



AFCARS Open Office Hours for the implementation of AFCARS 2020

Children's Bureau Data Analytics and Reporting Team

April 24, 2023¹

AFCARS 2020 Webinars and Trainings



AFCARS 2020 Trainings

TITLE	DATE
XML Concepts	March 29, 2023
Validating an XML file	March 8, 2023

AFCARS 2020 Webinars

TITLE	DATE
Updates on NCWDMS and AFCARS 2020 Reporting	March 27, 2023
Participation in the Pilot and Use of NCWDMS Part 2	February 6, 2023
Participation in the Pilot and Use of NCWDMS	January 9, 2023
New Technical Bulletins and Intro to NCWDMS	December 12, 2022
Office Hours Aug. - Oct. 2022	October 17, 2022
Compliance and Penalties	June 13, 2022
Implementation	June 28, 2021
AFCARS XML Submission — Questions and Answers	January 11, 2021
AFCARS Technical Bulletin #20 - Questions and Answers	November 23, 2020

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/afcars-technical-assistance>

Technical Bulletins

Technical Bulletin 20: Regulations, Data Elements, and Examples

This includes detailed information on what and how to report each element.

Technical Bulletin 21: File Structure & Encryption

This describes the requirements for the file, including the XML tags and the data groups, along with the schemas. It also contains the encryption requirement for child record number.

Technical Bulletin 22: Reporting Population and Data Extraction

Explains how to extract the correct reporting population and data extraction examples.

Technical Bulletin 23: Compliance and Penalties

This includes the policy and rules that will be validated at the time you upload the AFCARS file and explains how to calculate the penalties.

Presenters



Amber Nagorski, Project Coordinator, CB, ICF Contractor

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Rebecca Odor, AFCARS Program Administrator, CB

Next NCWDMS Release



- The following priority updates were deployed at the end of April:
 - Increased maximum file size to 2.6 GB
 - Added ability to export a CSV file for Compliance and Data Quality reports (limit of 1000 errors for each error type)
 - Resolved error in displaying results when there is a large number of errors
 - Fixed compliance check for E68 (TPR for Second Parent) to allow for a null value
 - Revised NCWDMS e-mail notifications for STT user transmissions files to only send notifications to users associated with the file's program type (AFCARS or Family First)

Future Priority Enhancements



- Currently working on high priority items planned for future releases:
 - Add ability to generate a compliance summary report
 - Add ability to generate a frequency report
 - Allow permanency plan and caseworker visit containers to be present in the transmission file with all null values for the related data elements
 - Further refinements to data quality checks

Question:

How do you handle the living arrangement and provider information for elements 112-146 for clients that have an open removal episode on October 1, 2022? It says to report all removal history information, as well as living arrangements and provider information, but some of this historical information that is being requested was not collected as a part of AFCARS 1993.

Answer from August 2022:

We understand this concern. Our direction at this time is to implement the regulation as written. An element with missing data for a child in care on or after October 1 will be an error. If the number of errors for an element is over the compliance threshold, the file will be noncompliant.

Question:

What values should we use for missing data from our system and data we currently don't collect for new elements?

Answer:

Agencies are expected to report on each of the elements. Agencies were given three years to prepare their data information systems to accommodate the new AFCARS 2020 data requirements.

If the agency's data information system does not directly collect and store information associated with an element, or if there is no process to extract the necessary information from other sources, like case notes, then the agency must respond with null or blank.

In most cases, this will be read as a missing value error and will be included on the compliance report as such. If there are 10% or more of the child records with an error for the element, the agency's file will be noncompliant.

Follow up Question:

We don't have data for children who have been in care for a few years. Should workers guess or just put numbers in for missing data? We don't want to stay in noncompliance indefinitely. We have no way to know the date ICWA applied or info on sex trafficking.

Answer:

Workers should not guess or enter random numbers in place of missing data. Knowingly entering data that cannot be verified is against the regulations.

If the agency's data information system does not directly collect and store information associated with an element, or if there is no process to extