meetings helps to build trust for CAC.

OCC. Both the OCC and the CCR&Rs make it a priority to listen to provider input about CAC. Provider surveys have given feedback on specific criteria. CCR&R interviewees agreed that the OCC has been very good at accepting feedback and resolves issues promptly. Accepting provider input has sometimes involved placating those who are very upset, particularly those concerned about government influence. OCC has demonstrated the ability to validate people who are expressing passionate opinions and help them feel that their position is being taken seriously.

Parents. Several CRR&Rs said that they would like more parent input on CAC, but are unsure how to go about it. Several mentioned that the surveys disseminated during the winter of 2012-2013 have provided good information on what parents think and want.

Interviewees said the advertising campaign has been helpful in obtaining parent and provider support. They mentioned the billboards, the brochures, the site, the name, the logo, and so on. A few CCR&R offices said that the current materials are professional, attractive, and informative, aiding them in their job of gaining provider buy-in.

Facilitative administration

It is important to have an administration that supports staff's efforts in administering the program. We did not ask any direct questions on how CCR&R staff felt that CCR&R directors, the OCC, and other administrators supported those that they oversee, reserving such questions for the anonymity afforded by the proposed questionnaire. However, interviewees volunteered information in response to less direct questions.

CCR&R. Although the CCR&Rs appeared to have good intra-office relationships, they provided little direct information on the facilitative nature of the administration in their CCR&R office. This is not surprising since we did not ask and it would not be very useful to get information on the director when she was present. One CCR&R interviewee did volunteer that they hold meetings where everyone could "bring out what bugs (them)" in order to better support the staff.

OCC. Many interviewees feel that communication is very open between the CCR&Rs and the OCC. There are regular opportunities to discuss issues at directors' meetings, and several expressed the opinion that the OCC is supportive and willing to answer questions. It appears from the interview data that there is an active effort on the part of the OCC to adjust policies and procedures to better support CAC, to solicit staff feedback, and to gather stakeholder input.

Decision support data systems

This is an especially important driver for CAC. The program as a whole has been adjusted several times in response to provider and parent input. Although the CCR&R offices collect information on their own areas, Bridgerland CCR&R provides much of the research that informs the program as a whole. There has been an especially strong effort to obtain information from providers through provider meetings and online surveys. Providers themselves have provided solicited and unsolicited feedback about concerns they have with CAC. The information gathered by the CCR&R offices is, for the most part, relayed to OCC through email.

Survey data does exist on parents' views of CAC criteria and has been used to design and modify CAC. One CCR&R asked a focus group of grandmothers for feedback on CAC criteria. Overall, though, parents have provided less input than providers on CAC.

Leadership

The driver of leadership consists of two parts: technical and adaptive leadership. Technical leadership is the ability to run the program according to the book; adaptive leadership is being creative and adapting infrastructure and/or practice to better support a program. Leadership drivers appear to have been fairly strong for CAC according to the interviewees. Overall, CAC leadership has made an effort to include everyone's input and actively seeks to adapt based on the information received. Anonymous surveys could provide more detailed information on the leadership driver.

CCR&R. We collected little information on technical leadership. However, as should be expected, CAC has elicited a good deal of adaptive leadership. Organizational policies appear to have undergone a great deal of adjustment to better accommodate the issues that have arisen not only with CAC, but all other programs administered by the CCR&Rs and the OCC.

OCC. CCR&R interviewees said that the OCC is actively working to support them in delivering CAC. Difficulties are quickly addressed. In interviewing the OCC, evidence of such practices was apparent; OCC interviewees said they are looking at ways to reassign duties to better support CAC.

Appendix A

Important skills for new hires according to CCR&R and OCC interviewees

Experience. According to the interviewees, experience in childcare is one of the most important qualities an employee can have. At the CCR&R level, several staff members cited experience in childcare as being vital for their jobs. One CCR&R specified 3-5 years paid experience in childcare, not including lab schools, which are thought not to reflect the realities of most childcare programs.

Interpersonal skills. CCR&R interviewees mentioned the importance of having employees who are able to gain the providers' support and trust, and in general build and maintain a good relationship with the providers. One CCR&R also cited an ability to be firm when it comes to quality

in those instances where an individual is arguing that a poor quality aspect of the care provided should be counted as quality.

Education. A degree in Early Childhood was cited as being vital. In order to make good judgment calls on quality, knowledge of children's need is very important. A few specifically cited a Child Development Associate Credential being important for employees. Knowledge of licensing and the CAC criteria were also cited as being important, but interviewees thought knowledge of the CAC criteria is probably best learned on-the-job.

Technological skills. Competency in technology is important, especially if the job in question involves working with the CAC site or helping providers work with the CAC site. However, some CCR&R offices stated that this is less of a priority as CAC seems user-friendly.

Organization skills. Organization skills are important especially for the OCC and CCR&R directors in managing the CCR&R and directing its CAC-related activities. One CCR&R office described the importance setting goals and the value of assigning tasks to meet goals.

OCC-specific skills. OCC named additional skills including the following:

- The ability to find good people to hire: This is important for any program, but particularly for CAC right now. The CAC program currently depends to a large degree on the ability of those involved in the program to make good judgment calls on their own, as they are pioneering a unique, previously untested program.

- Maintaining a broad, visionary picture: This was cited as very important at the very top in guiding the program as whole.

- Detail-oriented: this is more important for those positions that are involved in directly working with CCR&R offices and CAC criteria validation.

- Ability to alleviate concerns from upset groups and individuals: Some people have reacted very emotionally to CAC. Interviewees described successful encounters as incorporating an ability to remain calm, allowing the angered individual to share, and helping them feel that their comments are being seriously considered.