Evaluation of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction
The Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work (BI), was selected by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) to conduct an evaluation of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System. The purpose of the assessment was 1) to evaluate the extent to which all of the functions of a comprehensive child welfare training program are operating in a quality manner, and 2) to suggest enhanced or alternative methods by which these functions can be strengthened.

BI conducted the evaluation between September and December of 2008. All of the partners in the Child Welfare Training System were involved in the assessment process, including planning and design, data collection, and review of the draft report. The partners include: the Department of Children and Families (DCF), county child welfare programs, tribal child welfare programs, the DCF Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW), Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) and the University of Wisconsin system. The counties, state programs, tribes and universities are organized into five regional training partnerships: NEW Partnership for Children and Families housed at UW-Green Bay; Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership at UW-Madison, School of Human Ecology; Western Wisconsin Partnership for Children and Families at UW-River Falls, Social Work programs; Milwaukee Partnership for Professional Development at UW-Milwaukee, Helen Bader School of Social Welfare; and the Intertribal Child Welfare Training Partnership housed at UW-Green Bay. The regional training partnerships implement training for their constituencies.

Methods
The Butler Institute utilized a mixed method design that included collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple stakeholders within the state, as well as nationally. Data sources included:

- Document reviews
- Web-based questionnaires
  - Caseworkers (511 completed; 25% response rate)
  - Supervisors (241 completed; 48% response rate)
  - Trainers (50 completed)
  - Managers/directors (85 completed)
- 14 focus group interviews
- 32 Individual or small group interviews
- 7 interviews with external training experts
Key Findings by Domain

Domain I: Structure and Governance of Training System

The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System is recognized nationally as a model of partnership between the counties, state, tribes, and universities. The structure provides opportunity for sharing of power and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders. It has helped to produce a system of training in which the recipients of training and the agencies they work for, for the most part, appreciate the efforts made to meet their needs and are highly satisfied with the results. However, the growth and evolution of the system, in response to changing workforce and policy needs, has led to a number of structural and governmental concerns. These concerns include:

Balance of the relative interests and perspectives of the state and the county-university partnerships:

Over the past five years, Wisconsin, like many states, has seen rapid growth of its Child Welfare Training System in response to program review findings, legislative mandates, promising service delivery practices, and workforce demands. Large statewide projects (e.g., pre-service, a new Foundation training to replace Common Core, and Post-QSR training) have made demands on the existing system for timely development and rollout of training. Reorganization of the state Child Welfare system and high demands/crises in service delivery (such as has recently occurred in Milwaukee) have added to the stress and uncertainty that accompanies the change that is already inherent in this rapid growth.

Much progress has been made (e.g., development of a strategic plan, the training courses noted above and other courses developed at the regional level). However, there has also been some increase in factionalism among the training system partners, in this case along the traditional lines that characterize most state-supervised, county-administered Child Welfare systems. In the past, the regional university-county partnerships made almost all decisions about training in their regions. Recently, the state, in response to concerns about findings from the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) and the Quality Service Review (QSR) processes, has made many decisions that affect training in the regions. Regional partnerships feel that not only has their authority been usurped to some degree, but that their expertise is not recognized and their detailed knowledge of local practice is not valued.

Role of the Training Center:

There is not clarity about the role of the Training Center, especially in terms of a) development of statewide training-related efforts (such as standardized competencies, curriculum standards/formats, and common curriculum) and b) oversight and enforcement of Training Council decisions that affect regional implementation of both statewide and region-specific training. The lack of clarity is fueling frustration among many training system partners and eroding progress towards an important goal, i.e., a shared sense that collaborative approaches to finding solutions to training issues will work. Some of the university-based partnerships are concerned about partial loss of autonomy and less direct access to DCF as a result of a stronger Training Center role.

Decision-making Structure of the Training Council:

The Training Council is large in order to be inclusive of the many stakeholders or their representatives. It has a subcommittee structure that works well for planning, as well as, sometimes, getting work done on projects such as curriculum development.
However, when the Council’s tasks involve decision-making, the Council structure is too large to operate effectively, especially when the goal is to reach consensus.

**Domain II: Professional Development Continuum**

*Strategic Alignment and Planning:* Feedback from participants generally indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the connection between the training offered and their job-related needs. The responsiveness of the regional training partnerships to the counties is a significant strength of the training system and respondents expressed strong support for maintaining the partnership role.

Although much has been done to align training with agency priorities, the strategic plan and other documents that provide direction for the training system are in need of updating and expansion to promote an integrated process for assessing needs, planning and developing training offerings, and providing a protocol for an allocating resources.

Recently, the training system has been moving away from consistent use of the competency-based ITNA model to identify training needs and has been moving toward use of a different set of more skills-oriented practice principles in the Foundation and post-QSR training. While the current assessment process is clearly responsive to emerging needs as defined by the counties, there does not appear to be a systematic statewide needs assessment process that would help the Training Council plan and set priorities.

*Range of Professional Development Options:* The professional development continuum in Wisconsin consists of the following elements: Title IV-E stipend programs for MSW and BSW degrees, web-based pre-service training, classroom training (Foundation training for new workers, advanced classroom training options for experienced workers) and transfer of learning (QSR follow-up, Milwaukee mentoring, supervisor orientation in NEW).

The majority of respondents to the web-based questionnaire expressed satisfaction with available training for new workers, specifically the pre-service and Foundation components of the system, although some expressed dissatisfaction with the gaps in what is covered in the existing curricula. However, most respondents agreed that there are far fewer options available for experienced workers, supervisors and administrators than for new workers. New workers would like more training offerings on substance abuse, safety, legal issues and time and workload management. Supervisors would like to have more training in teaming, helping workers cope with burnout and secondary trauma, management and organizational skills, and cultural competency. Many respondents would like to have more courses offered via distance learning.

*Transfer and Practice Improvement:* Nationally, training programs are moving toward greater support of transfer of learning, integration of training with practice, and support of organizational change, in part in response to a greater emphasis on outcomes coming on the heels of the federal reviews. Wisconsin has undertaken specific initiatives statewide, in the NEW partnership, and at the Bureau of Milwaukee, that support transfer of learning and promote organizational change. Following the initial federal Child and Family Service Review (CSFR), DCF began a Quality Service Review (QSR) process with
the counties to evaluate practice and identify strengths as well as areas in which to target interventions that would lead to better performance on the federal outcome indicators. The post-QSR process, as well as the Milwaukee mentoring program and the NEW partnership initiatives, offer a great deal of promise in extending professional development beyond the classroom and making meaningful practice changes. The partnerships have also made available tools for supervisors to use to support workers’ transfer of learning, such as summaries of course content on the web and participant action plans. These efforts would be further strengthened by integration of the post-QSR and other training into a continuum of activities in support of common competencies and objectives.

Domain III: Curriculum Development

**Competencies:** The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System has historically been competency-based. With the transition from the I.H.S. Common Core training to the Foundation training, there is not now a statewide set of competencies/learning objectives for workers that provide a framework for curriculum selection, development or writing. While this allows some flexibility, overall it seems to have added to frustration with the system, and, in the view of BI, will hamper the training system in the future. A set of competencies/learning objectives (particularly if it is guided by a practice model) provides a useful guide for decision-making and curriculum development.

**Curriculum standards and format:** There is no common set of standards or a standardized format for curriculum in Wisconsin, although there are models used in some of the regions. There is no ongoing process now to create/adopt standards or one or more acceptable formats or to assure that these are being used throughout the state. Since Foundation training modules are not in a common format, trainers who deliver them in each region must adjust to each new module format. This seems to give tacit permission to customize these modules locally, as “standardization” seems to be missing internally.

Domain IV: Trainer Development

The current process of recruiting and selecting trainers from the counties has several clear strengths. Trainers are seen by respondents as being in touch with current practice and able to address local practice concerns. An additional benefit is that county personnel who serve as trainers are able to bring current information on best practices back to their agencies and serve as local expert resources. However, there are also limitations. Current county staff must take vacation time to train, which limits their availability, and those who are not current county employees can begin to lose the close connection to practice over time.

At this time, Wisconsin does not have a clearly defined set of competencies expected of trainers. While there is a set of trainer development guidelines for Foundation trainers, these address a set of activities rather than the knowledge, skills and abilities desired: a process focus rather than an outcome focus. As Wisconsin’s training system becomes increasingly sophisticated, a set of agreed upon trainer competencies will be needed to form a firm foundation for selecting trainers, planning and conducting trainer development activities, and evaluating trainer performance.
Domain V: Training Delivery

Training delivery options: The Wisconsin system has begun to expand the range of training delivery options with distance learning and targeted site-specific training. Online pre-service training has been well received and distance-learning courses under development are increasing in sophistication. The bulk of training within the system is still delivered in the classroom. A substantial number of respondents see classroom training as providing important advantages, and are not in favor of expanding distance learning as a delivery option. A commonly reported barrier is lack of computer technology in select counties at this time. However, respondents also saw the need for better utilization of distance learning options, especially as resources become less available to send staff to training. At the present time, most areas within the state have sufficient classroom training capacity to get staff through needed training in a timely way. There are exceptions, however. For example, problems were noted with access to training in Milwaukee, where turnover is especially high. BI believes that in the future Wisconsin will need to continue to expand the use of e-learning, teleconferencing and other types of training delivery such as brief, targeted, trainings on-site in the counties to maximize the efficiency and timeliness of training delivery.

A major need that the training system will have going forward is a learning management system. Such a system is needed to allow centralized tracking of completion of training requirements for reporting purposes. It will also help training participants and their supervisors to track progress and provide a vehicle for storing and administering evaluation tools and transfer of learning tools.

Domain VI: Research to Practice

There is a great deal of expertise in program evaluation in the university systems that house the partnerships as well as a strong research orientation through the state Office of Performance and Quality Assistance. Both of these factors provide the foundation for the possible development of more work in these areas. While there is interest in utilizing and strengthening the existing capacity to conduct child welfare research, as well as utilizing existing literature to inform and support the work of the training system, much work remains to be done to set a research agenda, identify resources to support the work, and identify the most appropriate model for the research function.

Domain VII: Training Evaluation

As in many training systems, the training evaluation done in Wisconsin is primarily level one, participant feedback. This information is used informally to make decisions about what curriculum is needed, how effectively current curricula are meeting participant needs, and how trainers are performing. Although this level of evaluation provides a great deal of information for program improvement, many informants expressed a desire to build capacity to conduct higher levels of evaluation that would provide information about staff’s acquisition of needed knowledge and skills, transfer of learning, and the relationship of training to practice changes and improvements in child welfare outcomes. At the same time, they recognized that this type of evaluation is costly. Difficult decisions must be made to allocate scarce resources in such a way that essential training functions are not compromised, but crucial evidence of training program impact is gathered and disseminated to build support for the training
system. The mechanism that several states have adopted to guide these decisions and to plan for an incremental building of evaluation capacity is the strategic plan. A strong strategic plan can guide how the Training System can move gradually to higher levels of evaluation over a period of time in a way that will maximize learning about training outcomes without overtaxing training resources.

Key Recommendations

• **Convene a facilitated, structured reconciliation process.** The Wisconsin Training System is a highly competent and sophisticated system that has benefited from the structural partnership between the state, universities, counties, and tribes. For a number of reasons, the partnership has not been functioning as a collaborative in recent years, as it did in the past. The Training Partnership would greatly benefit from a structured reconciliation process, facilitated by an outside Child Welfare training system expert who can help the members realign the rules, roles, boundaries and governance of the Training System. The training system needs to engage in this work to strengthen the collaboration of the partnership before moving into the strategic planning process.

• **Review and make decisions about how to change the structure, governing rules, and processes of the Training Council to make it more effective.**

  ➢ Institute a smaller executive committee to make final decisions. The advantage would be that all issues requiring a decision would be addressed, that decisions would be timely, and that ways of ensuring that decisions get carried out could be addressed. The disadvantage is that fewer members of the Training Council would have direct input into a decision.

    o If an executive committee were established, the full Training Council might be better utilized for raising and discussing issues, convening smaller workgroups, providing context and guidance to the executive committee, and reviewing the results of decisions.

    o Conduct full Training Council meetings less frequently (such as quarterly) and rotate them around the state to facilitate county participation. The executive committee meeting schedule could be planned based on needed decisions and those decisions’ timeframes. Holding less frequent meetings in various locations might also encourage more participation by county directors.

  ➢ The Training Council needs clear criteria for decision-making and mechanisms to enforce decisions, as well as to support implementation of decisions.

  ➢ The Training Council needs to improve its communication mechanisms with members, e.g. more timely postings on online of requests for input about meeting agendas, agendas themselves, follow-ups to meetings (decisions and minutes), and information.

• **Review and make decisions about the role and functions of the Training Center staff.** DCF needs to clearly communicate the roles and responsibilities of the Training Center staff so there is a shared understanding among stakeholders about the functions of the Training Center staff and the functions of other partners (i.e., post-QSR planning).
The Training Center staff should have clear authority for enforcement of decisions made by the Training Council or Executive Committee if established. If training projects are not being carried out in ways that reflect these decisions, the Training Center staff should be able to take action and hold stakeholders accountable.

The resource needs for all Training Center functions need to be reviewed, as the current functions are not adequately staffed.

- **Conduct Strategic Planning Process.** Strategic planning should be facilitated by an external person to address the above recommendations as well as make decisions about how best to ensure strategic alignment of training products with the state principles or model of practice.

- **Develop Statewide Training Plan.** Building from the strategic planning process, develop a statewide training plan. The plan should identify what training will be delivered statewide based on the competency model and the needs assessment described above, as well as clear timeframes for the trainings.

- **Develop standardized sets for competencies for all training audiences.** Adopting a common set of competencies that are aligned with the Wisconsin practice principles (or model if this is developed) and the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by staff to perform their jobs would provide the basis for an integrated training system in which the needs of stakeholders at the state and local levels could be met efficiently and effectively.

- **Revise Foundation Training Courses.** A common set of competencies should be used to guide the revision of the Foundation Training. Competencies should be ordered into a design that follows a “life of the case” model and should be used to guide the revision process for Foundation training and the development or selection of curriculum to address gaps.

- **Develop a systematic needs assessment process tied to a competency model.** Use of a standardized needs assessment process or set of tools will help provide the training system with information that clarifies statewide versus local needs. Such a system does not and should not preclude local responses to specific county needs, but can inform strategic planning and resource allocation to ensure that key needs are addressed without duplication of effort.

- **Further develop a model for post-QSR training and technical assistance and integrate with pre-service, Foundation and in-service training.** Strategies may include:
  - Design and implement formative evaluation strategies to collect feedback that looks at the effectiveness of different post-QSR learning strategies for different issues and locations.
  - Design an outcome evaluation to measure transfer of learning of specific post-QSR skills.
  - Involve regional partnerships strategically through the exit interview, post-QSR planning, training and TA, coaching and facilitation of peer networks would be an effective way to maximize limited training resources and integrate learning along the continuum of professional development from classroom training to skill transfer.
• **Expanding the range of professional development options for a variety of Child Welfare staff.** Many suggestions were offered by respondents, including expanding course offerings for experienced workers and supervisors; promoting communities of practice for supervisors and managers; and developing training for Case Aides.

• **Develop a common set of standards for curricula and one or more approved curriculum formats.**

• **Develop and implement a plan for making decisions about standardization and customization of statewide curricula.** The Training Council should develop a standardized set of curricula for Foundation training and other future statewide training projects. Yet there should be room for a limited amount of customization in order to meet legitimate county and regional differences.

• **Review process for trainer development and revise if needed.**

• **Develop an array of training and information delivery strategies and a plan for making decisions about which are appropriate.** Utilizing a larger range of delivery options for various types of training would not only maximize resources, but also promote learning and transfer of learning to the job. For example, more purely informational pieces of classroom training could be moved to web-based applications, saving time for skill development in the classroom.

• **Develop a training plan that addresses unique needs of Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.** The benchmarks and fundamental principles for a highly functioning training system are the same for BMCW as for all partnership regions of Wisconsin; however, there is a need for an individualized training plan that addresses the practice challenges that are unique to BMCW either in occurrence or in scope and magnitude.

• **Develop a Training Evaluation Plan.** As Wisconsin develops a training plan, it would also be helpful to have a training evaluation plan to set direction and serve as a map for future evaluation activities and resource decisions. Such a plan would lay the foundations for systemic expansion into higher levels of training evaluation that yield information regarding learning outcomes and transfer to practice, and relate training outcomes to outcomes for children and families.

• **Build research and evaluation capacity.** Building a research and evaluation capacity responsive to current program needs and plans for future initiatives will be necessary as the training system moves toward more sophisticated levels of training evaluation and practice related research. As part of building evaluation capacity, both staffing and infrastructure will need to be addressed.

• **Explore creation of a research to practice consortium.** Representatives from DCF, the Partnerships, the Training Program and interested University Deans or their designees should come together for a one day meeting to explore the idea of establishing a research to practice consortium.

• **Expand and coordinate access to available research to practice literature.** This effort might involve consolidation of resources from individual partnerships to a centralized website. The universities could participate in a process of synthesizing and evaluating the quality of the research literature on a given topic, through the lens of Wisconsin’s child welfare system.
INTRODUCTION

In March of 2008, the Wisconsin Training Program let a request for proposals for an assessment of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System. The purpose of the assessment was 1) to evaluate the extent to which all of the functions of a comprehensive child welfare training program are operating in a quality manner; and 2) to suggest enhanced or alternative methods by which these functions can be strengthened. The Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work (BI) was awarded the contract in May of 2008, and conducted the assessment from August 2008 through December 2008. This report presents the results of the evaluation.

Background

The Child Welfare Training System is a partnership involving the Department of Children and Families (DCF), county child welfare programs, tribal child welfare programs, the DCF Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare (BMCW) and Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) and the University of Wisconsin system. The counties, state programs, tribes and universities are organized into five regional training partnerships: NEW Partnership for Children and Families housed at UW-Green Bay; Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership at UW-Madison, School of Human Ecology; Western Wisconsin Partnership for Children and Families at UW-River Falls, Social Work programs; Milwaukee Partnership for Professional Development at UW-Milwaukee, Helen Bader School of Social Welfare; and the Inter Tribal Child Welfare Training Partnership housed at UW-Green Bay. The regional training partnerships implement training for their constituencies.

The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training Council, established in 1998, oversees the training functions and coordinates and integrates the training provided by the regional partnerships and other training provided by DCF. DCF contracts with the Training Center staff housed at UW-Madison School of Human Ecology to coordinate child welfare training in Wisconsin, including the Training Council. The staff includes the State Child Welfare Training Coordinator, the State Curriculum Coordinator, and a Statewide Trainer/Curriculum Specialist. These staff members work with DCF, the counties and the regional university training partnerships to help coordinate training for over 2,000 public and tribal child welfare workers throughout the State of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Training Council Annual Report, 2007). For clarity throughout this report as we discuss the structure, function and roles of the different partnerships in the Training System, the Training System Staff, as an entity, will be referred to as the “The Training Center.”

The Training Council developed a strategic plan in 2002 that has guided the activities and functions of the Training System for the past six years. In 2007 the Training Council began the work of creating a new strategic plan that would guide the development of the training system to better meet the challenging demands of preparing a child welfare workforce that can meet the needs of children and families in Wisconsin. The Training Council, facilitated by Susan Kanak of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement, engaged in a planning session to identify the strengths and needs of the current training system in preparation for strategic planning.

DCF expressed the desire to build on the strong foundation of the current system that includes effective development and delivery of training by the five regional partnerships and the strong collaboration between training system partners. Other top strengths identified by the Training Council during this planning session include:
Stipend programs with schools of social work to increase the number of child welfare staff who have BSWs or MSWs

- The partnerships as a vehicle for communication with county departments
- Ability of the structure to meet local needs
- A willingness to continue to collaborate, grow and change
- Commitment to support training all the county and dept. levels

Several areas of concern also emerged from the planning process in the areas of structure and governance of the training system, resource allocation, and professional development continuum of child welfare professionals. These areas were summarized into five high priority evaluation questions:

- How does the current training system influence case practice which leads to the achievement of positive outcomes for children and families?
- What are the resource needs of the training system?
- How well is the current governance process working (e.g. state/local balance, stakeholders)?
- How well is the Training System using research and evaluation within the training system?
- How well does the Training System support the continuum of professional development (stipend programs, partnership training, coaching/mentoring)?

**Purpose of this Report**

The purpose of this report is to present the results of BI’s full assessment of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training program and to offer recommendations for how the Training System can build on current strengths to better meet professional development needs of child welfare professional across the state. The evaluators were charged with addressing the five research questions described above as identified by the Training Council. BI submitted a draft report to the Training Council in February 2009 based on data collected from August through December of 2008. BI solicited feedback on the draft report and then met via teleconference with Council members to discuss changes to the final report. Those changes are reflected in this document. The findings and recommendations summarized in this report are intended to be used a resource and guide for the Training Council as they move forward with the strategic planning process for the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System.

**Report Structure**

**Methodology**

The description of the evaluation methodology is presented in the section immediately following this introduction. It includes the development of the framework and evaluation plan, as well as a description of the tools and data collection methods.

**Findings**

The findings and recommendations of the evaluation are organized by domains, or areas of focus of the assessment. The domains include:
• Domain I: Structure and Governance of Training System
• Domain II: Professional Development Continuum
• Domain III: Curriculum and Training Development
• Domain IV: Trainer Development
• Domain V: Training Delivery
• Domain VI: Research to Practice
• Domain VII: Training Evaluation

Under each domain the following areas are presented:

Description and scope. This section contains a brief description of the content of each domain and sub-domain area.

Benchmarks. The Benchmarks sections within each domain identify relevant standards of practice. The statements of standards in each domain reflect what the Butler Institute believes are most pertinent to the specific issues of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System. They draw on several sources including:

• The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System 2007 Annual Report
• NSDTA’s 2008 draft revision of A Key to Success: Guidelines for Effective Staff Development and Training Programs in Human Service Agencies
• NCWRCOI, Building Effective Training Systems for Child Welfare Agencies
• The BI team’s past experience and recent formal contacts with child welfare training experts from across the country (see Appendix A for list of these training experts).

Respondent viewpoints. This section describes the viewpoints of Wisconsin stakeholders and is derived from the information obtained from the document reviews, interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. This section describes the range of opinions and comments from respondents in order to illustrate the continuum of feedback, and notes when there is a consensus of any particular group or cohort regarding an issue. Inclusion of a comment or recommendation in this section does not mean that BI necessarily agrees or disagrees. The findings and recommendations by BI are based on many factors (see next section).

Findings regarding benchmarks. This section represents BI’s assessment of how the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training Program is operating in each domain against the standards of practice described in the benchmarks. These findings represent BI’s view of quality practice based on literature review, the contextual themes, and experience with other large child welfare training systems.
**Recommendations**

In this section, BI lists recommendations, and in some cases the next steps that would follow from the recommendations. When feasible, each issue is discussed in terms of alternative recommendations with the advantages and disadvantages stated for each. The purpose of this is to provide ideas about various ways in which program enhancements could be implemented. Many strategies will encounter barriers and some will raise new questions. Strategies for improving the Training System are inevitably embedded in Wisconsin’s larger issues and concerns, some of which are clearly beyond the scope of this assessment. This approach to a discussion of recommendations seeks to address this reality by offering alternatives where this seems useful and by identifying some of the advantages and disadvantages of the recommended strategies.

**METHODS**

The Butler Institute utilized a mixed method design in the assessment of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System that included surveys, interviews, focus groups and document reviews. By gathering data from a variety of sources, and using multiple methods, BI facilitated a meaningful and thorough examination of the functioning of the current training system. All of the analyses and recommendations included in this report are based on these data sources coupled with BI’s assessment of the findings. This section describes the development of the evaluation plan and the approach that BI used to collect the data. Finally, survey demographics are reported at the end of this section, while the survey results are reported in table format in Appendices E-H.

**Identifying key issues to be addressed**

A detailed evaluation plan was developed by the BI evaluation team project team through ongoing discussions with the Wisconsin Training Center staff, DCF and the Training Council based on the initial plan submitted in the proposal. The research questions identified by the Training Council during a planning meeting with Susan Kanak from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement formed the foundation for the focus of the assessment. The BI evaluation team held another planning session with the Training Council in July 2008 to further develop the assessment framework using the National Staff Development and Training Association’s *A Key to Success: Guidelines for Effective Staff Development and Training Programs in Human Service Agencies* as a guide. The issues that emerged were grouped across domains, each of which included a series of specific issues, questions, and methods of data collection. The organization of the domains in the evaluation plan was used to guide the development of the data collection instruments, including the individual questionnaires, focus group and interview protocols, and web-based questionnaires. The major questions for each domain are found in Appendix D.
Methods of Data Collection

Interviews

BI worked with the Wisconsin Training Council to identify interviewees, as well as sites and dates for interviews. The Training Center and regional Partnership staff contacted all interviewees to invite them to participate in individual interviews or focus groups and set up an interview schedule. BI emailed a confirmation letter with the interview questions to all interviewees prior to their scheduled interview. BI conducted interviews with thirty-two individuals and small groups of stakeholders who are involved in various ways with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training Program, including some members of the following groups: DCF, University partnerships, university faculty associated with the partnerships, Milwaukee CEO’s and Wisconsin county directors. In addition, BI interviewed eight training experts from other systems, including Pennsylvania, Washington state, Maine, North Carolina, New York, and California as part of the environmental scan (Appendix A).

All of the interview protocols reflected issues identified in the domains of the evaluation plan. Individual questions were tailored according to respondents’ experience with the Training System. For example, county directors were asked fewer, less detailed questions from the domain on curriculum development than were the Partnership training managers. Detailed questions about the Quality Service Review (QSR) were asked of people who were integrally involved in these processes. Individual interviews were conducted by the BI evaluators either in-person or by telephone and lasted from 30 minutes to four hours.

Focus Group Interviews

Fourteen focus group interviews were conducted with approximately 150 stakeholders across the state. Focus group participants included: county and private agency supervisors and caseworkers and county directors across the five partnership regions of Wisconsin (see Appendix B for a complete listing). Focus group interviews were conducted with 3 to 20 participants in each group. They were facilitated by a BI lead evaluator and a note-taker was present to record and transcribe the interview. For 12 of the focus groups, a BI researcher served as the note-taker. For two of the locations, (Green Bay and Eau Claire) a UW student was hired to take notes during the focus groups and transcribe the interviews.

Web-based Questionnaires

BI evaluators worked collaboratively with Training Council members to develop Web-based questionnaires for caseworkers, supervisors, county and tribal directors/managers, and trainers. Questionnaires were designed to gather stakeholder views on various aspects of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System based on the targeted domains for inquiry. Numbers of items on the questionnaires ranged from 40 to 51 Likert-style multiple-choice and open-ended questions, and took approximately ten to twenty minutes to complete. Demographic information such as years of child welfare experience, education, agency size, county, and region was also collected. Participants were not asked to include their name in order to maintain confidentiality of their responses. While the questionnaires were not anonymous since their email addresses could be tracked through Survey Monkey, respondents were assured of complete confidentiality of their responses. All data was collected and maintained through a password protected database at the Butler Institute, and only the BI evaluation team had access to the raw data through a private account with Survey Monkey.
Document Reviews

An integral part of this evaluation involved reviewing documents and materials pertaining to the Training System. These included, but are not limited to:

- Training Council Charter and the trainer development guidelines for Foundation trainers
- Training program job descriptions
- Examples of communications between the NEW Partnership and counties
- Selected Foundation curricula
- QSR principles

In addition, best-practice literature and source materials from other child welfare training systems were reviewed. A full listing of these can be found in Appendix C, Bibliography.

Data Analyses

Quantitative data from the Questionnaires was analyzed by Survey Monkey using frequency and descriptive analyses. These reports are presented in Appendices E through H. Qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed both at the statewide and the regional level to identify any regional issues or themes. Qualitative data from individual and focus group interviews were analyzed individually by the BI evaluation team for thematic pattern matching and key concepts. After the individual analysis, the evaluation team met for two days to compare and discuss the results. Together, the project team determined how best to incorporate the data into the final report.

Questionnaire data response rates and demographics

Caseworkers

Caseworker questionnaires were posted as a link on the eWdesktop by the eWiSACWIS section manager, so that caseworkers would see the link whenever they logged on to the system. In addition, agency supervisors and directors were asked to encourage caseworkers to complete the questionnaires. It is uncertain to what extent caseworkers were notified by their supervisors or directors about the questionnaire. There are an estimated 2000 to 2500 caseworkers in Wisconsin. The number of completed questionnaires was 511, suggesting a response rate of 20% to 26% (See Appendix E for Caseworker questionnaire results).

Caseworker respondents were represented across the state with 30% (129) from the Southern Partnership region, 29% (123) from the NEW Partnership region, 20% (85) from Milwaukee, 20% (84) from the Western region, and 2% (7) from ICW. Approximately 17% (83) opted to skip the question about their region. Almost 32% (137) work at small agencies with 1-15 staff, while 31% (133) work at agencies with 16-50 staff, 20% (85) at agencies with 51-99 staff, and 17% (74) are from agencies with more than 100 staff. Again, about 17% did not answer the question.
Both length of time at the agency and number of years in child welfare varied considerably. One quarter of caseworkers who responded (25%, n=108) have worked in their current position at their agency for more than 10 years, while 20% (88) worked there six to ten years, another 20% (88) worked there three to five years, 18% (79) one to two years and 16% (71) less than a year. About 15% (77) skipped the question. With respect to years in child welfare, 37% (158) have worked in the field more than 10 years, 25% six to ten years, 18% (78) three to five years, 13% (55) one to three years and 8% (35) less than one year. Almost 15% did not answer the question. A majority of the respondents (67%, n=294) reported that child protective services is their primary job. For those whose job is not primarily child protective services, they reported the following areas of work: Ongoing services (41%, n=120), initial assessment (33%, n=97), general services (3%, n=10) Access (6%, n=17), and “Other” (16%, n=47), which included foster adoption and licensing, more than one service area, resource unit and management. Forty-one percent of caseworkers hold a BS/BA degree (175), while 27% (114) hold a BSW, 21% (91) hold an MSW, 7% (31) have an MS/MA degree, and 4% (18) have other degrees.

Supervisors

Supervisor questionnaires were sent by the partnership directors to all of the supervisors in their regions. The number of supervisors in Wisconsin is roughly estimated at 500. A total of 241 supervisors completed the questionnaire, with an estimated response rate of 48%. (See Appendix F for questionnaire results). The greatest number of supervisor respondents were from Milwaukee (40%, n=67), followed by NEW (28%, n=47), then Southern (21%, n=35), and Western partnership region (12%, n=21). Information from the partnership indicates that NEW sent the questionnaire link to 69 supervisors (for a response rate of 68%) and Western partnership sent the link to 35 supervisors (for an estimated response rate of 60%). Data is not available yet from the other partnership areas to calculate regional response rates. Almost 30% (71) of respondents did not answer the question about region. It should be noted that this question might have been confusing for staff in the Southern partnership region since the DCF region is classified as Southern and Southeast. (See Appendix F for Supervisor Questionnaire Results.)

The agency size for supervisor respondents was evenly distributed, with 23% coming from an agency with 1-15 staff, 27% coming from an agency with 16-50 staff, 24% from an agency with 51-99 staff, and 26% from an agency with over 100 staff. There was also variability in the number of years working in the agency, with 18% (31) reporting working there for less than one year, 22% (37) for one to two years, 18% (31) for three to five years, 19% for six to ten years, and 23% (40) for more than 10 years. More than one quarter of the sample (26%, n=45) have worked in child welfare for more than 21 years, while about 8% (n=15) have been in the field for less than two years. Forty percent of respondents (68) hold an MSW degree, while 24% (42) hold a BA/BS degree, 17% (30) hold a BSW, 14% (24) hold an MA/MS, and 5% (8) reported “other.”

Trainers

Trainer questionnaires were sent by the partnership directors to all of the people who work as trainers in their regions. Since some train in more than one region, it is possible that some trainers received more than one email with a link to the questionnaire. The number of trainers is Wisconsin is not clear, although NEW partnerships reports sending the link to 19 trainers, and Western partnership sent the link to 14 trainers. We do not have information about how many trainers were sent the link in Milwaukee, the Southern region, or to ICW trainers. A total of 50 trainers completed the questionnaire, with 36 of them answering every question (See Appendix G for Trainer questionnaire results).
The majority of respondents reported being independent contractors (n=20, 59%), while only 9 reported being county employees (27%) and 5 reported being employed by the partnerships (15%). Interestingly, 16 trainers (32%) did not identify their employer, suggesting possible concerns about confidentiality of responses. The majority of trainers who responded to the question train part time (85%), while 15% train full-time. Approximately 34% of the total responders did not answer the question. The majority of trainers who responded train special skills and topics (82%), while 65% train Foundation courses, 18% train supervisors and 12% reported that they train “other” topics including Case Practice with Indian Tribes and ethics and boundaries.

Years of training experience among those trainers who responded to the question ranged from less than one to more than 10 years, with 6% reporting less than one year, 9% one to two years, 35% three to five years, 27% five to ten years, 24% more than 10 years (32% skipped the question). Of the questionnaires received, 11% were from trainers who held either a BA or a BS, 18% were from trainers with a BSW, 20% held an MA or MS degree, and another 50% held MSWs. Only 7 (15%) reported their highest educational degree as “other,” and 22 (44%) skipped the question.

Directors/Managers

The partnership directors sent an email to all of the child welfare agency and tribal directors, deputy directors and managers with a link to the questionnaires. Again, the number of directors and managers in Wisconsin who received the questionnaire is unclear. The Western partnership director sent the link to 28 directors, while the NEW partnership sent the link to 35 directors. If data from other regional partnerships becomes available on the number of directors that were emailed a questionnaire link, BI will be able to calculate an estimated response rate. The questionnaire was completed by 85 child welfare agency and tribal directors (See Appendix H for Director/Manager questionnaire results).

Of the directors who completed the questionnaire, 34% (24) were from NEW partnership, 30% (21) from Western Partnership, 29% (20) from Southern partnership, 6% from Milwaukee (4), and 1% (1) from ICW. It should be noted that in Milwaukee, the questionnaire was sent to the four CEO’s of the contract service agencies as there are no county directors. Many respondents reported working from small county agencies with 1-15 staff (46%; n=32), while 35% (24) work at agencies with 16-50 staff, 12% (8) at agencies with 51-99 staff, and 7% (5) at large agencies with over 100 staff. Only 16 (19%) skipped the question.

The greatest number of directors have worked at their agencies for more than 10 years (33%, n=23), while 20% (14) have been there for six to ten years, 23% (16) for three to five years, 19% (13) for one to two years, and only 4% (3) have worked at their agency for less than one year. Almost half of the directors have worked in child welfare for more than 21 years (43%, n=30), while almost 29% (20) have been in the field 11-20 years, 11% (8) six to ten years, 7% (5) less than a year to five years and 10% (7) have never worked in child welfare. Fifteen (17%) did not answer the question. Directors had a range of educational backgrounds, as 33% (23) hold MSWs, 30% (21) MA/MS degrees, 13% (9) BSW degrees, 19% (13) BA/BS degrees, and 6% (4) hold other degrees, including RN, JD, MPH and CSW.
FINDINGS

Domain I: Structure and Governance of the Training System

Description and Scope
This domain addresses how the structure and governance of the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System function in relation to its mission and goals. Its broad scope covers the following sub-domains:

1. overall design, organization, structure, components/entities and purview of the training program;
2. planning, decision-making and communication processes at the two levels of program operation; and
3. functions, tasks and roles.

Benchmarks
(standards of practice for Domain 1)

- There are clear statements of vision, mission, and values for the training system as a whole and these are actively employed during planning and decision-making processes. These are aligned with the Wisconsin Child Welfare service system, as embodied in both the state and county systems.
- The various components/entities of the training system (at both statewide and regional levels) are defined and the roles of each are clear in terms of the major functions: planning, decision-making, implementation of the many tasks, evaluation and ensuring accountability. There is a viable system for coordination and communication among the entities.
- There is a decision-making structure for the statewide training system that balances the need for broad input into decision-making and yet, when there is not a consensus, is able to make decisions that will be implemented across the system in a timely and verifiable way.
- The regional partnerships have systems in place for a) assessing and responding to constituency needs that may differ from other partnerships and b) contributing to statewide planning and implementation of training that is responsive to statewide training needs. Their assessment findings are incorporated into statewide planning.
- The tension between standardization and flexibility (i.e., to respond to statewide and regional needs) is recognized as both inherent and useful in a large state-supervised, county administered services system whose training system parallels this structure with state and regional partners. Because this tension is inherent and useful, the statewide training system includes mechanisms for identifying issues where this tension exists, negotiating, making decisions, and ensuring that decisions are followed. All partners recognize that compromise is often an essential element in finding solutions when differences of opinion persist.
- It is recognized that the Child Welfare system, (and thus the training system that serves it), must periodically balance the ideal of long-term planning with responsiveness to the need for quick change based on changes of direction in federal and state mandates, drops in funding, service delivery crises, etc. There are systems in place at both the statewide and regional levels to
make adjustments to the Strategic Plan as needed based on progress reviews and changes in the external environment of stakeholders.

✓ The statewide system has a set of criteria for decision-making that is responsive to various (and sometimes competing) mandates and interests so that each new issue can be considered within a framework of priorities that has been established and accepted ahead of time. For example, the criteria might address what kinds of training concerns (e.g., regarding curriculum content and delivery) are likely to be statewide in nature, and thus require standardization, and which are not (and can accommodate regional variations). Another criterion could be that specific identified federal and state mandates for service delivery are clearly addressed in training (and that a review of curriculum and delivery of training verify this).

✓ There is a statewide management and operations structure that has the resources and authority to conduct the activities associated with statewide planning, decision-making, implementation of tasks, evaluation and assuring accountability throughout the system. Positions within this structure have clear reporting lines and responsibilities.

✓ The statewide governance body (the Training Council) is clear about its purpose, role and span of control, particularly in relation to key functions such as planning and decision-making. The Training Council meetings (and the planning and follow-up) are primarily geared towards these functions. Other functions of the Training Council (such as information sharing) are identified and mechanisms are also in place (e.g., time set on agenda as needed and/or electronic newsletters and other means of communication).

✓ The statewide Training Council and regional advisory/decision making groups have clear plans for membership. Members take responsibility for participation.

✓ The statewide Training Council and regional planning groups have mechanisms to anticipate, identify, normalize, and overcome barriers that typically affect decision-making and other work efforts (differences of opinion about decisions and implementation strategies among stakeholders, insufficient resources, need for more expertise) and those that are inherent in growth and change, such as symptoms of distress within organizations and from stakeholders (lack of clarity about how work efforts fit together, discomfort with change, concern about implications for traditional work processes and products).

✓ There are both mechanisms and commitment in the statewide Training Council and the regional planning groups to share information and to elicit feedback and suggestions internally and externally.

✓ The regional Partnerships have a clear line of access and reporting responsibility to the state.

✓ Sufficient funds are allocated for the training program and they are under the control of the training program.

**Respondent viewpoints**

While there is overlap among these three sub-domains, the respondents’ opinions, based on questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, about them are provided here under each.
1. Overall design, organization, structure, components/entities and purview of the training program

Design, organization, structure and component/entities: Generally, respondents believe that the overall design, organization and structure of the training program is, or has the potential to again be, effective. However, recent growth and changes in how the system operates have led to concerns and also ideas about how to make improvements. The bases of both the support and concerns are identified here.

There is wide support for the structure of the training system as a partnership between the key entities: the local service delivery entities (meaning the counties and the tribes), the state, and the universities. The major advantages noted by multiple respondents were the following:

- This structure reflects the Child Welfare service system of a public, state-supervised, county administered system and the autonomy of tribal child welfare services. It provides a structural context of checks and balance that can both incorporate and mediate divergence of opinion.
- It makes use of the expertise and funding advantages of university involvement.
- The sharing of power motivates interest on the part of all partner groups to be involved (even when this is not fully achieved).

The concerns, questions and ideas expressed by some respondents are as follows:

- This structure, designed to balance power and to ensure input of the relevant stakeholders, has not always worked effectively, particularly recently. In an effort to move several large projects forward (e.g., developing a common worker Foundation training and a training/TA follow-up to QSR findings) in a timely way, some of the partnership processes have faltered. For example, some members have felt left out of communication loops and decision-making that in the past they would have been party to. Others have felt that the processes of the Training Council (considered by some to be drawn out and not oriented to decision-making) have impeded progress. One consequence of this is that some respondents have questioned the structure of the training system. Examples include:
  - Statewide Training Council: does is its size, composition or communication/decision-making processes interfering with effectiveness? For instance,
    - Is it too large to operate as a decision-making body? Should there be tiers to the Council, e.g., a large body to consider issues and provide input but a smaller body (a steering committee) to make decisions?
    - Does the consensus model for decisions still make sense? (Some respondents said that while laudable in terms of working from common purpose, it has led to impasse and then to unilateral decision-making when consensus isn’t reached).
    - Does the role of the Training Council need to be clarified, e.g., in relation to decision-making vs. an advisory capacity and, if the latter, is it advisory to the State or to the regional partners or both? This has become more of an issue in recent years as the state has increased its efforts to ensure statewide, standardized, timely training that is responsive to needs identified from the federal Child and Family Service Review and the state Quality Service Review.
• What is the purview of the Training Council in relation to training efforts, e.g., does it or should it address all training related issues? For example, should training needs identified by the state always be addressed by the Training Council, and if so, how? This is a major concern for many respondents. The example cited most often was the development of the post-QSR training. Some felt that the state tried to involve the Training Council but did not get timely cooperation on moving the project forward. Others felt that the state-initiated training ran an end run around the Training Council and has created a “shadow training system,” ill-will among partners, and fear that the state wants to take over the training system or at least minimize the power of the regional partnerships.

• What needs to happen if there is significant difference of opinion about how to (and even whether to) move forward on important initiatives? Examples include Foundation training, post-QSR training/TA, and two fundamental issues for training systems: a) establishment of a common set of core competencies and b) adoption of a uniform format for writing curriculum.

• What should be the outcome of decisions made in Council, i.e., what should be the process for assuring follow-up and accountability for the timeliness and quality of work based on decisions?

  o Relative authority of the State and the regional partnerships: the historical structure of the Wisconsin training system, developed based on the Institute for Human Services model, is designed to ensure that the regional partnerships are primarily focused on the needs of the counties/tribes within the regions as defined by these counties/tribes (or in the case of Milwaukee, the needs of the Bureau of Milwaukee). The statewide centralized functions, which generally are for the purposes of coordination, are now housed at the Training Center.

  As the training system has grown and the state has identified urgent needs (based largely on federal and state findings from quality reviews and sometimes resultant statute/policy), the autonomy of the regions has received more scrutiny. (One respondent noted that after the federal Child and Family Service Review, Wisconsin’s Program Improvement Plan was written to include training provisions and, as a result, “overnight” the role of DCF in relation to training became less about oversight and more about direction setting.) Virtually all interviewees and some focus group respondents noted this issue and agree on this explanation of the background. Also, there is nearly universal agreement that the University-based partnerships have been unwavering in their focus and commitment to trying to meet needs as defined by their counties/Bureau/tribes and that these efforts have been largely successful within budget/resource constraints. Implicit in this is that for the most part the regional partnerships see their constituency as their counties or tribes.

  However, respondents’ views differ with regard to the implications of the increased state involvement in the training system. These differing views tend to reflect how respondents view two other issues: 1) the degree to which training needs identified as statewide actually apply to regions and 2) whether statewide uniform training solutions are efficacious for all regions/counts. Those who are more aligned with regions tend to see many more problems with statewide training solutions and want more flexibility
and autonomy in implementing them. Those who are more involved with and responsible for addressing federal and state level law, policy and quality assurance findings are concerned that regional autonomy has the potential to undermine training efforts designed to ensure that all staff throughout the state reach a certain level of competency. Several respondents noted that Wisconsin, like all states, wants to ensure that client families receive services from competent staff wherever they live in the state. In addition, if workers receive consistent training across the state, if they move to another county or region in Wisconsin, they are prepared to serve families. This view values a consistent level of practice across the state, rather than “72 different ways of doing things”—an issue between states and counties that is much broader than training.

Both groups point to the same examples of this issue: 1) the processes for identifying the topics and curricula for the new Foundation training and 2) developing the post QSR training response. The former group feels there was unilateral decision-making that left them out while the latter group expresses frustration with trying to involve the partnerships in ways which would lead to timely decisions and actions about these two projects. Some from the latter group say that the structure of shared decision-making stalled significantly and has fostered a situation in which unilateral decisions had/have to be made in order to move work forward in a timely way.

- The specific roles/responsibilities of the Training Center staff (housed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and set up by DCF to manage the overall training program following the 2004 CFAR) have not been clearly defined, or at least there is not a uniform understanding of the role of the Training Center among respondents. Some see it as representing the whole training system, others see it as a delegated arm of the state, and still others say it functions as both. (One respondent spoke of the value of keeping the Training Center as a separate entity “in the middle of state-county issues” to mediate differences of opinion.)

With regard to the roles of the people who work at the Training Center, there is lack of clarity about the span of responsibility and control of the Training Coordinator – i.e., is the job to “coordinate” only or is it to also monitor and enforce? If the latter, is this limited to what is specifically stated in the partnership contracts or also to decisions made by the Training Council and or the state? Concurrently, there are questions about whether Partnership directors should report to the Coordinator and if so for what. Overall there is a question about whether the responsibilities held by the state (e.g., for contract monitoring) are being delegated to the Training Coordinator, and if not should they be?

The Training Center is seen by some partners as a vehicle to strengthen the state’s power in the training system and/or to strengthen the role of University of Wisconsin-Madison, where it is housed. Others see the Training Center as a much needed operations unit to move forward both the processes of the Council and other coordination and monitoring that must occur to achieve statewide quality training standards and to provide oversight for the contractual agreements between the state and the regional partnerships. Most respondents believe that the role of the Training Center, like the role of the Training Council, needs more discussion and clarification.

**Purview beyond Child Welfare:** The purview of the training system is an issue addressed by many respondents, specifically as to whether it should be expanded to include training on services delivered.
by counties beyond child welfare, e.g., Juvenile Justice and mental health. There is broad support for expanding the training system to address some of these issues (for instance the survey of county/tribal directors indicated 90% support for bringing Juvenile Justice under the tent and 74% to do the same with foster care, with declining but still majority support for mental health and substance abuse (see Appendix H for County/Tribal Director and Manager Questionnaire results). The major concerns expressed about expansion include the following:

- **Ability to respond to needs**: Funding for training in other areas (such as Juvenile Justice, mental health, adult protective services) is much scarcer than it is for Child Welfare. Expansion without resources can easily lead to more frustration.

- **Size and Current Functioning of the Training Council**: The size of the Training Council is already too big to be an effective decision-making body in the minds of many. Its current functioning is a source of frustration to them and while finding a way to conduct training for these other service programs is important, it’s not clear that simply expanding the purview of the Training Council as it now exists would help. However, since the services provided by counties go beyond Child Welfare, and because Training Council represents the training expertise of the system, it is the most likely home for an expanded training purview.

2. **Planning, decision-making and communication processes at the two levels of program operation**

   **State level**: The majority of respondents said that the planning and decision making processes at the state level have deteriorated over the past year or two. Among the concerns:

   - The Training Council functions less effectively as a planning and decision making group than it used to. Instead, more time is spent now on information sharing. While this information is about relevant training issues and programs, it isn’t typically used to address immediate planning concerns. This has left some respondents feeling that the key decisions are and will continue to be made elsewhere, namely by the state.

   - The planning and decision making that has occurred during the past year or two has not been as productive as in the years before that. Many respondents expressed frustration about the processes used to 1) select the focus of and curricula for the new Foundation training, 2) to implement post-QSR training, 3) to make decisions about adopting a standardized curriculum format, 4) to develop criteria to make decisions about the issue of standardization and customization of curricula, and 5) to adopt a standard set of competencies to guide all training development. Some of these respondents felt that they were being left out; others felt that efforts to involve key stakeholders led only to stalemates and thus untenable stalling of progress in several projects.

   - The process for setting the agenda for Training Council meetings has not been effective lately in terms of seeking membership input and getting agendas out in a timely way so that members who plan to attend can confer with their constituencies if needed or otherwise gather information.

   - Many respondents addressed what they saw as deterioration of communication between state level staff (DCF/Training Center) and regional partnership staff. Examples including the lack of information and input to Training Council agendas by regional partnerships and lack of information about decisions that are made by the state. Many respondents commented that
they would like to see better communication from the Training Council about current issues, processes and decisions. As one partnership director said, “It might be beneficial to have more regular communication for the Training Council – maybe quarterly?”

Some of the suggestions for improving communication were:

- Post Training Council agenda requests and agenda information to the website in time for people to respond and plan
- Post Training Council minutes on the website
- Post information about projects and issues on the website
- Convene Training Council meetings in different parts of the state.

**Regional level:** The great majority of respondents said that the planning and decision-making processes at the regional level work well and that the result is that the constituencies feel their input has been used effectively. Four of the five regions and the ICW have formalized methods in place to involve constituents in planning and decision-making, while the fifth region utilizes informal communication. A representative comment was made by one county director who noted that “a great deal of effort is made in getting feedback from directors, supervisors and direct service staff on the quality of training and the need for additional training.”

### 3. Functions, tasks and roles

**State level:** Many respondents indicated that there is confusion, overlap and gaps in this area that span both the state and regional levels. Some of these issues overlap with other domains and sub-domains but are addressed here as well in order to clarify the reason for Butler Institute recommendations.

- **Decision-making about which statewide training projects will be pursued:** Many respondents said that that several projects (e.g., post-QSR training and Foundation training) have made it apparent that there is not only a lack of clarity about how these decisions get made but also who makes them. Most respondents who commented on this area found this frustrating and want clarification. While several respondents warned that clarification could lead to unwanted decisions (e.g., the state will make the ultimate decisions), most said that it would be better to have clarity. Some said that in fact the outcomes (i.e., minimal regional partnership involvement in decisions about these two projects) indicate that the roles are clear, i.e., that the state does and will make a decision when it has concern about effectiveness and timeliness of Training Council decision-making.

- **Oversight and quality assurance of training material:** Many respondents who commented on this area said that the current process for developing statewide and regional training materials is uneven and that a statewide set of competencies and a statewide training material format (meaning a trainer’s manual and trainee materials such as handouts and PowerPoint) is needed. Others said that an alternative would be to have multiple acceptable formats, but that there should be a system for establishing criteria and guidelines. (See Domain III: Curriculum and Training Development for more detail.)

These functions have been assigned to the position of the State Curriculum Coordinator. However, the outcomes (a statewide set of competencies/learning objectives and one or more acceptable formats for training materials) have not been accomplished. Respondents indicate
that they are aware that this will be a significant amount of work and that expertise and protected time is needed to achieve this.

• Standardization of training materials: There is a great deal of concern about standardization of training materials. On the one hand, standardization of the materials provides one level of confidence that trainees across the state are being taught the same material and thus is a measure of a critical statewide need, i.e., to ensure that clients are served by competent workers wherever they live in Wisconsin. On the other hand, standardization can mean that legitimate county-level differences in practice are not addressed, and this leads to confusion of staff once on the job. Many respondents who spoke about this issue suggested that there needs to be a more formalized way of addressing these competing needs. As for now, the lack of oversight of delivery of common training (e.g., Foundation training) means that there is not a mechanism in place for assuring that the various modifications to Foundation training being made at the regional level still meet the needs for what should be uniform across the state. Again, this speaks to the importance of having a position within the structure to address this issue. This role seems to belong to the State Curriculum Coordinator but the authority and protected time to work on this do not appear to be available.

Regional level: Respondents report that communication at the regional level among the partners (university partnership staff and counties/tribes) generally is excellent (there were a few respondents who thought it was not quite this high but good). County staff at all levels (during interviews, focus groups and by survey) generally noted that partnership staff seek out their opinions in a variety of ways (formal and informal) and are responsive. Several noted that Partnership staff keep them informed about upcoming promising practices in the field and suggest ideas for training. Some noted that the low level of participation by county directors on the statewide Training Council may well reflect the fact that counties generally trust that the Partnership staff represent their opinions and can speak on their behalf.

Findings regarding benchmarks

The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System is recognized nationally as a model of partnership between the counties, state, and universities. It is the Wisconsin system that is used to illustrate the performance principle of “partnership” by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NCWROI) in its publication Building Effective Training Systems for Child Welfare Agencies (Kanak et al., 2008).

This recognition is well deserved even in light of the difficulties the system currently faces. The organizational structure does provide opportunity for sharing of power and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders. It has helped to produce a system of training in which the recipients of training and the agencies they work for are, for the most part, appreciative of the efforts made to meet their needs and highly satisfied with the results.

However, the growth of the system, including increased needs for training and for assurance of statewide quality and coverage of training topics, has strained the system significantly. The concerns include:
State level

1. **Balance of the relative interests and perspectives of the state and the county-university partnerships**: Over the past five years, Wisconsin, like many states, has seen rapid growth of its Child Welfare Training System in response to program review findings, legislative mandates, promising service delivery practices, and workforce demands. Large statewide projects (e.g., pre-service, a new Foundation training to replace Common Core, and Post-QSR training) have made demands on the existing system for timely development and rollout of training. Reorganization of the state Child Welfare system and high demands/crises in service delivery (such as has recently occurred in Milwaukee) have added to the stress and uncertainty that accompanies the change that is already inherent in this rapid growth.

Much progress has been made in the face of this systemic stress (e.g., development of a strategic plan, the training courses noted above and others course developed at the regional level). However, there has also been some increase in factionalism among the training system partners, in this case along the traditional lines that characterize most state-supervised, county-administered Child Welfare systems. In the past the regional university-county partnerships made almost all decisions about training in their regions. Recently the state, in response to concerns about findings from the CFSR and QSR, has made many decisions that affect training in the regions. Regional partnerships feel that not only has their authority been usurped to some degree, but that their expertise is not recognized and their close knowledge of local practice not valued.

The difference in orientation can be framed in light of two legitimate but sometimes competing concerns: uniform standards (the state) and customization (the counties), that is, the need to insure consistent statewide approaches and the need to insure that approaches are tailored to respond to meaningful differences in geographic areas of the state.

In Wisconsin (whose original Child Welfare Training system developed largely as county-led movement in one region of the state), the university-based training partners, are, for the most part, aligned with the counties in their regions and represent what they see as the counties’ perspectives in training decision-making. The counties/Bureau, for the most part, have a high level of trust in their university-based partners and, facing high demands in other program delivery areas, have de facto delegated much of their role in statewide decision making about training issues to their university partners. This has added to the university partners’ commitment to serving their counties/Bureau well by representing what they see as their interests when statewide issues are discussed. Thus, the inherent county-state tension tends to play out in decision-making about training as follows: the state is primarily concerned about achieving a high level of statewide training outcomes and the university partners are primarily concerned about insuring that these training outcomes are tailored for their counties.

Discussion of issues is conducted in this framework. (This is not to say that both the state and the university/county partnerships are unaware of or don’t appreciate the other interest, but just that in demanding and time-pressured circumstances, both tend to focus more on their own perspective and sometimes minimize the other. Nor is it to say that this is the only issue, but just that this is a critical factor in how the members of the training system approach decision-making.)
2. **Role of the Training Center**: There is not clarity about the role of the Training Center, especially in terms of a) development of statewide training-related efforts (such as standardized competencies, curriculum standards/formats, and common curriculum) and b) oversight and enforcement of decisions that affect regional implementation of both statewide and region-specific training. The lack of clarity is fueling frustration among many training system partners and eroding progress towards an important goal, i.e., a shared sense that collaborative approaches to finding solutions to training issues will work. Some of the university-based partnerships are concerned about partial loss of autonomy and less direct access to DCF as a result of a stronger Training Center role.

3. **Role of the Training Council**: There is not clarity about the role of the Training Council in terms of whether/under what conditions the decisions made by the Council are more than advisory to the state. In many instances the Training Council will make decisions by consensus, but when this is not the case, members are not clear about what the process is by which ultimate decisions will be made.

4. **Decision-making Structure of the Training Council**: The Training Council is large in order to be inclusive of the many stakeholders or their representatives. It has a subcommittee structure that works well for planning as well as, sometimes, getting work done on projects such as curriculum development. However, when the Council’s tasks involve decision-making, the Council structure is too large to operate effectively, especially when the goal is to reach consensus. The result has sometimes been that no decisions are made and time is spent rehashing issues without making progress. The consensus model of decision-making leaves some issues up in the air, without clear decisions made by the Council, and this leaves members unclear about what decisions will be made and by whom.

5. **Training Council Meetings Logistics**: Sometimes Training Council members are not receiving information about upcoming agenda issues in a timely way so that they can prepare for weighing in on decisions. There is not clarity about how to get issues onto upcoming meeting agendas.

6. **Single, Dual or Triple Track Training System**: There are three routes to the development and acceptance of curricula now operating in Wisconsin and these different paths and levels of acceptance have resulted in different curriculum tracks that are causing concern for many who want a more unified system. On the first path are training efforts that are known to and now supported by all members of the training system. These training efforts include those that are statewide and have nearly universal buy-in (pre-service); as well as those that are regional and are supported by the state. The latter include regionally developed trainings, some of which are used only in the region that developed them and some of which are now used by other regions as well). The second path is training that was initiated by the state and carried forward without full involvement or support by the Training Council and/or some of the regional partnerships (e.g. Foundation, post-QSR). While some initial concerns have been resolved and the projects are moving forward, the process was and continues to be frustrating for people on all sides of the issue. This, in turn, has slowed down, or in other ways impeded, the effectiveness of these projects. The third path is regional variations in statewide training (Foundation) that have not been through an approval process. In these cases neither the Training Council nor DCF can be assured that variations do not undermine statewide standardization efforts.
The role of the Training Council in relation to the second and third tracks is not clear. Resolving these issues would likely go a long way in establishing a clearer role for the Training Council overall.

7. **Staffing of Critical Centralized Training Functions in the Training Center:** There are several critical functions of the training system that need to be coordinated (and enforced) throughout the state, e.g., curriculum development and revision, trainer standards, and evaluation. For example, effective curriculum coordination involves ensuring that there is a standard set of competencies, one or more agreed upon curriculum formats, standards for content and training methods in curricula, established criteria for making decisions about how to address the “uniformity-customization” issue statewide, and oversight/problem-solving and enforcement for all of these. However, the current job description of the curriculum coordinator does not involve all of the needed functions. The Wisconsin Training System has assigned the coordination to one staff person at the Training Center (who also has additional assignments), and who has also tried to fill the gap by assuming a larger coordination role than formally identified in the job description. Performing all of the necessary functions on all relevant training projects is an extensive amount of work. There are not enough resources given the number and size of the curriculum projects. This has resulted in critical gaps in curriculum coordination functions on recent projects. This has left many stakeholders frustrated and worried that neither standardization nor customization has been adequately achieved.

8. **Partnership Contract Oversight:** In the past the state oversight of its contracts the university-based partnerships has been done at the State. One of the consequences of the rapid growth of the training system has been that the home for the responsibility for this oversight function has not been clear, i.e., is it still at the state, is it with the Child Welfare Training Coordinator in the Training Center, or is divided among the two? Bringing clarity to this would also ease frustrations.

9. **Expansion of Training Council Purview:** The issue of whether and if so how to expand the purview of the training system and the Training Council to effectively address the non-Child Welfare services administered by the counties is a justifiable concern for the Wisconsin Training System. For the most part these services (Juvenile Justice, mental health, etc.) do not have the training funding base that Child Welfare has, making it considerably more difficult to develop training. Yet, the training system that has been developed for child welfare is by far the most viable vehicle for such training.

10. **Where to House the Training System within the State Child Welfare Structure:** The lack of a clear home for all training related issues within the state Child Welfare structure is exacerbating the issues identified above. The lack of certainty about who at the state has the authority to make or delegate decisions and to conduct various oversight functions adds to the frustration about issues such as regional autonomy, balance of standardization and customization etc.

**Regional level**

At the regional level the formal processes developed by the partnerships for gathering input and doing planning are generally working well. The informal processes of one regional partnership are also working well; however, the eventual transition to new leadership would likely go more smoothly if a more formal process were in place before the current partnership director left.
One area which should be improved in some regions is the partnership director’s focus on state-defined issues as part of the planning and decision-making. To some extent some partnership directors and their staff minimize state-defined training issues during their planning processes with their constituencies. They are not sufficiently seeing themselves as part of a larger whole – each partnership needs to see statewide concerns and DCF as part of their scope and constituency. On the other hand, DCF needs to clearly define and articulate state-defined training priorities to all partners in the training system.

**Domain II: Professional Development Continuum**

**Description and scope**

Traditionally, states have focused a great deal of attention on offering high quality pre-service or in-service classroom training to all levels of staff, often in relation to a competency-based system of needs assessment. This is still a key component of a well functioning training system. However, in recent years the role of training has begun to expand to encompass a broader definition of training as a continuum of professional development activities strategically aligned with agency practice and outcome goals. More and more, training systems are being aligned with agency practice models as part of a coherent system in which the same set of competencies drives the recruitment, selection and training of staff, as well as the reinforcement and development of skills on the job. There also has been an increasing focus on the impact of training on practice, in part driven by the federal Child and Family Services review process, as well as a growing recognition of the role of training in promoting staff retention and supporting other organizational goals (Martin, Barbee & Antle, 2003; Curry, McCarragher & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; Robinson & Robinson, 1998; cited in A New Key To Success, NSDTA, in press; Kanak, Baker, Herz & Maciolek, 2008). While still providing an important tool for preparing competent child welfare staff, traditional classroom training is now seen as only one component of an integrated system of activities which may include web-based training, on-the-job training, mentoring programs, etc.). These activities serve as a bridge to staff selection and recruitment on the front end; for example through an alignment of selection criteria with key competencies identified with job success (Bernatovicz, 2001; Graef & Potter, 2002) or closer connections with BSW and MSW programs. They also offer a potential bridge to practice improvement and improved child welfare outcomes post training.

**Benchmarks**

**Strategic alignment:**

- There is a training plan in place that is aligned with the organization’s strategic goals and objectives.
- The training continuum relates to and reinforces the agency practice model/practice principles.

**Planning:**

- The organization has a training plan that is based on regular and systematic needs assessments, review of previous strategic plans (if any), policy requirements, and broad stakeholder input.
- The training plan includes strategies for addressing current and future workforce competency needs and skill gaps,
The training plan outlines specific expectations regarding training required of personnel in different positions and categories.

There is an organizational level decision-making protocol to determine priorities and allocate resources.

There is a process at the employee level for determining needs and developing individual training plans.

**Range of professional development options:**

- There is an integrated program of orientation and pre-service training for new employees in all classes of positions (administrative support, direct service, program specialists, supervisors and managers) which provides intensive skill-oriented training to prepare/enable employees to assume job responsibilities.

- There is an integrated program of in-service training for new and experienced employees in all classes of positions (administrative support, direct service, program specialists, supervisors and managers) which provides intensive skill-oriented training to enable employees to carry out job responsibilities.

- Continuing professional development opportunities exist for all levels of staff to:
  - fulfill the continuing education requirements within their respective professions and agencies,
  - support job enrichment, personal growth and career advancement.

- Professional development opportunities are based upon agency needs and the findings from employees’ individual development plans.

**Transfer and practice improvement:**

- Linkages to practice improvement.

- The agency promotes and supports transfer of learning principles and activities.

- The training program develops and supports a cadre of coaches and mentors, drawn from all levels of the agency, to reinforce good practice.

**Domain II.a.: Strategic alignment and planning**

**Respondent viewpoints**

The training program in Wisconsin, as in many states, has focused initially on providing high quality classroom training to child welfare staff on a range of topics. Regional training partnerships in collaboration with DCF and the counties and tribes in their area, are responsible for planning, developing, and providing training that is aligned with local needs and is responsive to state and federal policy. These partnerships, DCF, and other public and private agencies also make up the Training Council which provides a forum for collaboration and integration across the training system.

Feedback from focus group and interview participants generally indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the connection between the training offered and their job-related needs. Many respondents
mentioned the responsiveness of the regional training partnerships to the counties as a significant strength of the training system and expressed strong support for maintaining the partnership role. In the words of one online respondent “I believe one of the greatest strengths of the training partnerships is counties having direct input into and involvement in, identifying training needs and training priorities.” Another respondent commented “It’s a very open system allowing flexible responses over time to the perceived needs of the counties.” Most respondents from the counties also found the training to reflect practice realities well. One respondent described training as “directly related to practice standards and expectations” and another cited the trainings’ “direct relevance to day-to-day work.” An exception to this came from one partnership, where some participants felt that training didn’t sufficiently take into account their practice environment, and the challenges they faced in trying to implement the “best practices” taught in training in a job setting characterized by significant resource issues and high turnover.

Respondents indicated that a range of planning mechanisms is used to determine what courses will be offered. Statewide, the Child Welfare Training Council has a strategic plan in place for training which is currently scheduled to be updated pending the results of this evaluation. This plan lays out goals for the training system and assigns a lead on each goal to the full Training Council or one of its subcommittees. Progress toward these goals is laid out in a series of annual reports. Since January 2008 there has also been statewide policy on training requirements. According to interviewees, a great deal of planning also takes place at the Partnership level and QSR reviews provide a third mechanism for determining counties’ training needs.

Mechanisms at the Partnership level vary from informal, with communication taking place at supervisors’ and managers’ meetings as needed, to more formal processes, involving local boards and/or steering committees. Some respondents from the partnerships indicated that they survey their counties periodically as an additional means of setting training priorities. Interviewees mentioned using a combination of state and local priorities in making decisions about what training to offer. For example, one partnership reported using a combination of Training Council decisions, local partnership steering committee input, informal input from staff and trainees, and direct input from the state to guide their planning about training. Another mentioned additional screening for whether or not the requested topic was really a training issue, how widespread the issue was and whether or not the proposed training was IV-E eligible. Respondents were not aware of a common set of competencies derived from an agreed upon practice model that could be used to guide the development of a coordinated set of training offerings for staff at various levels. One respondent commented that one of the partnerships had begun developing a set of learning objectives, but that work on these stopped when the state adopted the curricula that form the basis for Foundation training. A few people mentioned that the I.H.S. competencies had originally been used as a structure to guide course development but were not widely used at this time, and at least one respondent felt that the lack of an agreed upon set of common objectives was a significant problem in planning for and developing training. One respondent described the current situation with respect to a guiding set of training competencies as “chaotic.”

As with several training programs across the country, Wisconsin’s program has begun to grapple with the optimal balance between meeting local and statewide training needs. Although most respondents saw the responsiveness of the partnerships to local training needs as a key strength, a number of participants mentioned a need for some training to be standardized statewide. They cited a need for consistency in certain key areas for purposes of accountability and for economies of scale in a tight resource environment. Several people acknowledged a tension between the need for consistency in at least some trainings and a desire to maintain the flexibility and responsiveness to local differences
afforded by the partnerships. As one respondent put it “our system has focused on pleasing the consumer but also should be evaluating the needs of the system.” Participants who mentioned the need for standardized training felt that the most appropriate courses to be developed and delivered as statewide trainings were the foundational pieces for various levels of staff. A few respondents also indicated the need for a common competency model statewide to guide the development of training and some cited confusion and tension arising from differences in sets of objectives originating from the partnerships and DCF. One respondent mentioned making changes in agency job descriptions and Human Resources evaluations to tie in with worker competencies and would favor a statewide competency model that could be used to tailor professional development plans.

Participants also offered feedback on linkages between training and university-based professional education programs. In recent years the training system and university-based BSW and MSW programs have begun to develop strategic linkages to forge closer connections among the educational preparation provided to students interested in entering the public child welfare arena, the job focused preparation provided by the training program and the needs of the counties for a skilled workforce. Respondents in Wisconsin cited instances of these linkages, for example: integration of material from training into university curricula, attendance of university faculty at training and participation in development of the pre-service training curriculum, sharing of instructional materials, use of training system staff and trainers to teach courses or provide guest lectures, completion of pre-service training as part of the IV-e program, and attendance at Training council meetings.

Respondents also commented that universities varied in how closely connected they were to the training system. In most regions, the relationship is defined as excellent. However, at least one respondent characterized the relationship of one partnership and the School of Social Work as being at “arm’s length” and another talked about “bad blood” between the local School of Social Work and the training system. However, respondents also acknowledged that the relationship had improved recently. Another respondent mentioned the need for a better integration of stipend programs with their training system and their long term plan for workforce development. This point was seconded by others who advocated an expanded focus by the training system on workforce education. Over 60% of trainers surveyed (20) agreed that greater access to new research on child welfare practice would help them further develop their skills as trainers.¹ A number of interview respondents indicated that the universities have expertise in this area, although one commented that the extent to which this expertise has been connected with the training program has differed.

Findings regarding benchmarks

The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training Council has taken several steps to promote the strategic alignment of the training system with state and county needs and goals. Wisconsin has a strategic plan in place for training, initially approved in 2002. This plan was developed with stakeholder input from DCF, and counties and tribes through the training partnerships. It lays out major goals for the training system and assigns a lead on each goal to the full training council or one of its subcommittees. Progress toward these goals is laid out in a series of annual reports and objectives are updated to reflect past progress and emerging needs of the system. A process for developing a full update to the plan was begun in 2007 and will be completed after this report is submitted. Documents indicate that DCF uses the strategic

¹ Agreement is defined as selecting the “Agree” option on a 5 point scale on which 1=“Disagree,” 2=“Disagree Somewhat,” 3=“Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4=“Agree Somewhat,” and 5=“Agree.”
plan to guide contracting with the training partnerships, and that the regional steering committees have used it to guide local action plans for the partnerships. The system also has policy on pre-service, Foundation, and in-service training requirements for case workers and supervisors, which is laid out in HFS 43 administrative rule, implemented in February 2008. Much of the current strategic plan deals with meeting goals related to these requirements. A second connection between the training system and the goals of the child welfare agencies occurs through the post-QSR training, which is designed to directly address county practice and improve outcomes.

Although much has been done to align training with agency priorities, the strategic plan and other documents that provide direction for the training system are in need of updating and expansion to promote an integrated process for assessing needs, planning and developing training offerings, and providing a protocol for an allocating resources. The current strategic plan provides broad goals for the training system. It also lays out requirements for pre-service and new worker Foundation training. This document, together with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System document adopted in 2005, emphasize the need for a coordinated training system. The 2005 document also discusses using the ITNA as a common framework for assessing individual training needs both at Foundation and advanced levels (although the partnerships are free to meet needs differently beyond Foundation).

Recently, the training system has been moving away from consistent use of the ITNA model and has been moving toward use of a different set of more skills oriented practice principles in the Foundation and post-QSR training. However, there is not universal buy-in to this model and there is lingering resentment on the part of some who saw the process of adoption of these principles as a unilateral decision by DCF. Respondents in Milwaukee also indicated having their own practice model that they feel meets their needs. Interviewees reported a variety of needs assessment mechanisms that work well locally. However, while the current assessment process is clearly responsive to emerging needs in the counties, there does not appear to be a systematic statewide needs assessment process that would help the Training Council plan and set priorities.

Respondents reported concerns about how the process of adopting a new practice model is evolving. At present there is no one agreed upon model, nor is there a set of staff competencies that are aligned with agreed upon practice principles, that can provide a framework for training and staff development activities. This has contributed to concerns about QSR training as a “shadow system” and concerns about duplication of effort and gaps as partnerships develop training.

A common competency model with broad-based buy in would foster the development of an integrated planning process and a series of training and professional development offerings that complement rather than duplicate each other. It is also needed to facilitate the connection of the post-QSR training with the rest of the training system, and connections among the university-based professional education programs, the training program and the counties to address future workforce needs.

Domain II.b.: Range of professional development options

Respondent viewpoints

In Wisconsin the professional development continuum consists of the following elements: MSW and BSW degree programs, Title IV-E stipend programs, web-based pre-service training, classroom training
(Foundation training for new workers, advanced classroom training options for experienced workers), and transfer of learning (QSR follow-up, Milwaukee mentoring, supervisor orientation in NEW). Much of the recent focus has been on development of pre-service and Foundation training for new caseworkers. Common Foundation training for supervisors and foster parents are in the planning and development stages. At this time there are training requirements in place for caseworkers and supervisors outlined in HFS 43. There has been a process in place for an individual needs assessment and planning of professional development, the Individual Development Plan (IDP). However, familiarity with the IDP varied among respondents. Some reported using it with their supervisors to plan for their training needs. Others reported that it was not used.

**Availability of training for new workers:** The majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with available training for new workers, specifically the pre-service and Foundation components of the system. Over seventy percent of caseworkers (72.2%) who responded to the online survey indicated that training workshops offered a sufficient variety of topics to meet their training needs. A similar percentage (73.4%) of supervisors surveyed, and 95.7% of county directors and managers agreed that training met the needs of their workers. Some concerns were raised in the individual and focus group interviews regarding gaps in the Foundation curricula, most notably in the area of case planning. When asked about what additional topics might be needed in Foundation training, a number of focus group respondents mentioned organizational training, time and workload management, mental health, alcohol and drug issues, and domestic violence. Respondents would also like to see more options available for workers with Juvenile Justice responsibilities, but recognized that this may not be possible given current funding requirements. (Appendices E, F, & H).

**Experienced Workers:** Most respondents agreed that there are far fewer options available for experienced workers than for new workers. For example, two people who had been on the job for four years commented that they had taken all of the training available to them. An online respondent stated “For agencies with senior/long term staff it is often a challenge to locate advanced training opportunities as well as training to assist them in moving beyond the old way of doing things,” and when asked how the training system could be improved to better meet the needs of your agency, a second responded “more advanced training for experienced workers.”

In 2000 UW Green Bay received funding from the Children’s Bureau to develop and implement a supervisor training and mentoring project. NEW Partnership worked with consultants to pilot the peer-mentoring program with county child welfare supervisors in Northeast Wisconsin, and to continue it currently. Based on supervisor feedback, peer-mentoring meetings were integrated into the regional supervisors meetings (in both the northeast region and northern region). Peer mentoring meetings continue to be held at each Northeast and Northern Regional Supervisor Meeting. Peer mentoring meetings have been ongoing since 2004. Additionally, every new supervisor in NEW Partnership is contacted, provided information about peer mentoring and invited to attend meetings. Peer mentoring coordinators (lead supervisors) provide new supervisors a copy of the peer-mentoring manual: Supervision and Mentoring in Child Welfare Services.

Respondents discussed the type of training they would like to see for experienced workers. A few commented that what is available is too topical and compliance focused. One person raised the need for a beginning, intermediate and advanced sequencing of courses to support a career ladder. Another mentioned a desire for advanced core training that would take place after about two years on the job.
and would be more “hands on” and more focused on how to do the job. Others expressed a need for brief and focused “refreshers.” This point was echoed by supervisors who felt that there was a need for experienced workers to learn about the topics and skills now being covered in Foundation. Another theme that emerged was a desire for more cross systems training and more training of caseworkers with foster parents. Milwaukee participants also expressed a need for more training across job areas and functions as their jobs tend to be more specialized.

There were few differences in reported training needs between CPS and non-CPS caseworkers. For example participants in both groups agreed that training offered enough variety of topics to meet their needs (73% CPS and 71% non-CPS). CPS workers were slightly less likely to agree that trainings are scheduled frequently enough to meet their needs (77% CPS; 72% non-CPS) and that Foundation training improved their ability to do their job (38% CPS; 34% non-CPS) as well as specialized training offered through the training program (42% CP; 37% non-CPS). compared to those who were not primarily CPS workers.

Specific topics that respondents (questionnaire, interview and focus group) would like to see advanced training on included:

- Substance abuse
- New standards and topics such as the new safety assessment and QSR model
- Time and workload management
- Legal issues
- Sexual abuse
- Interviewing children, especially communicating with teens and young children
- Foster care issues
- Medical issues
- Secondary trauma
- Mental health
- Multidisciplinary training with groups such as law enforcement and the schools
- Culture
- Adoptions

**Availability of training for supervisors and administrators:** The majority of supervisors who responded to the online survey agreed that available training met their needs (64.8%). Most county managers and directors surveyed also agreed that the workshops offered met their own needs (78.6%) and the needs of their supervisors (84.3%). Individual interview and focus group participants mentioned that directors and managers usually were given information through overviews at regular meetings, and in one region, at one to two day trainings held at local hotels. Respondents also pointed out that basic training is available for supervisors, although a statewide supervisory Foundation series is still in development. Some regional partnerships offer supervisory Foundation trainings originally developed by the NEW Partnership, which those who had participated in found to be excellent. The Milwaukee Partnership currently offers training for new supervisors that also received favorable reviews from respondents. Others found policy information needed for their jobs on Partnership websites and a few supervisors
had attended the caseworker pre-service or used it as a resource and felt that it provided them with good information. Participants also mentioned that the state was conducting roundtables on ACCESS for workers and supervisors. (Appendices F & H).

However, several people mentioned the need for more training specifically for supervisors and administrators; for example, “Although supervisors and administrators can attend most of the trainings if they so choose, it seems that trainings specifically designed for supervisory and administrator types are few and far between.” Respondents felt that there were some good options for new supervisors, but that more training would be helpful, particularly for experienced supervisors and for those making a transition to a supervisory or management position. One respondent commented that more should be done with directors around working with supervisors since they are key to practice change. Another commented that “the current workshop on Leadership for Administrators is a good start, however some administrators struggle with personnel type issues, especially those who came up through the ranks and now find themselves in a leadership position.”

When asked what additional training would be helpful for them, supervisors and directors mentioned the following:

- Teaming
- Helping workers deal with burnout, secondary trauma
- Management skills (e.g., fiscal issues, MOUs, budgeting, grant writing, personnel/Human Resources, organizational change)
- Cultural competency
- Help with coaching and mentoring for self and with their workers (e.g. grand rounds case staffings)
- Transference and counter transference in the supervisory role
- Leadership development for both supervisors and managers. Also, a track for those interested in a future management position. How to move from being a peer to being a supervisor.

Supervisors and more experienced workers also mentioned that they would like the opportunity to attend conferences to further their professional development.

**Availability of training for other groups:** Focus group and interview respondents also pointed out a need for more training for parent aides/paraprofessionals and for foster parents and relative caregivers. Respondents in some regions stated that the extent to which aides are able to attend caseworker training vary across regions. A few respondents commented that caseworker training often isn’t applicable or required, and that a basic training for these workers is needed. Topics suggested included: identifying potential safety concerns during home visits, boundary issues, cultural issues, and maintaining a non-judgmental attitude. With respect to foster parents, very little was mentioned except in one region where a curriculum from I.H.S. was being adapted. Respondents commented that they would like to see more training that involved caseworkers and foster parents together. However, it should be noted that this assessment was not focused on foster parent training and there were no direct questions about this topic.

Participants were also asked for their views on using distance learning and web-based training options. Most participants indicated that they were not aware of distance learning options, with the exception of
the pre-service training, which most found to be high quality and an effective and easy way to get information. Many of those interviewed commented that they saw a need for more distance learning options, especially in view of shrinking budgets. One respondent commented that web-based training was a “godsend” because counties are unable to send workers away for weeks at a time. Ways in which respondents thought that web-based and distance learning technology could be used effectively were:

- To supplement and reinforce classroom training
- For supervisor support, peer networks, and TOL, and
- Web-conferencing

However, a sizeable number of respondents expressed a preference for face-to-face training. They cited a need for networking, the importance of learning from peers in a classroom, concerns about the effect of distractions when completing a training in the office at a computer, and concerns about the facilities and resources needed to deliver more of this training. One respondent felt that it was not needed in their region which was “resource rich” and did not require traveling long distances to training. Another felt that the workers in her region would not accept it and commented that computer technology is available to workers but is not used.

**Findings regarding benchmarks**

The training system has made a strong start to laying out an integrated system of pre-service and in-service (Foundation) training for new workers, supervisors and foster parents. Training requirements for workers and supervisors are in place. Pre-service training has been developed for case workers and has been well received. Foundation training has been developed and implemented for caseworkers, foster parent Foundation training has been completed, and Foundation training is under development for supervisors. Areas for possible future development as resources permit include: articulating training requirements for other levels of staff, such as case aides; expanding the professional development options available to experienced staff and supervisors, exploration of other professional development options in addition to face-to-face classroom training, and implementation of a consistent process for determining individual needs and constructing individual development plans that meet the needs of the agency.

**Domain II.c.: Transfer and practice improvement**

In this area, participants were asked to comment on supervisory and agency support for transfer of training, as well as specific activities and initiatives designed to promote practice change.

**Respondent viewpoints**

**Support for training and transfer:** Most respondents indicated strong support for training at higher levels within county agencies. All of the county directors or managers who responded to the online survey indicated that they supported staff attending training. Over 60% of caseworkers and supervisors surveyed agreed that agency directors and managers were supportive of their attending training (63.1% and 61.4%, respectively). One interviewee mentioned the financial contribution to the training system made by the counties and their history of active involvement in training. Trainers come from the counties, and in some cases, counties provide training space.
Supervisor support for attending training as well as for transfer of learning on the job was seen as more variable. Workers’ perceptions of supervisor support for attending were generally positive but varied somewhat by county. Most said that when supervisors did not support their attendance at training it was more an issue of coverage than of not valuing training.

Respondents reported that support for training varied with individual supervisors. While some supervisors meet with their workers to discuss the pre-service modules or the participant action plans they filled out at training, others do not talk to their supervisor about training at all. Of caseworkers who responded to the online survey 44.6% agreed that their supervisor encourages them to use the skills learned in training on the job and 44.1% agreed that agency managers and directors were supportive of using skills learned in training on the job. Additional comments suggested that supervisors may not know what to do to support transfer for their workers. This view was supported by supervisors who participated in the focus groups who indicated that they would like to know more about coaching and mentoring strategies as well as what workers were learning in training.

**Activities and initiatives:** Wisconsin has undertaken specific initiatives statewide, in the NEW partnership and at the Bureau of Milwaukee that support transfer and organizational change. Following the initial federal Child and Family Service Review (CSFR), DCF began a Quality Service Review (QSR) process with the counties to evaluate practice and identify strengths as well as areas in which to target interventions that would lead to better performance on the federal outcome indicators. Respondent feedback generally characterized the QSR process as working well in identifying and addressing county training needs and in providing targeted training plans and interventions to improve practice and foster organizational change. Specific comments included:

- QSR should be expanded to become part of a larger continuous quality improvement effort.
- QSR training is more effective than the Foundation training provided to new workers in that it identifies where counties struggle and can be focused and adaptable in addressing the issues.
- It allows coverage of some of the same skills at different levels, e.g. basic for new staff and more deeply for veterans.
- QSR is completely compatible with the Milwaukee practice model and provides a “good marriage” to reinforce frontline workers’ understanding. It helps identify what is working and why. Other training is not as practice focused.

Several respondents commented on the way the QSR process has evolved. Opinions were varied and frequently differed based on the role of the respondent. For example, several of the respondents from the partnerships and their regions expressed concern that the post QSR process was a dual or “shadow” training system and one respondent disagreed with the specific practice principles selected. They also voiced some frustration and anger with the way in which the system was put in place. They commented that DCF did not discuss the QSR process with the partnerships, and does not take sufficient advantage of local partnerships’ knowledge of their counties and ability to coordinate efforts where similar needs exist across their regions. One person also stated that the post-QSR was “thrown together” too quickly and the rollout process was poorly designed in that not enough communication took place with the partnerships. This person went on to say that the idea is good, but that counties do not receive enough follow-up after the initial intense review.
These views differed from those expressed by others, particularly respondents from DCF, who reported that the partnerships were not originally interested in participating in the QSR training although they were asked to provide someone to work with the QSR trainer hired by the state. One partnership respondent disagrees with the assertion that they were not cooperative, and argues that they have tried to convince DCF to allow them to provide post-QSR training to groups of smaller counties. On this point, there seems to be a philosophical difference between this particular partnership and DCF about the extent to which post-QSR training should be individualized for each county. One DCF representative asserts that the reason that the QSR process was instituted in the first place is to offer counties individualized technical assistance and training based on their unique needs as diagnosed by the QSR review that is different from the standard training offered by the partnerships.

There were also differences of opinion regarding the skills needed by the trainers who would be involved in QSR and how they would be prepared to respond to county needs. One respondent expressed concern regarding the unwillingness of the partnerships to require their trainers to participate in the QSR certification process and another spoke of the need to move more quickly than the partnerships were able to.

Despite differing views of the effectiveness of the initial post QSR design and rollout, several respondents commented that there are now more points of contact between the QSR process and the partnerships and that the process was working more smoothly now than in the beginning. Respondents from both the state and regional stakeholders mentioned that partnership directors from some of the regions are attending post QSR meetings. They also mentioned that there has been some teaming of partnership trainers with the QSR trainer which has the benefit of combining local knowledge with an overall systems perspective. Several respondents also commented that they would like to see additional integration of QSR and partnership training.

Milwaukee has implemented a mentorship model. Respondents indicated that new workers are assigned to a supervisor mentor while in their training team for the first 4 to 6 months of their employment. Each agency has at least one training team with approximately 6 workers per team. While on the training team, workers have fewer cases and mentors are available to help with day-to-day tasks, accompany workers on home visits and to court, and provide on the job training and transfer of learning follow up for formal training. During this time, new workers also begin working with their permanent supervisor and may attend unit meetings or shadow their mentor, supervisor, or a more experienced worker. Respondents felt that the mentors were helpful and responsive. However, they also pointed out that the high turnover in Milwaukee sometimes prevents all new hires from having needed access to the training teams and mentors. One focus group participant underscored the importance of having this type of support by describing her experience as a new hire. She described a 45 day window when no new hires could be assigned to a training team since they were full, and how some new workers had even quit the job because of the lack of support. She had been in the job for a year with no training or supervisor support and little mentor support and described feeling overwhelmed and unable to manage her workload.

**Findings regarding benchmarks**

Wisconsin clearly has strong support for training from the county agencies. The close connections between the counties and the partnerships, and the counties’ and tribes’ active participation and monetary support have been invaluable in initiating and growing the system from the grassroots.
However, as in many systems, there is a disconnect between an appreciation for the value of training and the reality of translating this support into daily activities that foster transfer of learning and reinforce good practice. Like many others, Wisconsin supervisors struggle with competing priorities and often feel that they lack the time to keep abreast of what their workers are learning in training and the tools to coach and mentor them in applying new skills.

Training programs are moving toward greater integration of training with practice through such means as on the job training, mentoring, and peer coaching. This new direction has developed in part in response to a greater emphasis on outcomes coming on the heels of the federal reviews. Wisconsin has some of these pieces in place with the Milwaukee mentoring program and post-QSR training. These efforts offer a great deal of promise in extending professional development beyond the classroom and making meaningful practice changes. The partnerships have also made available tools for supervisors to use to support transfer of learning such as summaries of course content on the web, and participant action plans. These efforts would be further strengthened by integration of the post-QSR and other training into a continuum of activities in support of common competencies and objectives.

**Domain III: Curriculum Development**

**Description and Scope**

This domain addresses the Wisconsin Training System’s processes for developing or selecting training curricula, including those that are used statewide and regionally. These processes include the planning (statewide and regionally) for which curricula should be developed (discussed under Domain II). The term “curriculum” is used here to include the written trainer manual, all trainee material, audiovisual materials/PowerPoint slides, and support materials such as props.

**Curriculum development encompasses processes for the following:**

- Identifying the audience(s) and general focus of needed training (e.g., “case planning” or “engaging families”).
- Identifying the scope of the training. This often begins with a list of topics, followed by the relevant competencies/learning objectives. Deciding on the specific focus for the curriculum may involve reviewing and selecting from an existing set of overall competencies and learning objectives (if they exist) and/or developing more specific learning objectives for the training. These should be aligned with any practice models or principles that guide agency practice. This honing of competencies and learning objectives utilizes needs assessment data gathered during a variety of formal and informal processes, for example, review of job descriptions, state and federal law, findings from quality service delivery/program reviews (CFSR and QSR), input from stakeholders (staff, families, other Subject Matter Experts), and scanning best practice literature, with best practice most frequently defined as evidence informed.
- Identifying content to include in the curriculum in order to address the competencies and learning objectives (utilizes the same reviews as described above).
- Developing training methods to meet the competencies and learning objectives (for example, skill competencies need different training methods than do knowledge competencies).
• Writing curriculum in an established format (one that has been accepted by and is in general use throughout the training system). Sometimes more than one format has been approved by the training system.

• Having and utilizing a set of criteria to make decisions about identifying optional and required content and training methods. This is part of how training systems address the issues of standardization and customization.

• Having a process for finalizing curricula, including:
  o a formative evaluation process (whereby stakeholders first review and critique a written curriculum and then observe and critique piloting of the curriculum),
  o criteria and a process for curriculum revision, and
  o final acceptance by an identified key stakeholder group (so that the curriculum is formally approved).

• Having a curriculum development plan to accomplish all tasks in a timely way. This involves decisions about timeframes, authors, advisory committee input, instruments and plan for formative evaluation, revision criteria, etc.

• Having a plan for how and under what conditions revisions will be made (often such criteria involve issues such as a significant change in policy or procedure, significant best practice, and a periodic review, e.g., one every three years).

• Having a plan and process for dealing with the standardization and customization of statewide curricula. This issue addresses content (including case illustrations, county-specific practice, and relative weight given to various content pieces), training methods, and format of the curriculum.

Curriculum selection: Sometimes, as an alternative to developing new curricula, training systems opt to find and select existing curricula and to modify them as needed. This is becoming a more viable option now that more training curricula are developed throughout the country and made available for others to use (e.g., some training systems such as CalSWEC put full curricula online).

In selecting curricula, training systems go through a process that has similarities to writing curricula, e.g., identifying which topics/competencies they want to address, reviewing existing curricula to identify where policy and practice differences exist and where changes of emphasis are needed (in content and/or methods), making a plan for how to address these in a revision, adapting the format of the curriculum if needed to meet the state’s format, and then carrying out the same processes for formative evaluation, piloting, and revision.

Benchmarks
The benchmarks are addressed in four areas: processes for development or selection of curricula, curriculum content, training methods, and format for the curriculum.

Processes for Development or Selection of Curricula

✓ A group/committee of key stakeholders is charged with the responsibility of working the process of either development or selection through to the final curriculum product. This group is clear about its responsibility (e.g., what resources it has at its disposal; what the criteria for making decisions about issues such as content, methods, and standardization/customization are; and
whether its authority about the final product is making decisions or recommendations, and if the latter, to whom).

✓ There is a lead author who is responsible to this committee.
✓ This committee includes Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in both content and training design.
✓ The process and timeframe for all tasks are clear.
✓ A decision making body has addressed and already made decisions about important issues that the curriculum committee will face, including, for example, criteria for making decisions about standardization/customization, curriculum format(s), and how and at what point formative evaluation activities will be undertaken.
✓ All final curricula go through a defined process that involves development, piloting, evaluation, and revision prior to roll out.

Curriculum Content

✓ The competencies and learning objectives are clear, relevant, and drive the content of the curriculum.
✓ Competencies are aligned with practice models or principles that the agency has adopted
✓ The content reflects best practice whenever possible.
✓ The content is relevant to the realities of the various work tasks and environments of the participants and this connection is made clear.
✓ Transfer of learning strategies are emphasized in the content.
✓ Cultural and other diversity issues are woven throughout the curriculum.
✓ The content is consistent and congruent within the curriculum (i.e. there are no conflicting points of information except to purposefully illustrate dilemmas or controversies in the field). Information presented in different sections/steps is complementary.)
✓ The scope (breadth of coverage) and depth (detail) of content provide enough information to meet learning objectives of the curriculum.
✓ Learning methods match competencies to be developed and reflect a broad spectrum of activities
✓ Literature, research and national expertise are used to develop the program

Training Methods

✓ There is a sufficient mix of training methods to accommodate various adult learning styles and maintain interest. These include lectures, demonstration of skills, opportunities for practice in applying knowledge and skill, discussions (large and small group), activities (individual, dyadic, small and large group), use of case studies, use of audio visual materials, role plays, etc.
✓ Training methods reinforce use of knowledge and skills on the job.
✓ The training methods can be carried out, i.e., not too complex for trainer to manage.
The amount of time allowed for the various methods is sufficient.

Format for the Curriculum

- There is one or more approved formats in which curriculum is written and all curricula conform
- The trainer’s manual is sufficiently complete so that a trainer has all information needed to train from it.
- The trainers’ manual, the PowerPoint, and the trainee handouts are organized for easy use by the trainer (e.g., clear table of contents, agenda, labeling of activities, labeling of materials, etc.).
- The content is sequenced well, e.g., from simple to complex, universal to exception, and by logical steps suggested by the content.
- Handouts are clear, visually appealing, and varied in format and reinforce training content. Some can be job reference tools.
- Flipcharts/PowerPoint slides contain only key points or simple visual models.
- Audio visual materials are carefully chosen for appropriate length, content, and quality, e.g., videos are relevant and can be clearly seen and heard.
- Props (e.g., toys, puzzles), if used, are integrated into the content and designed for ease of use. The written curriculum is clear about the specifics of props and how they are to be used.

Respondent Views

Common competencies/learning objectives: Respondents said that the Wisconsin training system had used the I.H.S. competency model since inception and that recent attempts to revisit and revise these has not been fruitful, in large part because of the time involved and competing priorities for developers. Thus, there is not a current statewide set of competencies that drive the development/selection of curricula.

Some respondents said that developing a standardized set of competencies for each training audience (workers, supervisors) would be helpful although the work involved could be significant. The value would be that there would be a statewide (i.e., standardized) set of competencies, which would be a framework for addressing some of the differences of opinion about curricula priorities and content. Also, a common set of competencies might spur the development of a state practice model description which in turn could help give common direction and language for various curricula. (Competencies may also derive from a practice model, although historically competency models in Child Welfare preceded practice models). A common set of competencies is a framework for linking existing and to-be-developed curricula into a system. For example, all curricula could be mapped to the common competencies, which would be a useful way to identify where various competencies are addressed through a myriad of curricula.

Several respondents identified issues that should be considered before launching a concerted effort to establish a statewide set of competencies: 1) The process of competency development can be an exercise that loses track of what the real goals of the child welfare system are and thus a process for identifying the goals should come first. 2) Many (and often disparate) competencies/learning objectives already exist in various child welfare training currently being done in Wisconsin and these would need to be reconsidered. For example, each of the Foundation modules has its own competencies/learning
objectives and these are not coordinated or mapped to an overall set. Post-QSR training is based on QSR practice principles and these have implications for competencies. 3) The level of detail of competencies and learning objectives would need to be clear, that is, would there be an end-product that both directs and limits curriculum development or would there be a skeletal framework that would support more detailed learning objectives? Some respondents were concerned that statewide competencies and learning objectives could curtail their ability to customize statewide training or even develop region-specific training that did not directly address a given competency.

**Curriculum standards and format:** Respondents noted that there is no common set of standards or approved format for curriculum. Some regions have their own. Some respondents felt this was fine and allowed the regions more flexibility. Others said that it presented problems in the case of statewide curricula in that they were having to train from curriculum that they did not consider to be user-friendly, and in some cases (as with Foundation) were rewriting the curriculum into a format that they liked.

Some respondents noted that adopting a set of standards and one or more acceptable formats for curriculum would help address some of the differences of opinion that arise when curriculum is being written or selected and then adapted. (While some issues that lead to differences of opinion are about content and training methods, some are about how “trainer-friendly” the curriculum format is.)

**Foci of Curricula:** Many respondents expressed frustration with how the foci of statewide training curricula are determined some of the time. The example given most frequently was Foundation training. Several respondents said that there was no overall design for what should go into the new Foundation training and that this had a detrimental effect on which curricula were selected for use in Wisconsin. Several noted that there are important gaps in Foundation, i.e., modules of topics that other states require. (One respondent rhetorically asked what it would mean if workers were able to “engage and team from now to doomsday, but can’t develop a case plan?”). In fact, many respondents identified the lack of a standardized curriculum that teaches assessment and case planning as a serious gap. One DCF representative noted that 95% of counties assessed through the Quality Service Review do not use evidence-based practice methods for conducting assessment and service planning for families.

Some respondents advocated for a participatory approach to developing a comprehensive statewide training plan that addresses the life of case within a competency-framework (ideally aligned with a statewide practice model). However, others were skeptical, commenting that that there would be too much resistance to a collaborative approach for developing a comprehensive plan and citing previous experiences with Foundation and post-QSR training as examples. These respondents said that the need for a statewide response that addresses critical concerns (e.g., from the QSR or CFSR) trumps the value of full stakeholder participation, if that participation is not productive in terms of developing training curricula in a timely way.

**Alignment of Content with Practice:** There were a variety of opinions about the extent to which content of curricula tends to be in alignment with practice (although not with policy). Several respondents noted that in the absence of a fully developed statewide child welfare practice model, alignment can be hard to define. However, others noted that DCF staff have routinely “been at the table” to ensure that curricula aligns with state policy.

Respondents noted that some practice differs between counties and thus alignment to practice is harder than alignment to policy. Those who noted this also advocate that there be a fair amount of flexibility built into curriculum expectations to allow for county specific practices (see next sub-section).
Respondents in most regions felt that training currently reflects the realities of the job in their counties, and many are concerned that standardization of training could compromise the ability of the partnerships to meet local agency needs.

**Standardization/Customization:** The issue of standardization and customization of statewide curricula is a major concern for respondents. Those who favor one standardized curriculum for key courses (such as Foundation) stress the importance of the following: 1) workers around the state need to understand federal law, state law and state policy, 2) there are many procedures and good practice interventions that are useful regardless of local county differences and these are the bulk of what is included in the Foundation training, 3) the state must have confidence that these issues (law, policy, procedures and good practice) are being taught and practiced throughout Wisconsin; trainer fidelity to a standardized curriculum is one measure of that, and 4) to the extent that any objective evaluation of worker learning eventually takes place, the measures must be based on a standardized curriculum (as well as trainer fidelity in delivering it).

Several respondents who favor standardization are concerned about how any customization would occur, including how review and approval for customized pieces would be done. For example, Foundation training focuses on skill and customization could reduce skill components and focus instead primarily on knowledge.

Those who advocate customization of statewide curricula identify the following points in favor of tailoring curricula to regional needs: 1) some of the Foundation curriculum is not written in what they consider to be trainer friendly fashion (i.e., an issue of format and quality of trainer instructions) and 2) some practice elements/exercises/examples in the curricula do not fit well with local practice or with typical populations served in the area. They want (and have exercised) flexibility to change the curricula for these reasons.

**Selection/Adaptation of Curricula:** Respondents noted that the selection of modules for Foundation trainings was done quickly in order to meet concerns identified in quality reviews. As noted above, some respondents said that the need for timely decisions (plus the substantial amount of work needed to adapt and implement these modules in Wisconsin) could not occur in the necessary time frame given the amount of resistance by some training system staff. Others said that the “resistance” was in fact legitimate concern about the Foundation modules, both in terms of content and format of the curricula.

The issue of selection/adaptation of curricula for Wisconsin intertwines with the issues of standardization/customization. Those who are most concerned about the applicability of content of Foundation modules are also concerned with what they see as a need to tailor it to counties.

As an overarching issue, many respondents noted that there is no agreed upon process and criteria for arbitrating and making decisions in a timely way. Also, there is next to no enforcement of statewide decisions at the regional level. Between the two, the reality is that there currently is no assurance that training, as it is now being delivered in the regions, provides common coverage of critical elements of the statewide version of the Foundations modules.

**Resources:** Nearly all respondents believe that curriculum development (including standard competencies, decisions about common standards/formats, curriculum writing, curriculum selection and adaptation, and quality control mechanisms for all of these) is greatly under-resourced at this point. The oversight, coordination and enforcement functions for statewide projects rest with one position at
the Training Center and this work accounts for only part of the position’s job duties. While there are other resources for curriculum writing (regional partnership staff and contractors), there is need for additional resources. Some respondents thought that the Training Center should have a full time curriculum writer. Others suggested that more resources be directed to bringing on more contract writers. Whatever the solutions, nearly all respondents noted that this key function of a training system needs significantly more resources.

Findings regarding benchmarks

Curriculum development/selection processes and standardization/customization

There is significant disagreement about how statewide curricula should be developed and/or selected and whether statewide curricula should be standardized or customized. While the most recent annual plan specifies that the Curriculum Committee will “regularly update the worker pre-service and Foundation curricula to reflect changes in child welfare policy and practice,” this is not working effectively in the minds of most respondents in terms of Foundation training. (Since pre-service is computer-based, once it is finalized, it cannot be changed locally.) The result has been a patchwork of regional decisions about how to implement Foundation training. While each regional partnership conducts Foundation training in a way they think best meets the needs of their area, there is no statewide quality assurance of the process/content. Thus, if one regional partnership decided to change one of the Foundation courses so that was trained much differently in that region than in another, there is not an effective way to address this.

Statewide competencies

The Wisconsin Child Welfare Training System has historically been competency based (it began by using the I.H.S. competency-based common core training). The first goal of the most recent annual plan is to “provide competency-based training as a foundation for child welfare staff and caregivers that is responsive to change in child welfare policy and practice; address competencies through the standardized pre-service and foundation curriculum; implement the pre-service and Foundation curriculum consistently across partnerships to support statewide standards of practice; review competencies on a regular basis based on trainee evaluations, agency/supervisor feedback and national research; and other training curriculum will reflect the competencies.” Additional goals concerning training for supervisors and managers imply the training system’s understanding of the value of a competency based system, (i.e., “Goal 6: Develop the competencies of child welfare supervisors and child welfare agency managers”).

With the transition from the I.H.S. Common Core training to the Foundation training, there is not now a statewide set of competencies/learning objectives for workers to provide a framework for curriculum selection, development or writing. While this allows some flexibility, overall it seems to have added to frustration about the system, and in the view of BI, will hamper the training system in the future. A set of competencies/learning objectives (particularly if it is guided by a practice model) provides a useful guide for decision-making and writing. BI is not aware of any other well-functioning child welfare training system that does not operate under a common set of competencies.

Often the competency models used in Child Welfare across the nation were originally developed primarily for training new child welfare workers, but have been expanded to cover all levels of experience in child welfare (e.g., “new-advanced” frameworks). More recently, with an increased focus on broader workforce issues, a few competency models now encompass HR functions, i.e., helping to
guide recruitment, selection, and performance evaluation as well as training. An example is the Maine Child Welfare system which, with the help of the training program at the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Institute for Public Sector Innovation, has developed an integrated competency-based system for HR and training functions (Bernotavicz & Locke, 2000).

**Curriculum standards and format**

There is no common set of standards or a standardized format for curriculum in Wisconsin, although there are models for this used in regions. There is no ongoing process now to create/adopt standards or one or more acceptable formats or to assure that these are being used throughout the state. Since Foundation training modules are not in a common format, trainers who deliver them in each region must adjust to each new module format. This seems to give further permission to customize these modules as “standardization” seems to be missing internally (no overall set of competencies, no standard format).

**Resources**

This domain of work (curriculum development) is a core function of a training system. The resources needed to set curriculum standards, to develop one or more acceptable curriculum formats, to revisit and make decisions about an overall set of competencies for workers, write and/or select curricula, revise curricula, make decisions about customization/standardization are inadequate in the Wisconsin system at this point and most respondents are keenly aware of this.

**Authority**

This domain is a critical example of how differences of opinion in the Wisconsin Training System tend to result in stalemates, lack of trust, and difficulties in moving forward on projects. It points to the need for work at the level of the whole training system regarding how to arrive at binding decisions (as described in Domain I).

**Domain IV: Trainer Development**

**Description and scope**

This domain addresses the issues associated with recruiting, selecting, and preparing trainers for these diverse roles and evaluating trainer effectiveness. The quality of trainers in a child welfare training program is always critical. It has become even more so as expectations for training have risen in the wake of the federal CSFR reviews, and training programs have been seen as a primary vehicle for bringing about practice change and improving outcomes for families. Traditionally, trainers have been expected to be familiar with subject matter; familiar with learning styles and cycles; able to engage trainees in the learning experience; and skilled in the use a variety of training methods, such as lecture and facilitating group exercises. More recently, the trainer’s role has begun to move from a major emphasis on imparting information to a much greater focus on promoting learning outcomes. Expectations of trainers have begun to include expertise in using standardized skills based curricula, ability to utilize distance learning and other computer based delivery technologies, ability to promote transfer of learning, and ability to support evaluation of learning (NSDTA 2001, AHA 2005). States are becoming increasingly interested in competency based models of trainer development, and even trainer
certification. NSDTA is currently developing a trainer certification process that depends in part on its previous work on a set of instructor competencies (NSDTA 2001).

**Benchmarks**

- The training program is staffed primarily with people with clear training responsibility; either full time trainers or, when agency staff are assigned on a part-time basis, their training role and responsibilities are separate from other assigned duties.
- There is a process for use of consultants/contract trainers.
- There are standards and methods to promote selection of high quality trainers using competency-based approaches and job sample tests.
- Roles, functions and competencies of training staff are clearly defined.
- There is a process for training new trainers in pedagogy skills and requirements in place for its completion.
- Opportunities and resources are provided for refresher training, professional growth and development of experienced training staff.
- There are processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of trainers, provide support and ensure quality performance.

**Respondent viewpoints**

With respect to the benchmarks above, respondents described the staffing pattern in Wisconsin as primarily part time trainers recruited by the partnerships from the county agencies. Some respondents reported having full time trainers who provided Foundation training, and one partnership talked about bringing in outside experts to provide some of their advanced trainings. Over 80 percent (84.8%) of trainers who responded to the online survey indicated that they trained part time. Over 50% (58.8%) described themselves as independent contractors, 26.5% described themselves as county employees and 14.7% described themselves as partnership employees. (See Appendix G).

According to interview respondents, the primary mechanism for trainer recruitment and selection is informal. The partnerships identify and approach people from the counties who they think would be good trainers and ask them if they would be interested. Almost 70 percent of respondents to the online trainer survey indicated that they became aware of the opportunity to train through being contacted by Regional Training Partnership staff. Respondents, for the most part, felt that this process has worked well and that using trainers from the counties has resulted in trainers who are in tune with practice realities. A few reported tension between the partnerships (which see trainer recruitment and selection as their function) and the state. This has been reported as centering around the post-QSR training where the state has taken responsibility for selecting and certifying trainers who participate in that process. At this time there is a statewide QSR trainer assigned full time to providing this training.

The Training Council has adopted general guidelines for the recruitment, selection and preparation of new trainers. This document lays out a series of activities that the Training Partnerships will include when preparing trainers to train the Foundation curricula. Depending on trainer expertise, training topic, and trainer involvement in the curriculum development process, all or some of the following activities are required:
• Attend Training of Trainers (TOT)
• Attend training as a participant
• Attend training as a trainer observer
• Participate in the curriculum Training of Content (TOC), if available
• Co-train with an experienced trainer
• Partnership support and feedback to trainer, during and after training sessions
• Informal, regular contact by partnership staff

Respondents report variation in the extent to which the activities in these guidelines are used by the partnerships, as well as variation in the overall preparation of trainers for non-Foundation training. A few respondents indicated that TOT is not needed for advanced training because the trainer is involved in the course development. Respondents reported that there is no formal TOT process, although most partnerships provide some TOT. All partnership staff discussed observing their trainers and providing feedback and support. A few interviewees also discussed teaming new trainers with an established trainer at first, and providing opportunities for trainers to attend conferences.

Trainers who responded to the online trainer survey most frequently indicated participating in the following:

• Attending TOT workshops (86.8%),
• Attending training as a participant (76.3%),
• Observing training (77.1%),
• Receiving feedback from partnership staff (94.7%), and
• Informal support from partnership staff (89.5%).

Fewer had:

• Co-trained with experienced trainer (69.4%),
• Attended trainings on content of specific courses (60%), or
• Attended local, statewide, or national conferences (55.6%).

These trainers found the training activities that they had participated in to be helpful, rating them on average at 2.5 or above on a scale ranging from a value of 1 for “not very helpful” to 3 for “very helpful.”

Trainers felt that the trainer development process:

• provided them with useful knowledge and skills that they use in training ($\chi=4.45$ out of a possible 5),
• enhanced the effectiveness of their trainings ($\chi=4.45$),
• prepared them to deliver curriculum ($\chi=4.24$),
• prepared them to use transfer of learning strategies ($\chi=4.11$), and
• provided them with adequate opportunities for hands on practice and feedback ($\chi^2=4.18$).

Trainers felt slightly less prepared to integrate issues of cultural competence into their workshops ($\chi^2=3.17$).

When asked in which areas they would like further support trainers most frequently indicated:

• information on training methods/skills (69.7%),
• more transfer of learning strategies (63.6%),
• greater access to new research on child welfare practice (60.6%), and
• additional information on specific topics such as federal CSFR outcomes, substance abuse, cultural diversity, trauma treatment, and others (51.5%). (See Appendix G).

As with trainer recruitment and selection, interview respondents reported that processes for trainer evaluation were largely informal. Partnership staff who participated in interviews and focus groups indicated that they observe trainers and give them feedback, and that someone from the partnership attends every training. One respondent discussed spending more time with new trainers, and focusing on experienced trainers only when they were training something new or something that they had not trained recently and that may have changed.

Trainee evaluations were reported to be an important part of evaluating trainer performance. Several respondents from the partnerships mentioned that they share and discuss trainee evaluations with their trainers right away, and at least one partnership also reported giving trainers summaries based on trainee evaluations. One interviewee described depending primarily on feedback from trainees to make decisions about trainer competence by saying “by and large the trainers are very good. If they aren’t we don’t use them again.”

The vast majority of respondents felt that most trainers do an excellent job. Over 50% of workers and 60% of supervisors who responded to the online surveys agreed that child welfare trainers are competent, well-organized and prepared. Focus group and interview participants also spoke highly of trainers’ knowledge of child welfare practice, and commented that they were well prepared, familiar with training content, and respectful of cultural issues and adult learners. A few respondents also mention appreciating hearing the trainers’ stories of their own experiences and felt that those stories helped them learn. Trainers of advanced courses were mentioned as particularly knowledgeable. Respondents at the director and management levels mentioned appreciating the trainers’ knowledge of county practice issues. Respondents did mention, however, that there were a few poor trainers.

There were some general areas in which some respondents felt that trainers could improve, although this varied somewhat by region and respondents’ roles. Participants from Milwaukee felt that trainers could do a better job of understanding and addressing the realities they face in their work, as well as the characteristics of the clients they work with. They felt that a few trainers were too removed from practice. Others in Milwaukee expressed concern that trainers with a background in a particular job function sometimes had trouble relating the material to other job functions, although other respondents did not see this as a problem. Some focus group participants felt that there was a need for less lecture and a more interactive style. (This may reflect the training methods of the curricula being taught but it also could mean that some trainers are not following curricula and are reducing skills.
exercises to knowledge lectures.) Respondents with state level responsibilities felt that trainers could be better prepared to train to skill.

Several respondents commented on the need for more resources. Specific areas mentioned were the need for more ICW trainers and more trainers for Foundation courses. One respondent commented that Foundation courses have been written to be co-trained but that is not being done because they are understaffed.

Interview and focus group participants varied in their views regarding the need for more standardized processes for selecting, preparing and evaluating trainers. As in Domain I, many respondents tended to have different perspectives depending on their views of their roles and responsibilities with respect to the training system. Respondents who were more closely aligned with a regional perspective emphasized the strengths of selecting trainers from among interested county staff and concerns that the state wants to take on what has been a partnership role. A number of people mentioned the close connections to current local practice and the stability of the trainer workforce as strengths of the local selection process. At least one respondent clearly stated that she valued the local process of selecting those who were good practitioners to become trainers and did not want more standardization. She also mentioned that there had been tension in the past over what has been seen as the state’s unwillingness to accept trainers selected by the partnerships. Another respondent mentioned that it was considered a job “perk” for county staff to be selected to be a trainer, and that there was value-added for the agency to have in-house expertise on particular practice areas.

Respondents who had statewide administrative, policy, and quality assurance responsibilities tended to express more concern about the potential weaknesses of having different trainer development processes and standards across regions, particularly with a movement toward greater emphasis on skills development and promoting transfer of learning. These respondents were more likely to favor standardized processes for trainer selection, development and evaluation and a process of certifying trainers. Specific viewpoints expressed included:

- Responsibility for these standardized trainer development processes should rest with training program staff,
- Deciding on the right balance of practice background and training background is a difficult question, but the current trainer certification process used for QSR works and should be retained,
- Some of the current trainers are not interested in training standardized curriculum and are unwilling to do exercises such as role plays, and
- The current policy on trainer development adopted by the Training Council is too “watered down” to lead to much consistency in the quality of trainers across the state.

The trainers themselves also appeared to be split on the issue of a statewide, standardized trainer development process. Sixty percent of those responding to the online trainer survey indicated that they would favor a standardized process as a way to increase trainer skill development, consistency of course delivery and quality assurance. Some of their reasons for favoring a standardized process are illustrated in the following comments.
• A standardized process would “enhance the likelihood that trainees will receive a consistent and predictable training format, quality of presentation and delivery, and ensure that trainers have a minimum level of experience, education, and training prior to becoming and educator.”

• “Whether the trainer development process should be standardized for all trainers seems like a Partnership issue. I think trainers would benefit from a clearly articulated trainer development process so that they would know what was available, what to expect and how they would be evaluated.”

• “I think the Western Wisconsin Partnership provides very high quality trainer development. However, I do see a need for the state to have some standards and expectations for trainer development. This might add to the standardization of trainings across the state which might in turn help to standardize practice.”

Those who disagreed expressed concerned that a standardized process would be contentious and would not meet regional needs. They also pointed out that trainers’ development needs were not uniform.

• “Standardization of training is quite risky in Wisconsin because there isn’t consensus between the training partnerships and the state child welfare agency about what should be trained, how it should be evaluated, and who should train which topics. Right now the state agency, which has minimal expertise on training, has too much influence on the whole training system.”

• “I think that the regional partnerships know the trainers in ways that allow them to tailor trainer development to the needs of their trainers. I think that this individualized attention can be missed in standardized processes.”

• “Trainers need to be prepared to meet the needs of their service area. Different Counties have different needs.”

• “Each trainer should have opportunity for training, but based on previous experience, trainer needs might vary.”

Findings regarding benchmarks

The current process of recruiting and selecting trainers from the counties has several clear strengths. Trainers are seen as in touch with current practice, and able to address local practice concerns. An additional benefit is that county personnel who serve as trainers are able to bring current information on best practices back to their agencies and serve as a local expert resource. However, there are also limitations. Current county staff must take vacation time to train, which limits their availability, and those who are not current county employees can begin to lose the close connection to practice over time. Many states’ training programs use a mix of full and part-time trainers, including consultants and contract trainers, and at least to some extent, use personal knowledge to approach specific individuals to become trainers. However, the exclusive use of such informal processes is highly dependent on the persons involved and can lead to inconsistencies based on individual philosophies of what makes a good trainer. Under certain circumstances it can also lead to a perception of unequal access to the opportunity to become a trainer.

At this time Wisconsin does not have a clearly defined set of competencies expected of trainers. While there is a set of trainer development guidelines for Foundation trainers, these address a set of activities rather than the knowledge, skills and abilities desired: a process focus rather than an outcome focus. As Wisconsin’s training system becomes increasingly sophisticated, a set of agreed upon trainer
competencies will be needed to form a firm foundation for selecting trainers, planning and conducting trainer development activities, and evaluating trainer performance. Such a set of desired competencies can be applied to both part-time and full time trainers and does not preclude using local knowledge and relationships to identify good candidates. It also does not preclude individualized trainer development options. However, it is needed clarify what is expected of trainers and provide clear criteria against which they may be evaluated.

In addition there is no standardized process or set of guidelines for the use of consultant or contract trainers. It is often not practical for content area professionals who conduct trainings on advanced topics to complete a full program of trainer development activities. Many states offer a streamlined process for those who conduct trainings on advanced topics in which they have particular expertise, and may even outline conditions under which trainers are exempt from any requirements (e.g. a onetime training conducted by a recognized expert). However, the articulation of such a set of guidelines is another component of a mature trainer development system.

**Domain V: Training Delivery**

**Description and scope**

This domain addresses Wisconsin’s processes for ensuring that large numbers of potential trainees receive the right training at the right time. As part of this function, it also involves communicating with potential consumers of training, supervisors, administrators, or others regarding the availability of training options, and marketing training to ensure participation in professional development activities. The scope of the training delivery domain has traditionally included such activities as registration of participants, locating and scheduling training facilities, and ensuring that materials are available and equipment is present and functioning. As in other areas, training programs have been moving toward an expanded vision of what training delivery means. The training delivery domain often now encompasses not just the logistics of planning and scheduling classroom training, but also planning for, administering, and supporting a range of delivery options including computer based and distance learning, locally based team training, or individualized coaching. Training programs are also increasingly likely to maintain resource centers and websites, and to track progress on individual training plans and completion of training requirements via learning management systems.

Specific areas included in this domain are: range and availability of delivery options, facilities and logistics, management systems, and support and communications.

**Benchmarks**

**Range and Availability of Delivery Options**

- The training system supports a range of training delivery: classroom, distance and self-directed; individualized and team-based.
- Sufficient delivery options are provided to enable staff to complete training and staff development requirements in a timely manner.

**Facilities and Logistics**

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The training system ensures a physical environment conducive to learning, including space, equipment and training materials.

Training is offered in locations that are convenient and cost effective for staff to access.

The training system makes efforts to keep pace with state-of-the-art instructional support technology and to model its effective use.

Training materials are available for statewide use and a resource center is maintained.

Management Systems

A learning management system is in place to enable tracking of progress on individual training plans and completion of training requirements.

The training program/agency has administrative systems and databases that enable the proper scheduling and support of training and development programs.

Support and Communications

The training program has mechanisms in place for communicating training options, requirements, registration procedures, locations, dates and times to all people who would be expected to use and/or interact with the training.

Administrators and supervisors communicate the importance of and ensure participation in training and development activities.

Respondent viewpoints

Range and Availability of Delivery Options

In addition to classroom training, focus group and interview respondents described two types of training activities supported by the training system: computer and web-based training, and on-site training provided to counties as part of the QSR process. On-site training was described as involving a range of activities including:

- roundtable discussions,
- brief, targeted training modules,
- brown bag lunch meetings, and
- sharing activities for supervisors to use with their workers.

E-learning: Currently, the Training Program contracts with the e-learning development team at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to develop distance learning modules for the Child Welfare Training System. The development team worked with the Training Council to develop the Pre-service training and also a web-based portion of the Effects of Abuse and Neglect training module. Currently, the team is working with the Council to develop a distance module for Child Welfare Legal Training. With respect to e-learning, respondents reported experience only with web-based pre-service training. Those who had used it commented that it was well done and helpful. Respondents did not mention having difficulty accessing or navigating the pre-service modules. Respondents familiar with the development of the pre-
service modules reported a desire to move toward more sophisticated e-learning applications as resources permit. Specific points raised were:

- The current pre-service is technologically “primitive” and the new legal training under development will be more interactive. An example of the former is use of still-photos with audio instead of video, which is more expensive; an example of the latter is that the trainee will apply statute to case scenarios, e.g., in a case process module, trainees experience a virtual case process, making choices at key decision points.
- The training system is working to develop more sophisticated distance learning modules. There is a need to explore what kinds of training content lends itself to distance learning format.
- Respondents are unsure about the extent to which counties across the state will be able to fully utilize distance learning training because of varying resources in terms of technology, internet access, and staff time allocations.
- Respondents report that they are happy with what has been developed in this area.

As mentioned under Domain II, viewpoints regarding how extensive distance learning options should be varied among respondents. Barriers that were mentioned to the expansion and/or more sophisticated use of distance learning included:

- Increases in development time and money for more sophisticated applications,
- The limited content that is appropriate for a distance-learning application,
- Tradeoffs related to the convenience and efficiency of distance-learning versus classroom training that allows staff to get out of the office and interact with peers,
- Sacrifice of learning that comes with peer interaction,
- Hardware needs in some counties,
- Equipment that doesn’t work,
- Lack of staff comfort with the equipment and lack of technical support in some counties/regions, and
- The lack of an assessment of each county’s technology needs in relation to being able to use distance learning.

**Availability of classroom training:** Survey, focus group and interview respondents generally reported that classroom training was held frequently enough to meet their needs; however, some differences were reported by region. The majority of online survey respondents at all levels agreed that classroom training workshops were held frequently enough that workers could attend training when they needed to (88.4% of managers and administrators, 70.8% of supervisors and 73.2% of workers). Most survey respondents also agreed that supervisory training was available with sufficient frequency (85.5% of managers and administrators and 67.6% of supervisors), and that training for administrators and managers was available when needed (75.5% of managers and administrators). (Appendices E, F, & H).

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2 Agreement is defined as selecting the “Agree” option on a 5 point scale on which 1=“Disagree,” 2=“Disagree Somewhat,” 3=“Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4=“Agree Somewhat”, and 5=“Agree.”
There were differences in opinions about course availability by region. Only 50% of respondents to the caseworkers’ survey from Milwaukee agreed that courses were held frequently enough, in contrast to 76.2% to 83.7% of respondents from other regions. Only 49.3% of supervisors from Milwaukee agreed that caseworker trainings were held frequently enough, in contrast to percentages ranging from 67.6% to 95.2% for other regions. A similar difference was observed for Milwaukee when supervisors responded regarding the availability of supervisory training. This pattern was also reflected in opinions expressed by focus group and interview participants from Milwaukee. They reported having difficulty getting into required Foundation training in a timely way, and having a great deal of difficulty getting back into training when a class is canceled, they are unable to attend, or they are called out for an emergency. Respondents explained that they were unable to register in advance for another training session because classes were full. They had to depend on seats opening at the last minute. Focus group respondents also mentioned that cancellations were a problem with supervisor trainings, and that new supervisors also have problems getting training in a timely way. They felt that these classes have problems filling because supervisors are overloaded and frequently aren’t allowed to go, or need to cancel due to emergencies or workload issues.

Partnership staff respondents reported several strategies they use to increase timely access to training, including opening their training to staff in other regions, and paying for county staff from their regions to attend training offered by other partnerships in order to allow them to get to training faster or to make up pre-requisites that were missed. One respondent also talked about exploring options for providing supervisor training in their monthly meetings or via teleconference.

However, some caseworker and supervisor focus group participants reported that they were not allowed to attend training outside of their partnership region. Others mentioned that they might or might not hear about course offering in other regions. One supervisor commented that the policy regarding crossing partnerships has not been well communicated and pointed out that people need to find openings online which “takes a little effort.”

**Classroom training formats:** Interview and focus group participants also offered suggestions and comments for additional training formats. They expressed concern about time away from the job, as well as time away from family when attending training that requires an overnight stay. Specific suggestions were:

- Schedule trainings so that people are not expected to attend three trainings in one month,
- Train one day a week for 3-4 weeks in a row, rather than 3-4 consecutive days of training,
- Offer more onsite training in larger counties,
- Offer more half day sessions,
- Offer short, concise refreshers for experienced workers, and
- Offer brief one to two hour teleconferences and webcasts on specific topics.

**Resource needs:** A number of interview respondents expressed concern about the possible effects of the current budget shortfall on the range of training offered, as well as on efforts to prioritize options like distance learning. One respondent commented that the training program has tremendous resource needs that are not met. She stated that she expects that there will be cutbacks in training and services,
and that cuts will be especially problematic in areas with high turnover where training is a constant need.

**Facilities and logistics**

**Facilities:** Workers and supervisors who responded to the online surveys generally agreed\(^3\) that the facilities were comfortable and conducive to learning. However, respondents’ views of the adequacy of training facilities varied somewhat by partnership region. Caseworkers from Milwaukee were less likely to agree that facilities were adequate than caseworkers from other partnerships (33% in comparison to 47% to 68%). Supervisors from two of the partnerships were much more likely to agree than those from two other partnership regions that their regions’ training facilities were comfortable (85.7% and 85.7% compared to 46.8% and 26.2%) and conducive to learning (78.1% and 90.5% compared to 38.2% and 32.3%). Most workers and supervisors did not report the distance they had to travel to a training facility as a barrier to their participation.

Participants in the interviews and focus groups described pros and cons associated with use of both centralized training centers and a variety of non-training specific sites such as hotels or office buildings. Respondents commented that a centralized training facility offers a consistent and comfortable environment, with convenient access to technology and other supports. Partnership staff who use a number of sites talked about the flexibility of offering training in different parts of their regions and being able to balance travel time for participants by holding trainings around the region rather than in just one place. Some staff respondents also commented that they appreciated getting away from the office. Downsides mentioned to the use of office building and hotel sites included:

- Distractions associated with having training in the same buildings where staff offices are located,
- Too few rooms available to accommodate training needs,
- Hassle of taking materials from site to site,
- Inconvenience of using rooms that are not designed for training and where quality and available support varies, and
- Problems with using computer technology/distance learning when training in hotels or other non-training specific sites.

Others who commented favorably on the facilities, regardless of whether in a training center or other site praised the:

- Comfort of the facility,
- Location of the facility,
- Ease of access and parking, and
- Helpfulness of staff on site.

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\(^3\) Agreement is defined as selecting the “Agree” option on a 5 point scale on which 1=“Disagree,” 2=“Disagree Somewhat,” 3=“Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 = “Agree Somewhat,” and 5 = “Agree.”
Issues raised by respondents were specific to individual facilities and dealt primarily with room temperature and access to vending machines, refrigerators and coffee.

**Training materials:** Most respondents also commented favorably on the logistics involved with ensuring that training materials were in place. The majority of workers and supervisors, across all regions, who responded to the online survey, agreed that needed training materials were in place for all trainings. A few commented on problems with trainers being unfamiliar with PowerPoint or video equipment, or audiovisual equipment that did not work. Focus group and interview respondents reported that training material is always professional and comprehensive, contains effective content, and is packaged in useful binders that they use as resources in their jobs.

**Registration:** Interview and focus group participants also reported that the registration processes for training function smoothly, and that online registration is easy and efficient. One respondent commented that the processes for getting the right people to the right training work well. In the words of another respondent “It is very easy to register and pay for trainings on the website. The calendar and advance notice is helpful for long range planning. Affordability is definitely a strength. The system is consistent with goals and there is a purpose for content presented. The ability to attend training in any of the regions for the same fee is very helpful as we here in our county are equally distant from Western and Southern Region Trainings.”

**Website information:** Wisconsin has available a statewide Child Welfare Training System website. Each of the Child Welfare Training Partnerships also maintains a website. The statewide website contains information on training related policies and procedures, a statewide training calendar, information about curriculum resources that may be requested from the Training Program, the Annual Report, and various documents related to the work of the Training Council, as well as links to the Partnership websites and other resources. The Partnership websites vary in format but also typically provide a training calendar and a number of links to training related resources. Interviewees reported that the state has the responsibility to maintain a centralized website that provides access to current curricula. They reported that policies and statues are online, which is helpful. The statewide website also provides a convenient link to access pre-service training. A few supervisory focus group participants reported accessing pre-service content, although few reported completing the entire series. At least one supervisor commented that it is difficult to find the time to get online to become familiar with training content.

**Management Systems**

A number of respondents stated that a centralized learning management system that can track participant training is a critical need for the training system. One mentioned the need to report completion of HFS 43 requirements as well as requirements of the federal CSFR process. Another reported that Wisconsin mandated tracking of completion of training requirements in 2008 for reporting purposes. Interview respondents reported that the Partnerships currently track participants and keep records of all training using their own software programs, but that there is no statewide centralized web-based system that can track individual participants. One respondent indicated that WiSACWIS might have the capacity to track training individual training participation, or may have the functionality for future use. In addition to reporting requirements, one of the respondents talked about the need for a learner management system that could store evaluation information and track participants’ performance on higher levels of evaluation. A few respondents to the online surveys also mentioned the need for tracking training requirements. For example:
• “It would be nice to be able to receive notification when you have completed all the CORE Foundation trainings that are required of new workers. It gets a bit confusing sometimes which are required in the first year and which are electives.”

• “Ensure that all trainings that have been attended by workers are filed so that when trainings are offered there is no confusion about which trainings the workers have attended or have not attended.”

Support and Communications

County support for training: Respondents to the web-based questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews indicated strong support for training from administrators, managers and supervisors in the counties. All managers and directors who responded to the web-based questionnaires agreed that they support staff attending training, and 85.7% also agreed that their supervisors support workers attending training. Just over 67 percent (67.3%) of supervisors who responded agreed that it was important for workers to attend training in order to do their jobs better, and 76.8% of workers agreed that their supervisors supported their attendance at child welfare training. Approximately 63% of workers agreed that agency directors and managers supported their attending training. This strong support was echoed by the focus group and interview participants. As one respondent put it, “At my agency supervisors are very supportive of training. Workers are encouraged to go to training and coverage is not an issue. You do not cancel training unless you are on your deathbed.”

A few respondents indicated that although there is strong support for training there is not as much understanding at the county level of resource needs, particularly what will be needed to support transfer of learning to the job and evaluation.

Awareness of training opportunities: Processes for announcing training opportunities appear to work well with a few exceptions. Only small percentages of respondents to the online surveys for caseworkers (9.1%), supervisors (5.4%), and managers/directors (4.8%) indicated that late announcements of training opportunities, or late distribution of information about training within the agency (2.4% of supervisors and 6.3% of managers/directors) presented barriers to staff attending training. Focus group and interview participants commented that much of this information could be accessed online. One survey respondent echoed this, saying there is “Little distribution of announcements within my Agency-I try to remember to check the website occasionally for new trainings.” (This appears to be an issue of intra agency communication rather than communication from the Partnership to the agency.)

Survey, focus group and interview participants mentioned some specific issues:

• In one region there is not good communication of distance learning availability. Supervisors are not passing along information gathered in meetings,

• Policies regarding attending trainings in different partnership regions have not been consistently communicated,

• Supervisors don’t have time to track the training calendar in relation to the needs of specific workers. A system that gives them early notification of topics coming up would be helpful. Some respondents mentioned that they get emailed schedules and that these can be a good reminder if received soon enough, and
• “The emails that notify workers of trainings (confirmation letters) are too confusing. Can it be changed to reflect just the name of the training, the date and time, and location but nothing else?”

Participants cited communication around the rollout of pre-service training as very helpful. They also mentioned that websites are user friendly.

**Findings regarding benchmarks**

**Training delivery options:** The Wisconsin system has begun to expand the range of training delivery options with distance learning and targeted site specific training. Online pre-service training has been well received and distance learning courses under development are increasing in sophistication. The bulk of training within the system is still delivered in the classroom. A substantial number of respondents see classroom training as providing important advantages, and are not in favor of expanding distance learning as a delivery option. A commonly reported barrier is lack of computer technology in select counties at this time. However, respondents also saw the need for better utilization of distance learning options, especially as resources become less available to send staff to training. At the present time, most areas within the state have sufficient classroom training capacity to get staff through needed training in a timely way. There are exceptions to that, however. Problems were noted with access to training in Milwaukee, where turnover is especially high. Wisconsin will need to continue to expand the use of e-learning, teleconferencing and other types of training delivery such as brief, targeted, trainings on site in the counties to maximize the efficiency and timeliness of training delivery. As respondents correctly pointed out, there is a need for face to face training and this will remain an important option for specific skill areas, and to provide networking and socialization opportunities. However, there will be a need for a careful process for decision-making regarding the most appropriate delivery mode for specific content and skills as part of future strategic planning and resource allocation.

**Training facilities, logistics and communication:** Models for selection and use of training facilities, logistics and communication are major strengths of the current training system. Two options for locating classroom training have evolved: the centralized training center, and a system of using office buildings and hotels throughout the partnership region. These options have pros and cons, but for the most part appear to fit the needs of the partnership regions well. Processes for ensuring availability of materials and AV equipment at training locations also appear to be working well. The statewide training system and the partnership regions have websites that foster communication with training constituencies. Training calendars are available for each region and statewide, and online registration processes appear straightforward and user friendly.

The websites provide a rich resource of books, videos, full text articles on best practices, and links to national organizations and the Children’s Bureau. Some can be accessed directly online and some need to be requested from the partnerships. The State Training System website contains a list of curriculum resources that may be requested. Maintaining a resource library is an important function of a training system and Wisconsin has a great deal of resources available to stakeholders. It would be beneficial to provide easier access, avoid duplication of effort and expand the range of resources if these separate online resources were merged and coordinated centrally into one resource library and accessed through the state and partnership websites with a common link.

A major need that the training system will have going forward is a learning management system. Such a system is needed to allow centralized tracking of completion of training requirements for reporting
purposes, but also is needed to allow training participants and their supervisors to track progress, and provide a vehicle for storing and administering evaluation tools and transfer of learning tools.

**Domain VI: Research to Practice**

**Description and Scope**

This domain addresses the Wisconsin Training System’s interest in exploring development of a research-to-practice component of or an auxiliary to the training system. A research-to-practice component could be used to support the training system by:

- Seeking out the evidence-informed practice literature to help guide decision-making about new curricula, content of curricula, learning theory, and promising practices in training methods and evaluation of learning.
- Conducting research on training-related activities, e.g. effectiveness of different delivery modes such as distance learning.
- Helping the Wisconsin Child Welfare System generate ways to develop a comprehensive workforce approach by integrating various functions under a unified competency based model. These functions could include professional education, recruitment, selection, training, targeted transfer of learning through coaching, mentoring and peer networking, and performance evaluation. (See Domain II as well for a discussion of parts of this issue.)
- Beyond training and larger workforce development, a research-to-practice component could work with DCF and the counties by conducting program evaluation of child welfare practice efforts in the state. While this potential activity is not training related per se (although it could eventually produce findings which would have training implications), it could utilize the expertise of the university partnerships in the area of program evaluation.

**Benchmarks**

Research to practice partnerships between public Child Welfare and university partners:

- Have a process in place for determining a specific research agenda to enable the university partner to design projects that meet the needs of the child welfare state and/or county agencies.
- Use collaborative methods between partners to review research, make decisions, plan, implement, and evaluate initiatives.
- Have university staff/faculty who have the knowledge, skills, and resources to access and evaluate the literature and implement projects.
- Are adequately funded for the identified projects.
**Respondent viewpoints**

There was a great deal of interest on the part of many respondents about this domain, although many cautions were expressed about cost issues given what was generally seen as the relative lower importance of this function in comparison with key training functions, and budget concerns with a lowered IV-E penetration rate and a worsening economy. For example, among county/tribal directors, 17.4% thought that fewer resources should go into this area, 43.5% thought that current resources are right and 39.1% thought more should go to it. (See Appendix H)

There were also a variety of opinions expressed about where any research functions should be located, i.e., centralized at one university or dispersed among the university partners. Some respondents favored centralizing all research-to-practice functions in one university, while others thought that each university in the partnership could best serve local interests. Another model suggested was to have the function related to designing and conducting child welfare research centralized at one university, with other universities doing related work such as literature reviews (ala the Campbell collaborative) in support of curriculum development.

Several universities expressed keen interest in being part of expanded research-to-practice efforts, citing related work that had been done or proposed by faculty as well as their close working relationships with both university partnership staff and county administrators in their areas.

**Evidence based literature:** All of the training partnerships currently conduct literature searches as they develop curricula so this would not be a new task. Relevant literature is posted on Partnership websites. Participants thought that additional resources, if available, should continue to support this system, i.e., that when a university partnership had a lead role in curriculum development (for either a state or regional curriculum), the literature review should stay with them. However, an additional scenario suggested by a participant could be that macro projects (such as review of learning literature to support training on curriculum development or training of trainers) should be housed in one university only.

**Research related to learning and training:** Several respondents indicated an interest in conducting research related to learning and training. As one example, the development of e-learning in Wisconsin could be the basis for studying retention of learning in various settings.

**Unified Competency-based Workforce Model:** There was interest expressed in thinking through the benefits and implementation issues associated with moving towards a continuum of workforce support (as discussed in Domain II) and with the specific example of a competency-based workforce model. Again, issues of cost given the relative importance of this were mentioned frequently.

**Program evaluation:** Several university partners, state staff, and county directors were intrigued with this and brainstormed some ideas for child welfare initiatives at the state, regional or county level which could benefit from a focused program evaluation. Several noted that Wisconsin has implemented several initiatives based on the existing “evidence base.” Examples mentioned were collaborative teaming with Juvenile Justice, family teams, the extent to which various poverty-related safety net programs are useful for families in the child welfare system, and what promotes retention of workers in the system (e.g., does the Milwaukee model of extended orientation affect retention). Currently most evidence for program effectiveness comes from program evaluations done in other states or countries. Respondents commented that while these programs were undertaken as a result of evidence for their effectiveness gathered in other settings, it would be useful to have program evaluation based on data
from Wisconsin. Now, most of what forms the evidence base for initiatives within Wisconsin comes from the QSR or CFSR, both highly valuable sources, but not evaluations of program change initiatives per se. It was noted that several Wisconsin universities have faculty with experience in program evaluation as well as expertise in grant writing. Also, it might be possible for Wisconsin universities to collaborate on inter-state evaluations.

**Findings regarding benchmarks**

There is a great deal of expertise in program evaluation in the university systems that house the partnerships as well as a strong research orientation through the state Office of Performance and Quality Assistance. Both of these factors provide the foundation for the possible development of more work in these areas. University partnerships which do have access to child welfare-specific research (such as those in California and New York) have been successful in strengthening the training components of their programs by having access to these. For example, test questions used in evaluating the California Common Core curricula have been referenced to both training content and the research base that supports the correct answers.

While there is interest in utilizing and strengthening existing capacity to conduct child welfare research, as well as utilizing existing literature to inform and support the work of the training system, much work remains to be done to set a research agenda, identify resources to support the work, and identify the most appropriate model for the research function. A major issue will be determining whether or not a centralized or decentralized model, or some combination, will best serve Wisconsin’s needs. At this time there are some areas of overlap and duplication of effort related to the maintenance of evidence-informed practice literature and resource links on the Partnership websites. There are also differences in faculty research areas, and differences among universities with respect to existing capacities, e.g. expertise in using administrative data. Regardless of the model that is ultimately selected, it is in Wisconsin’s best interests, particularly given current economic conditions, to identify and use these resources as efficiently as possible.

**Domain VII: Training Evaluation**

**Description and scope**

Training evaluation encompasses several goals. Typically these are to improve training quality and staff performance in support of agency goals and priorities. The evaluation of training covers a wide range of activities designed to assess the training needs of staff, provide formative feedback for curriculum improvement, assess the program’s efficacy in developing staff knowledge and skill, and assess the transfer of knowledge and skill to the job. As in other domains, the scope of training evaluation is also evolving. Training evaluation now may be called upon to examine the organizational and contextual factors that influence the use of skills and knowledge on the job, to assess the effects of alternative training delivery methods, such as e-learning, or to link to evaluations of client and agency outcomes. This domain deals with the program’s capacity to conduct traditional training evaluation activities such as assessing staff training needs, conducting formative evaluation of curriculum and delivery, and obtaining participant satisfaction feedback. It also deals with how the program is positioning itself to move to higher levels of evaluation.
Benchmarks

✓ Evaluation provides information directly relevant to the mission, goals and objectives of the training program and of the agency as a whole, and promotes agency use of findings.

✓ Stakeholders have opportunities for meaningful input into evaluation activities (e.g., through participation on advisory groups, collaboration on aspects of the evaluation design or instrumentation, or review of reports and other documents).

✓ The evaluation actively seeks support from key individuals and groups.

✓ Evaluation is conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Policies and procedures exist to safeguard the rights and welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected by its results.

✓ Evaluators take into account potential implications of individual differences in culture, religion, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity when planning, conducting, analyzing and reporting evaluations.

✓ A system for categorizing and describing levels of evaluation is used to ensure that the evaluation design is appropriate for the level of learning specified and will yield the desired level of information.

✓ Evaluation is carried out using the most rigorous designs, procedures, instruments and analyses that are feasible in the context of the agency’s needs and legal, ethical and practical constraints.

✓ Evaluation is designed and conducted to provide needed information in a practical and cost effective manner.

Respondent viewpoints

Respondents indicated that training evaluation is primarily conducted at Kirkpatrick’s (1959) Level 1, participant reaction, and is used for course improvement and trainer development. Information at this level is obtained from a workshop evaluation administered at the end of training, observation of training by partnership managers, and anecdotal feedback from participants. Interview participants mentioned the following information gathering strategies:

• Sitting in on all training sessions to identify issues,

• Examination of the open ended questions on the end of session workshop evaluation tool that ask what participants found to be helpful and what they would like to see changed or improved,

• Examination of feedback regarding trainers on workshop evaluations,

• Examination of Participant Action Plans completed at training, and

• Telephone follow-up with supervisors, or informal debriefs at supervisor meetings.

A very few strategies at higher levels of evaluation were also mentioned. Respondents from the ICW partnership are considering comparing compliance statistics before and after ICWA training as an evaluation strategy. Respondents also mentioned that there are quiz questions incorporated in the pre-service training, however, these are intended to reinforce learning and are not used for evaluation purposes.
Trainers who responded to the online survey found the feedback from the workshop evaluations to be helpful. Over 60 percent (64.9%) agreed with the statement “Workshop evaluations provide useful feedback.” One interview participant disagreed, citing a need for a new workshop evaluation, saying that the current questionnaire is too general. Others also expressed a need for ways to collect more detailed feedback, perhaps through focus groups. (See Appendix G)

Interview participants reported that they share evaluation information with trainers informally rather than distributing summary reports based on the workshop evaluation data. Respondents reported:

- That the county directors and managers do not want to see the evaluation data, but trust the partnership to use it as needed and provide necessary updates.
- Not being fully aware of the evaluation being done now. The partnership director brings evaluation information to directors’ meetings.
- Not seeing the training evaluations (Level 1 sheets). These are not hidden. They just are not shared.

Respondents, for the most part, agreed that more training evaluation might be needed and useful but several expressed the caveat that more evaluation should not take resources away from training. A small number of interview and focus group respondents expressed satisfaction with the current level of evaluation, or were unsure of the need for more information and how it might be used. For example:

- Supervisors seem happy and are not asking for more evaluation about worker knowledge or skills,
- More evaluation could be beneficial, but also costly and possibly not worth it,
- Not sure how else we would use evaluation or how aware supervisors are of linkages between what is being trained and workers’ skills. They are aware of performance in a general way but not how performance links to training.
- Respondent doesn’t know that higher levels of evaluation are needed, or how she would use it herself, and
- A lot is known already because Milwaukee is under a settlement agreement. We don’t need to generate more data, but pull together what is known.

Points made by respondents who favored more evaluation included:

- We have no way of knowing how effective training is because we have no evaluation,
- Evaluation should be a core value. We need to be prepared in tight budget times to show effectiveness,
- The QSR process needs to be coordinated with the CSFR outcomes. That data could be used to identify gaps and needs,
- Trainee happiness sheets don’t offer much indication of actual learning, and
- We need more evaluation on the effectiveness of training and need to move to higher levels of evaluation.
Focus groups and interviewees were interested in seeing more evaluation in the following areas or of the following types:

- Transfer of learning and practice change,
- Additional assessment of training needs through follow-up assessments, analysis of trends emerging from QSR process to identify gaps and themes,
- What is being learned, not just opinions about what is being learned,
- What knowledge base do trainees come in with and leave with,
- A competency-based skills test after Foundation courses and competency based OJT,
- Feedback geared to program improvement, efficacy of training,
- Evaluation of the curriculum with specifics on activities and focused on the individual training—what works and what doesn’t, rich feedback possibly through focus groups, not just an evaluation of the trainer,
- What works in relation to medium of delivery, e.g. effectiveness of mentor programs, competency based evaluation of trainers, and
- How does training affect program outcomes, worker retention?

The majority (64.9%) of trainers who responded to the online survey agreed that evaluations of trainee knowledge or skills would provide useful feedback (Appendix H).

Interviewees recognized the need for more resources to move evaluation to higher level. One element that respondents commented on was the need for an evaluation plan.

- A strategic plan for evaluation is needed to tie evaluation to program outcomes, and
- A statewide agenda might be needed for training evaluation with input from the state, universities, and other key stakeholders.

Respondents also raised the issue of the infrastructure needed to house data and track participation and evaluation results. One respondent remarked that there is currently no centralized capacity, or learner management system, to do this although some resources may exist at the partnerships. Interviewees reported that WISACWIS might have capabilities that could be used to track completion of requirements. One respondent mentioned that Open-Learning, the trainer registration system, has web-based access, but can’t track individual participants.

Several respondents viewed closer connections to the universities as an avenue that might be used to increase evaluation resources. Respondents from the universities mentioned being open to providing assistance with higher level training evaluation and that such activity fits directly with the universities’ mission of community involvement and service. One participant, however, cautioned that evaluation is not the universities’ primary purpose, and that such work is publishable only if it is “cutting edge.”

**Findings regarding benchmarks**

As in many training systems, the training evaluation done in Wisconsin is primarily level one, participant feedback. This information is used informally to make decisions about what curriculum is needed, how
effectively current curricula are meeting participant needs, and how trainers are performing. Although this level of evaluation provides a great deal of information for program improvement, many informants expressed a desire to build capacity to conduct higher levels of evaluation that would provide information about staff’s acquisition of needed knowledge and skills, transfer of learning, and the relationship of training to practice changes and improvements in child welfare outcomes. At the same time they recognized that this type of evaluation is costly. Difficult decisions must be made to allocate scarce resources in such a way that essential training functions are not compromised, but crucial evidence of training program impact is gathered and disseminated to build support for the training system. The mechanism that several states have adopted to guide these decisions and to plan for an incremental building of evaluation capacity is the strategic plan. A strong plan can guide how the Training System can move gradually to higher levels of evaluation over a period of time in a way that will maximize learning about training outcomes without overtaxing training resources.

At this time Wisconsin does not have a training evaluation plan to guide and prioritize evaluation efforts to ensure alignment with system priorities. However, the system does have experience with a strategic planning process for training that might be expanded to include an evaluation planning component. The Training Council also has an Evaluation subcommittee. While strategic planning processes generally involve wider stakeholder input, and frequently are led by a facilitator from outside the system, the evaluation committee could provide valuable input to structuring the process.

In addition to the need for an evaluation plan, the training system should have several foundational pieces in place to support further development of training evaluation. At present, training evaluation and its uses and benefits are not well understood throughout the system. Additional education is needed for consumers of evaluation information to illustrate how data may be utilized, and to build support for future evaluation efforts. Additional education is also needed to develop common frameworks for understanding of evaluation issues for those who participate in strategic planning. A deeper understanding of evaluation will also lead to better decision making around how university resources may be used to contribute to training system evaluation priorities. A second foundational piece that is not yet in place is the infrastructure to support data collection and storage. Respondents mentioned that Wisconsin does not yet have a learning management system. It was also unclear what capacity exists within WiSACWIS, or what other databases and systems might be available to support development of evaluation components and functions such as item banks, tracking of participation, and storage of data. Third, the training system as yet does not have staff capacity to either conduct evaluation or to coordinate teams using university faculty, evaluation consultants and others who will carry out evaluation activities.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1: Conduct a Forum for Reconciliation and Readying the Training System for Strategic Planning**

The Wisconsin Training System is a highly competent and sophisticated system that has benefited from the structural partnership between the state, the universities, the counties, and more recently, the tribes. Due to a number of reasons, the partnership has not been functioning as a collaborative in recent
years, as it did in the past. Collaboration is achieved when partners are committed to a common mission, can reconcile differences in power and authority, can negotiate differences and resolve conflict, establish norms of reciprocity and trust, share resources, and develop joint accountability for results (Claiborne & Lawson, 2005).

The Training Partnership would greatly benefit from a structured reconciliation process, facilitated by an outside Child Welfare training system expert who can help the members realign the rules, roles, boundaries and governance of the Training System. The training system needs to engage in this work to strengthen the collaboration of the partnership before moving into the strategic planning process. BI sees these issues as follows:

- The state has a rightful responsibility to require development of statewide mechanisms to ensure that there is training in place throughout Wisconsin that is responsive to federal and state quality review findings. In fact, everyone in the training system should view this as a critical need for which all are equally responsible.

- The Training program should have one “home” in DCF, i.e., there should be one position in DCF whose job it is to oversee all training functions of Training Program. Others in DCF who are involved with training would work through this position as key point of contact.

- The university-based regional partnerships need to see themselves as part of and responsive to a statewide system of training as well as to their regions. While this is not an easy balance, it is a key part of their responsibility.

- DCF needs to acknowledge through its decisions and actions the high level of expertise that exists in the university-based regional partnerships and the high quality of work they have done over the years in responding to regional training needs. The high level of support in the counties for the regional partnerships is due to their commitment and competence in meeting regional needs over the years.

- Centralization/decentralization is a basic and ongoing issue in state supervised, county administered Child Welfare service systems such as Wisconsin and this affects the training system in a similar way. In recent years the state has asserted its role in the training system that originally was a county led movement. A new balance of power is being forged and the training system as a whole needs to devise criteria for making decisions that recognize the issues above.

BI has several recommendations about who could serve as the facilitator for this process:

1. Susan Kanak, Policy Associate II, Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, skanak@usm.maine.edu, 207.780.5840. Susan has worked with many states (including Wisconsin) on a variety of training system issues.

2. Kathy Jones Kelley, APHSA, kathy.kelley@aphsa.org, 717.540.0051 or 717.443.6897. Kathy was the director of the Pennsylvania Child Welfare training system and now works with states on training system issues.

3. Don Schmid, Child Welfare consultant and former director of the North Dakota Child Welfare agency. Under Don’s leadership, North Dakota established its statewide child welfare and Native American child welfare training systems. Don has worked with a variety of states on child welfare programming.
4. Ellen Taylor-Powell, Ph.D., is a program evaluator with the University of Wisconsin-Extension at UW-Madison. She is the author of “Evaluating Collaboratives,” a well-regarded resource document on collaboration in Human Services. Because Dr. Powell is a local expert, she might be a good resource for the Training System in terms of consultation or guidance.

Once these issues have been effectively addressed, BI recommends that the facilitator continue to work with the training system on Recommendations 2-6.

**Recommendation 2: Review and make decisions about the structure, governing rules, and processes of the Training Council**

Several options might work to improve the structure of the Training Council. One is to consider instituting a smaller executive committee to make final decisions. The advantage would be that decision making would truly occur (as opposed to discussions with no clear decisions), that these decisions would happen in a timely way, that all issues that require a decision would get one, and that ways of ensuring that decisions get carried out could be addressed. The disadvantage is that fewer members of the training council would have direct input into a decision. In order to deal with this, the membership of an executive committee would need to represent the state, the regional partnerships and the counties. The issue of how such membership is structured will need careful consideration to ensure that each component of the training system is fairly represented, and to avoid the possibility that imbalances in the numbers of members from each of the training system components will lead to one or more entities being outvoted based only on numbers. If an executive committee model is adopted, the Training Council should consider developing a set of bylaws to govern its functioning; addressing such issues as the composition of the committee, voting and tie-breaking procedures, and the interaction of the executive committee with the full Council.

If an executive committee were established, the role of the full Training Council could be reconsidered. The full Training Council might be better utilized for raising and discussing issues, participating on smaller workgroups, providing context and guidance to the executive committee, and reviewing the results of decisions.

Regardless of whether the structure for decision-making changes or remains the same, the Training Council would benefit from developing a set of criteria by which decisions will be made. For example, decisions about statewide curriculum projects would be made within the context of what constitutes the requirements for acceptable curricula including format, content, and adherence to a competency model. Criteria for what must be standardized and what can be customized would be established (see later recommendations for more detail). The current subcommittee structure could focus on these criteria for various issues and make recommendations to the Training Council. Once adopted, these criteria would be the benchmarks for relevant decisions. As another example, decisions about training priorities and resource allocation would be made according to the strategic plan for training, once it is developed.

Such decision making criteria would help to alleviate the situations which have led to an untimely decision-making process as seems to have been the case with both the Foundation training and post-QSR projects. If timeliness of decisions were a non-negotiable criterion, then all training projects could
be addressed by the Training Council. This should eliminate any justifiable reason for having a dual training system, i.e., training decisions and projects operated by DCF without Training Council decision making and, conversely, regions making unilateral decisions about how they will participate.

The Training Council needs to improve its communication mechanisms with members, e.g. more timely postings on online of requests for input about meeting agendas, agendas themselves, follow-ups to meeting (decisions and minutes), and information.

If an executive committee structure is adopted, it would be worth considering having full Training Council meetings less frequently (such as quarterly) and rotating them around the state to facilitate county participation. The executive committee meeting schedule could be planned based on the decisions that need to be made and according to what timeframes.

The Training Council has experienced challenges getting county directors to attend the meetings on a regular basis. Having less frequent meetings in various locations might encourage participation by county directors. In addition, county directors might be more likely to attend the meetings if there is a stated purpose for their participation on the Training Council as well as detailed agendas that clearly identify the topics to be considered at the meetings requiring their input. County directors are less likely to attend if they feel that their input is not critical and that the partnerships can effectively speak on their behalf.

**Recommendation 3: Review and make decisions about the role and functions of the Training Center**

In the draft report submitted in February 2009, this recommendation stated that “There needs to be clarity about whether the Training Center is the training administrative arm of DCF or whether it is the administrative unit for the training system as a whole.” DCF responded that that the role of the Training Center staff is to function as the training administrative arm of DCF, and that this decision is non-negotiable. In light of this information, and confusion regarding this point that was expressed during the data collection process, BI recommends that DCF clearly communicate the roles and responsibilities of the Training Center staff (perhaps as part of the strategic planning process) so there is a shared understanding among stakeholders. In their role, the Training Center staff should have clear authority for enforcement of decisions made by the Training Council: if training projects are not being carried out in ways that reflect these decisions, the Training Center staff should be able to take action and hold stakeholders accountable.

**Recommendation 4: Review the resource needs for key statewide functions**

Several of the key functions of statewide training system are not adequately staffed. For example, the curriculum development function for Foundation training, including developing standardized competencies, establishing acceptable format(s), and addressing the standardization/customization issue requires more time than is currently available. Training Center staff are frequently pulled away from training functions to do other DCF work such as case reviews. This is detrimental to the training system functions, as there is not enough staff time to manage the development and delivery of
statewide training initiatives and provide support to the regional training partnerships. In addition, Training Center staff often observe training throughout the state or participate in QSR planning with counties, and it is not clear what is a Training Center staff function and what is, or might be, a partnership function.

BI recommends that the resource needs for all functions be reviewed. While DCF may not be able to fund them fully, a resource needs analysis would facilitate planning for these functions in light of what the resources are and need to be. Some of the functions, such as reviewing and approving regional customization of statewide curricula, may be able to be done by a temporary consultant who works with a subcommittee of the Training Council – first to help set the criteria for decision making and then to review customized curriculum against these criteria.

**Recommendation 5: Review and make decisions about accountability mechanisms**

A concern woven throughout the findings of this evaluation is that there are insufficient mechanisms in place to make clear decisions and then to follow up in supporting and enforcing their implementation. Some of this comes out of a desire to make decisions on a consensus basis which should then considerably reduce the need for enforcement. However, one of the consequences has been an increase in the number of issues that do not result in a decision and remain unresolved.

BI recommends that the training system develop clear criteria for decision-making and mechanisms to enforce decisions, as well as to support implementation of decisions. One option would be that regional partnership contracts would have language about the necessity of implementing standardized curricula based on the criteria that are developed for customization. A mechanism, perhaps implemented through the Training Center, would be put in place to review and enforce this process. Another option, that BI recommends, is that all statewide training projects must be developed through the Training Council and that DCF would be responsible for ensuring that this occurs. Under this structure, training projects need to be aligned with the strategic training plan in order to be approved, preventing allocation to resources for projects that do not mesh with the overall direction of the training program and theory of change regarding professional learning and development.

**Recommendation 6: Conduct Strategic Planning**

The Training Council has an excellent track record of strategic planning. BI recommends that the issues above be addressed as part of the strategic plan. Other issues include:

- Whether and how to expand the purview of the training system (not just the Training Council) to support the other major service areas administered by the counties (e.g., Juvenile Justice)
- How to ensure that there is strategic alignment of training products with the state principles or model of practice.
- Responding to findings identified in this evaluation in the following domains:
  - continuum of professional development
  - curriculum development
  - trainer development
In preparing for the strategic planning process, the Training Council might want to consider facilitation by a consultant and use of some strategies for both discussion and decision making (e.g., nominal group process). A plan for periodic review of progress should be built into the plan.

**Recommendation 7: Develop the Statewide Training Plan**

Building from the strategic planning process, develop a statewide training plan that identifies what training will be delivered statewide based on the competency model and the needs assessment describe above as well as clear timeframes. This will require upfront work on developing criteria for making decisions, setting priorities, determining which training will be developed and delivered statewide, what resources are needed, and how partnerships will communicate and share resources to meet needs they may have in common but that are not statewide. The plan should also be informed by the statewide needs assessment and the regional training plans. A statewide training plan will provide decision-making criteria for selecting as well as developing training curricula and could help to ensure that training projects (such as Foundation training) have comprehensive development plans (preferably competency based) so that all key competencies are addressed and the product is not a series of loosely related modules but a unified whole.

Wisconsin has an annual training plan which incorporates many of these features and processes but is not explicitly mapped to competency models or a structured needs assessment as described above. This task could be addressed first by the Training Council and then more fully developed by a subcommittee.

**Recommendation 8: Develop standardized sets for competencies for all training audiences**

Adopting common sets of competencies that are aligned with the Wisconsin practice principles (or model if this is developed) and the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by staff to perform their jobs would provide the basis for an integrated training system in which the needs of stakeholders at the state and local levels could be met efficiently and effectively. A common set of competencies would facilitate decision-making about which needs are best met with standardized (or customized) statewide training and which are best responded to locally. It would also provide a firm basis for assessing staff development needs, planning course offerings, setting priorities for development of new training and delivery of existing training, and forging connections with human resources regarding selection procedures and universities with respect to coordination with professional preparation. The training system has begun to move toward a greater emphasis on skill development in line with the practice principles adopted for Foundation and post-QSR training, but does not appear to have a current and commonly accepted set of competencies for staff at various levels.

There are a number of approaches to selecting or developing competencies that align with agency goals and a larger continuum of professional development. For example, the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) curriculum competencies were originally created by the graduate schools of social work to prepare their students for child welfare work and are updated every 4 to 5 years to reflect
current practice. These competencies are designed to reflect the common priorities of the schools and county and state agencies, and provide a model for collaborative curriculum development while still allowing for local autonomy where needed. California has several stakeholder committees that come together under the Statewide Education and Training Committee (STEC) to set priorities and make decisions, such as which curricula need to be developed as statewide curricula and which curricula should include evaluation components. Workgroups composed of state, university and county representatives oversee common curriculum development and make decisions regarding its content and structure. Typically, even standardized curricula offer customization options for the trainer in covering the material. The one exception to this is where content and exercises lay the foundation for evaluation and must be delivered in a standardized way to provide appropriate preparation for trainees to succeed.

Another option, used in Nebraska (Graef and Potter, 2002), is to base a coordinated system of selection, needs assessment, training and evaluation of job performance on a set of competencies derived from a job analysis. The job analysis identified the critical tasks performed by child welfare workers in that state as well as the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to accomplish them. The training system bridges on the front end to the employee selection process through evaluation of a prospective employee’s education and experience in light of how it relates to specific job tasks. They also use a structured hiring interview based on the same task analysis. Following training, supervisors evaluate job performance with a tool that is also based on behavior derived from the same job analysis.

A third system, used in Maine (Bernotavicz and Wischman, 2001), also coordinates the hiring process with a subset of the competencies used to design curricula for a program of pre-service training. The entire set of competencies was derived from job analyses and behavioral event interviews (Spencer and Spencer, cited in Bernotavicz and Wischman, 2001) that identified characteristics of top performers, and assessment of organizational culture and climate. These were refined by groups of subject matter experts.

Washington State has recently adopted Solution Based Case Practice as a model for child welfare casework. As part of the implementation of the model, they redesigned their SACWIS system to align with the practices and language used in the model. The curricula that make up the caseworker Core Training Academy and the competency based posttest administered at the end of Academy are also undergoing revision to align with the practice model.

Regardless of how a common set of competencies is selected, adapted or developed, having a common model is needed to move forward with development of an integrated staff development system.

**Recommendation 9: Further development of Foundation Training**

The Wisconsin Training System has made a good start in providing standardized statewide training with the on-line pre-service training and adapting a series of Foundation courses for new workers. However, several substantial gaps have been identified in the Foundation curricula, including training that addresses assessment and case planning. Part of the reason for these gaps is that the Foundation trainings were selected and adapted from other systems because they reflected desired practice principles. However, there was no overarching set of training competencies to guide the selection and adaptation process. One solution would be to order the competencies into a design that follows a “life of the case” model and use this to guide the revision process for Foundation training and the development or selection of additional curriculum to address gaps. In such a structure, for example,
skills that address assessment and case planning could be added as a stand-alone module, and other key competencies currently missing from Foundation training could be included in a natural order.

**Recommendation 10: Develop a systematic needs assessment process tied to a competency model**

Use of a standardized needs assessment process or set of tools will help provide the training system with information that clarifies what is a statewide need versus a local need. Such a system does not and should not preclude local responses to specific county needs, but can inform strategic planning and resource allocation to ensure that key needs are addressed without duplication of effort.

Pennsylvania, in moving away from reliance on the ITNA, adopted a system of training needs assessment that looks at a variety of indicators beyond the job descriptions and the competencies, specifically: federal and state statute, CFSR and state/local reviews, state and county improvement plans etc.

In Wisconsin this task could be further developed by a subcommittee of the Training Council. Much of the information (such as from CFSR and QSR reviews and plans) is already available and has been used to define some specific training needs. However, a more comprehensive approach would seek to develop a needs assessment process and, periodically, a needs assessment product that could guide strategic planning as well as actual curriculum products.

**Recommendation 11: Further develop a model for post-QSR training and technical assistance and integrate with pre-service, Foundation and in-service training**

The current structure for post-QSR training and technical assistance (TA) follow up, implemented in the last year or so, involves developing an individualized plan for each county during after the QSR review process that specifically addresses the unique needs of the county. This may involve a combination of training, on-site coaching and mentoring, and peer networking. Both the QSR and partnership staff are involved in this process.

Assessing the individual needs of a county through a comprehensive review process and then designing interventions to specifically meet those needs is a good model for transfer of learning and promoting practice change. In so far as the post-QSR county plans involve mentoring for staff and additional supports for supervisors, such as coaching or peer networking, learning is more likely to result in agency-wide practice improvements. As this process moves forward, BI has several recommendations for how QSR can be integrated into the overall continuum of professional development offered by Wisconsin and how the approach can be made more effective and efficient:

1. Design and implement formative evaluation strategies to collect feedback that looks at the effectiveness of different post-QSR learning strategies for different issues and locations. For example, individual coaching and mentoring may be the best approach for certain counties or to address specific topical issues, while others might lend themselves to peer-networking approaches that are multi-county. It will be important to have a process for gathering structured feedback from the counties (e.g. through follow-up interviews, questionnaires and focus groups) who have gone through the process about what strategies worked best for them, and the
facilitators and barriers to transfer. As more of this data is collected, the information can be used to refine the QSR approach and to expand the array of potential intervention strategies.

2. Design an outcome evaluation to measure transfer of learning of specific post-QSR skills. This, combined with the feedback from the formative evaluation activities will help Wisconsin determine the most effective transfer of learning strategies for given situations and develop a plan for how to integrate similar transfer of learning strategies into Foundation, and Specialized and Related trainings.

3. The county strengths and needs identified through the QSR process are a valuable barometer for how the training system is functioning. For example, through the reviews, it became evident that case assessment and planning was a skills-area that needed improvement in many of the counties. It was also a topic area missing from Foundation training. Thus, a clear statewide training need emerged from the QSR process. Areas of need that emerge from the QSR need to be summarized and examined holistically throughout the state so that the training system can use them to guide planning for training at all levels. Some needs might be local, and call for a county or regionally-specific response. However, many areas of need might cut across partnership regions and might be better addressed through standardized training or specific models of coaching that can be used in different sites.

4. Greater and more strategic involvement of regional partnership staff into QSR through the exit interview, post-QSR planning, training and TA, coaching and facilitation of peer networks would be an effective way to maximize limited training resources and integrate learning along the continuum of professional development from classroom training to skill transfer. The regional partnerships are ideally suited for this work because of their deep and thorough understanding of county needs and current role as training specialists. Since the regional partnership role has traditionally been delivery of training, the expansion to more general learning specialists for the counties is a natural and developmental fit.

**Recommendation 12: Expanding the range of professional development options for a variety of Child Welfare staff**

Wisconsin respondents and outside experts interviewed by BI made a number of excellent suggestions to expand staff development options. These include the following:

1. Consider developing a set of competencies and Foundation training for case aides.

2. Expand course offerings for experienced workers targeting needs common to all or most of the state. Partnerships have already developed curricula on some of the topics that could be used in their entirety and/or to jump start development of new curricula. Another option is to provide refresher training, perhaps online, to bring experienced workers up to date on aspects of practice model/skills being taught in new Foundation training.

3. Develop advanced training for supervisors on management skills.

4. Take advantage of training and peer network opportunities for supervisors and mid-level managers that are currently being developed by Children’s Bureau initiatives, such as the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute.
5. Look for alternate ways to promote learning for supervisors and managers through communities of practice in Wisconsin, either through conferences, peer networking, learning circles, webinars, or classroom training.

6. Continue to explore ways in which advanced topics training developed by other systems can be adapted for use in Wisconsin, such as the Supervisor Training currently being implemented in Milwaukee.

7. Consider development of a common tool and process for identifying individual development needs (a modified IDP) and develop a protocol for how workers and supervisors can develop a plan to address identified professional development needs through training and other activities.

8. In developing or revising training, be mindful of whether sections or aspects of curriculum would lend themselves to a distance learning format (like they are doing with the Legal training) to save training time.

**Recommendation 13: Develop a common set of standards for curricula and one or more approved curriculum formats**

As training systems grow, producing and updating curricula can become an increasingly time consuming activity. Curricula must be written and packaged in a way that is easy for trainers to use, and include ancillary training materials such as trainer notes, PowerPoint slides and handouts. Establishing one curriculum format that reflects agreed upon standards helps to achieve a uniformly high quality set of curricula that is workable for all trainers. If there are significant and legitimate differences of opinion about format, more than one can be adopted, but all formats under consideration should be critiqued against a set of curriculum standards and approved by a statewide body of the training system.

Contingent on available resources, the training system, through a subcommittee of the Training Council and facilitated by the Training Center Curriculum Coordinator (or a temporary consultant if there are workload issues for the Curriculum Coordinator) could undertake this work, i.e., developing a set of standards for curriculum (reviewing NEW’s standards would be a good starting point) and then developing one or more acceptable formats. Wisconsin uses a variety of formats so these could be reviewed as well as those of other states.

A key to making this successful (as with other recommendations) would be arriving at decisions and then agreement to abide by them and use of enforcement mechanisms as needed.

**Recommendation 14: Develop and implement a plan for making decisions about standardization and customization of statewide curricula**

A standardized set of curricula is needed for Foundation training and will be needed in the future for other statewide training. Yet there should be room for a limited amount of customization in order to meet legitimate county and regional differences (examples of content that varies across other states as well as Wisconsin include terminology, teaming strategies, how courts work, demographics of populations served, how families’ cases are transferred from one unit to another).
Again, contingent upon available resources, the training system, through a subcommittee of the Training Council and facilitated by the Training Center Curriculum Coordinator (or a temporary consultant) could undertake this work. It would involve identifying patterns in which legitimate regional differences exist, identifying criteria for determining when these are relevant in a curriculum, identifying what are content (and training method) non-negotiable components (i.e., must stay standardized), and from this, develop a framework for making decisions. Regions which then modify standardized training would need to have the curriculum reviewed and accepted by the Curriculum Coordinator. Disputes could be resolved by the subcommittee.

**Recommendation 15: Review process for trainer development and revise if needed**

A clear strength of the Training system is the consumer satisfaction with the quality of trainers across the state. In order to build on this strength and ensure continuity of quality trainers in Wisconsin, B1 suggests the following:

1. A more open recruitment and selection process for standardized training such as Foundation courses. Currently the system appears to rely on current regional partnership staff’s awareness of people who might be interested and make good trainers. A more formal and open process would be helpful and could be accomplished with an open job announcement and application (including self-screening questions) that interested people could submit and which would be periodically reviewed by the regional partnership staff and a trainer development subcommittee of the Training Council.

2. This subcommittee could create a fuller framework for trainer development by identifying what set of trainer competencies is desired and what trainer development activities are needed to be aligned with these competencies. These could be configured in several ways. There could be a standard TOT (possibly with an on-line component as well as a classroom component) that develops basic skills for new trainers. Experienced trainers could be grandfathered-in or could be required to demonstrate competence either through completing the basic training or providing other evidence supporting their knowledge and skills in the same areas (e.g. written observations by training managers). As with worker training, the model could be used as the basis for identifying levels of training from basic to advanced skills. It could also be used to identify different subsets of skills desired for people who conduct standardized foundations trainings vs. advanced trainings.

3. This subcommittee could also consider what a competency based trainer evaluation system would entail. Currently the regional partnerships each monitor and support trainers but the criteria aren’t clear and need to be formalized. Possible domains could be: fundamental training skills; skill in illustrating points with one’s own experience; cultural competency; facilitating skills training; use of technology, such as PowerPoint and the Classroom Performance System; and fidelity to curriculum (at least for Foundation training). A competency based observation tool could be developed and would be a way to give feedback to trainers and to structure trainer development for them.

Another aspect of a trainer evaluation plan would be to consider when and how often observations occur and what is done with data afterwards. Additional questions that would
need to be considered are: Are observations stored and summarized and reviewed periodically for trends or themes, or are they simply shared on the spot in relation to a specific training? If stored, are they stored at the partnership or centrally at the training program? Is there a need to look at strengths and weaknesses across the whole cadre of trainers (regionally, or statewide for standardized pieces), so that common needs can be identified and addresses in a coordinated way? Could observations be collected by the trainer and become part of a portfolio that establishes competencies and can travel when the trainer wants to work for several partnerships?

4. One aspect of trainer development that BI believes should be considered is the current practice of someone from the regional partnership staff attending every training. This practice should be reevaluated, as it is costly and probably not needed. There are other mechanisms for ensuring that trainers have the necessary materials and equipment and experienced trainers do not need this level of support and monitoring.

Recommendation 16: Develop an array of training and information delivery strategies and a plan for making decisions

Wisconsin, like other states, could benefit from convening a workgroup (subcommittee) to explore and set guidelines for training delivery strategies based on the competency and content area of planned training. Utilizing a larger range of delivery options for various types of training would not only maximize resources, but also promote learning and transfer of learning to the job. For example, more purely informational pieces of classroom training could be moved to web-based applications, saving time for skill development in the classroom.

Other aspects could include developing a centralized web-based resource through the Training Program for sharing policy information, curricula, best-practices information and for peer networking. Having a centralized resource would save time and moneys by avoiding duplication of efforts among partnerships and promoting single-point access. A resource implication is that the Training Program (perhaps at the Training Center) would need sufficient staff time allocated to maintain it in order not to lose functionality provided through existing websites.

Another strategy could be to use one statewide training calendar that is accessible from all websites. The current calendar on the state training system website can link to any training to get specifics including location and sponsoring partnership. At this point, interested parties need to register through a link on their partnership website. This would make it easier for staff to see if a training they need is being offered by another partnership and may cut down on wait time when trainings are full. This might reduce duplication of effort.

A web-based learning management system that tracks individuals’ completion of all specific course requirements (not just an entire series such as Foundation training) would be helpful. The learning management system should have the capacity to grow with the training system and become a vehicle for supporting evaluation, through providing online resources for testing, OJT, and storing test results. Portions should be easily accessed by staff and supervisors to manage and monitor their completion of training requirements. A centralized learning management system could help identify resource needs and provide data about course completion rates statewide.
Recommendation 17: Develop a training plan that addresses unique needs of Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare

Statewide training systems often struggle with how to address the training needs of a large urban area in the state that are similar, but in some ways different than the needs in the rest of the state. The benchmarks and fundamental principles for a high functioning training system are the same for BMCW as for all partnership regions of Wisconsin; however, as these results demonstrate, there is a need for an individualized training plan that addresses the practice challenges that are unique to BMCW either in occurrence, or in scope and magnitude. The issue of staff turnover in Milwaukee and its impact on agency climate, culture and performance as well as on outcomes for children and families has been long documented (Flower et al., 2005). In addition, the structure of BMCW and the process for placing service contracts out to bid to private agencies also distinguishes it from the rest of Wisconsin.

BI recommends a separate strategic planning process to examine how these factors influence training needs, and how training resources should be allocated to BMCW to address the unique needs of the system. The planning process needs to also take into account the results from the recent comprehensive BMCW case review process. One example might be to build in more flexibility to customize Foundation training (cultural competency, crisis management, etc.) in targeted areas. The Milwaukee training partnership has worked with BMCW to implement strategies that are responsive to turnover issues (i.e., offering additional trainings at the training center or on-site, implementing supervisor training, mentoring teams, etc.). This is start, however, a strategic planning process could result in a stronger plan for professional development in Milwaukee. For example, the Training Partnership might want to consider adopting a formal academy model of training that ensures more structured sequential delivery of Foundation training. Another example would be allocating resources to identifying or building an adequate training facility that meets the needs of BMCW.

Finally, the Training Council needs to find balance to the amount of resources—in terms of planning time, monetary resources and focus of meetings—that are devoted to issues that are Milwaukee-specific. In addition to a separate planning process devoted to identifying and addressing the training needs of BMCW, the Training Council should develop a protocol for structuring meetings so that common training concerns and decisions are addressed, as well as those that unique to different regions of the state. The results of the planning need to be linked into the larger, statewide strategic plan (e.g., guidelines for flexibility and customization for Foundation courses based on a statewide set of competencies and practice principles).

Recommendation 18: Establishing a climate that supports evaluation

As Wisconsin develops a training plan, it would also be helpful to have a training evaluation plan. It should have several foundational pieces in place to support the purposeful expansion of training evaluation over time to move to higher levels. Establishing a climate that supports evaluation involves a major paradigm shift for human services training agencies. As in most other states, training evaluation and its uses and benefits are not well understood throughout the Wisconsin system. Additional education is needed for consumers of evaluation information to:
1. Build support for future evaluation efforts. Supervisory and management staff will need to understand how data may be utilized to support decision making, performance monitoring and other job functions. They will also need knowledge of strategies for communicating their support for evaluation to staff, and the importance of their role in ensuring the availability of high quality and accurate information.

2. Develop common frameworks for understanding of evaluation issues for those who participate in strategic planning. This understanding will aid in setting priorities, specifying levels of evaluation that provide the information desired, and allocating appropriate resources. A deeper understanding of evaluation will also lead to better decision making around how university resources may be used to contribute to training system evaluation priorities.

3. Educate its own members and stakeholders regarding evaluation, and to involve them, particularly supervisors, in the design of evaluation activities. This is particularly important in evaluations of TOL, since supervisors are an important resource in judging performance in the field. Ways in which this has been done in other states include:

   • “Evaluation summit” meetings involving evaluation consultants from within and outside the system. These can be configured as informational sessions, or a combination of an information session with time for large or small group discussion and planning for specific future initiatives or existing projects. One such model consists of a general “evaluation 101” session led by an experienced training evaluator, and individual consultation or small group discussions with counties regarding specific needs. Consultation sessions would be co-led by an evaluator and someone familiar with local practice and or data resources (e.g. an expert in what administrative data are available in WiSACWIS, a QSR trainer, a partnership trainer, manager or director).

   • Evaluation “brown bags,” perhaps attached to existing supervisory or management meetings to provide brief targeted presentations on evaluation, or best practice literature. University faculty might be an excellent resource for conducting these sessions.

   • Information dissemination through the training program website that highlights evaluation planning, activities, and/or findings; or provides brief articles that illustrate how evaluation might be used, how to interpret outcomes data, and what findings mean to a supervisor or administrator.

   • Posting evaluation tools (e.g. checklists or observation forms for supervisors to use in supporting transfer of learning) that may be shared across the state. These tools should always be posted with explanations of how they were developed, and recommendations for what is and is not appropriate use to help ensure the validity of information collected.

**Recommendation 19: Develop a strategic plan for evaluation**

A strategic plan specifically for evaluation is needed to set direction and serve as a map for future evaluation activities. Butler Institute recommends the formation of a strategic planning group for training evaluation with representation from DCF, the Training Program, the training partnerships, and county staff at administrator, supervisor, and worker levels. The group should include persons with expertise in training evaluation, and may include representatives from private agencies or other systems (e.g., mental health). We recommend that the process begin with an evaluation session led by an
outside training evaluation expert or experts for those who will be working on the evaluation plan to provide them with the basic information needed for decision making. This person should remain involved for some period of time to help facilitate the planning process. It might also be useful to have a co-facilitator from Wisconsin who has a strong interest or background in evaluation: perhaps someone from the Evaluation Committee of the Training Council. A strategic plan for training evaluation should:

- Set evaluation priorities for some period of time (e.g., three to five years). The plan would identify which courses or competencies will be evaluated, at what level, and in what time frames. It should also address the process and criteria used for the alignment of training evaluation activities with agency priorities.
- Specify a timetable for updates to address changing training evaluation needs over time; including criteria for addressing emerging priorities not originally known or considered.
- Specify guidelines for developing rigorous evaluation designs at each level of training evaluation; for example, standards for knowledge or skills test development. In the case of knowledge tests, the guidelines should specify such things as the development of a test plan for content validity, the minimum number of items to be included in tests for various purposes, procedures for pilot testing and item analysis, acceptable levels of reliability, and procedures for determining an acceptable level of performance (APA, AERA, & NCME, 2002). For embedded skills tests, the guidelines should specify a definition of skills assessment tasks, how to choose or develop a task appropriate to the level of the target competency, the number of samples of performance required to fairly represent trainee ability and the range of situations in which the skill will need to be used, and criteria for developing scoring rubrics (e.g., when anchor description should be included for scale points and setting standards of performance, or when inter-rater reliability should be established [Forster & Masters, 1996]).
- Establish guidelines for reporting of evaluation results. Policy regarding the uses to which evaluation data will be put and with whom it will be shared should be clearly stated and communicated to trainees, their supervisors, and other stakeholders.
- Outline policies and procedures regarding confidentiality, sharing information about the evaluation with trainees, and protection of trainees’ rights, including when an Institutional Review Board (IRB) might be required.

Once implementation begins, it is important to visit the plan periodically and make modifications. However, such a document helps to ensure that priority needs are met, that high standards are maintained and that resources are allocated appropriately throughout the period of time covered in the plan. This type of strategic plan also informs resource needs and helps define the skill sets needed from research staff or consultants to implement the planned activities.

**Recommendation 20: Build research and evaluation capacity**

Building a research and evaluation capacity responsive to current program needs and plans for future initiatives will be necessary as the training system moves toward more sophisticated levels of training evaluation. As part of building evaluation capacity, both staffing and infrastructure will need to be addressed. First, the training system, as yet, does not have staff capacity to either conduct evaluation, or to coordinate teams using university faculty, evaluation consultants and others who will carry out evaluation activities. Varied competencies will be needed in those who design and carry out training...
evaluations. For the evaluation of learning outcomes in training, transfer of learning, and impacts of training on agency goals and outcomes, an evaluator should have knowledge of how to:

- Conduct literature reviews
- Operationally define educational objectives and testing purposes.
- Develop a variety of item formats, including multiple-choice and constructed response items.
- Develop and validate skills performance tasks and observational assessment tools.
- Develop answer keys and scoring rubrics for different item formats.
- Evaluate tests and items using statistical and qualitative methods.
- Incorporate meaning into test score scales using both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced procedures.
- Use standard setting techniques to set “passing scores” and other performance standards on tests and skills measures.
- Develop appropriate documentation to properly communicate the quality of an assessment.
- Understand the utility of training evaluation within the broader context of policy and decision making.
- Construct questionnaires and structure appropriate sampling strategies.
- Select and use analytical and database software.
- Collect and analyze qualitative data.

No one individual is equally well versed in all of the evaluation skills mentioned above. Different disciplines tend to concentrate on different aspects of research skills. For this reason, it is often advantageous to use team approaches to evaluation and flexible project staffing. Possible staffing models are:

- An in-house evaluator who serves as the project director supported by internal staff and external consultants/university faculty. This model works well if there are sufficient staff resources to implement an evaluation, but help is needed with certain technical aspects. This model can provide the advantage of a team leader who has local knowledge and who can ensure that the evaluation is congruent with program objectives. It may also be a cost-effective option when there is a long-term commitment to conducting evaluations of training, rather than a specific evaluation of one course or aspect of the program. A potential drawback to this model is that it requires a substantial commitment of staff and resources, and it may not be perceived as being as objective as using outside evaluators in some contexts.

- An in-house evaluator supported by internal staff. This option may be cost-effective in the long run providing that there is an ongoing commitment to evaluation. It can also promote increased involvement of program staff in evaluation efforts. This option avoids the expense of hiring an outside evaluator and is often thought of as less costly. However, with a research and evaluation function that encompasses several varied activities, it can require a
substantial commitment of staff to provide the range of expertise required, and a careful cost-benefit analysis is needed to determine if it is actually the least costly alternative.

- An outside evaluator (an individual consultant, research institute, university, or consulting organization) who serves as project leader and takes the responsibility for conducting the evaluation with the input and support of internal staff. This model has the advantages of providing expertise that may not be available in-house, fresh perspectives on the program, and experience in doing evaluation that may lead to greater efficiency and objectivity. However, outside evaluators may be expensive and may not have a full understanding of local conditions and issues. The latter can be overcome with support from the in-house members of the team and/or the use of advisory boards. Another cost-saving strategy is using an outside evaluator during the development phase, and then gradually “phasing out” the job functions completely, or else using the external evaluator for discrete activities such as annual analysis and reporting of data.

Regardless of the model used, it will be important to clearly define the competencies needed for the research and evaluation functions desired by the training system, and to either hire staff with those competencies, or identify university faculty or contract with consultants who have the needed experience and abilities. If a set of competencies will be needed routinely, hiring internal staff might be the most efficient and effective model. If a set of skills will be needed for a specific, time-limited project, a mixed model, where in-house staff manage the project and consultants provide specialized services, might be appropriate. Resources that would be helpful in defining the needed competencies include the National Staff Development and Training Association competencies for the evaluator/researcher role in training evaluation and Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals in Human Services, and the American Evaluation Association’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators and Educational Evaluation Standards. University faculty or evaluation consultants may also be helpful in defining needed skill sets.

It might be helpful to have a directory of university faculty that highlights their involvement in child welfare research and evaluation, special areas of expertise or interest and contact information on the website.

A second capacity piece involves building the infrastructure to support training evaluation data collection and storage. Interview respondents mentioned that Wisconsin does not yet have a learning management system. It was also unclear what capacity exists within WiSACWIS, or what other databases and systems might be available to support development of evaluation components and functions, such as: building test item banks, tracking trainee participation, linking training evaluation data to other administrative databases, and storage of data. The training system will need a statewide data system to track individual level participation and to store evaluation data. Such a system should also include a unique identifier for individuals that can be used to link various pieces of the evaluation and training evaluation data to client outcome data. Possibilities that should be investigated for these functions include: incorporating a training evaluation function in WiSACWIS, tracking and storing training evaluation via a learning management system, or another stand alone database that is linked through a common staff identifier. Butler Institute recommends that various options be considered as part of the strategic planning process. Infrastructure needs can be met incrementally as decisions are made regarding the scope and purposes of any training evaluation to be undertaken; however, planning is essential to ensure that all components of such a system work together and that resources are not wasted. The stakeholder group that participates in the strategic planning process may also be able to
identify existing resources as well as offer ideas for appropriate programs and systems to carry out additional functions.

**Recommendation 21: Explore creation of a research to practice consortium**

There has been considerable interest in the concept of establishing a research function that would:

- increase the training system’s ability to access literature on evidence based and promising practices in child welfare,
- increase the training system’s access to research and program evaluation expertise within the university system, and
- allow the Wisconsin Training System to conduct research that adds to the growing evidence base.

Butler Institute recommends that representatives from DCF, the Partnerships, the Training Program and interested University Deans or their designees come together for a one day meeting to explore the idea of establishing a research to practice consortium. While other options exist, such as centralizing the research functions at one university, or utilizing a fully de-centralized model of local research to practice centers within the Partnership regions, BI believes that a consortium model offers the best option for moving forward. Within the current configuration, there are areas of duplication of effort, but also distinct areas of expertise and well developed capacities already in existence at individual universities. As a practical matter, a consortium model could exploit existing capacities and reduce duplication of effort, rather than maintain separate centers or re-create functions within one Center that may already exist elsewhere.

A consortium model does require substantial planning and coordination. If there is sufficient interest in moving forward, the planning group may want to form a steering committee, brainstorm possible sources of funding, plan next steps, and possibly identify a few small initiatives that could serve as a pilot for how future collaboration could take place. A consortium will need a broad process for obtaining input on how it should be structured, what its scope should be, protocols for decision making, and substantial discussion on setting the research agenda. Planners may want to consider bringing in experts from other systems, such as Mary McCarthy from New York, or Nancy Dickinson from North Carolina, who have had experience in the set up and operations of university based Child Welfare consortia. These experts may also be able to offer advice on possible funding for the development of a research to practice consortium. At least some of the existing child welfare research centers partner with foundations or obtain grant or foundation funding, thus university of Wisconsin faculty with grant writing expertise or strong relationships with foundations, will be a key resource.

Planners might also want to talk to those who have set up or who operate research centers such as the Center for Social Services Research at Berkeley which maintains a child welfare dynamic report system that facilitates access to CSFR outcome data reports broken down by time periods, counties, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. by the state, counties, and research community, and conducts and publishes child welfare research. Another such center is the Judith Granger Birmingham Center at the University of Texas at Arlington.
Recommendation 22: Expand and coordinate access to available research to practice literature

Training system access to child welfare research could be improved through the following processes:

• Consolidation of the child welfare literature currently available on the Partnership websites to the statewide training system website. Individual training websites currently maintain lists of articles, links to other resources such as the Child Welfare Information Gateway, and in some cases, full text articles. However, what is included on each site, as well as ease of use, varies. It is possible for anyone in the state to access information on any of the Partnership websites with a little effort; however, a common resource area on the statewide website would make access faster and easier. The proposed consolidated list could be accessed directly from each Partnership’s website via a link to the statewide site as well as directly from the statewide training system website. However, by making a consistent set of resources available in one location access would be improved for everyone across the state. The Partnerships have considerable knowledge of the research literature and their participation and expertise would continue to be critical to maintaining a quality information resource. Coordinating this effort will take some investment of time and attention to developing mechanisms for soliciting input from the Partnerships (perhaps by e-mail), and for updating the resource lists. This function currently is a responsibility of the training program curriculum coordinator, but also could become a function covered under a research to practice consortium if one is established.

• The universities could participate in a process of synthesizing and evaluating the quality of the research literature on a given topic, through the lens of Wisconsin’s child welfare system. Protocols for evaluating and categorizing the quality of emerging evidence (e.g. CWLA’s levels of rigor) exist. However, the universities could apply both their expertise in research and knowledge of local populations and practice to provide additional guidance to counties interested in adopting a particular practice and to curriculum writers addressing transfer of learning issues. This might take the form of additional literature reviews or meta-analyses, or through a system like CWLA’s that provides ratings on the website of both the quality of the evidence and its applicability to Wisconsin.

• The universities, as part of a consortium or under their current structure, could continue and expand efforts to partner with counties on specific program evaluation needs. Needs might be identified in a variety of ways: through the evaluation summit described above, through participation in QSR exit interviews, through a planning meeting or meetings with DCF and the counties to identify areas in which faculty interests and skills mesh with program evaluation needs, or through more representation on the Training Council.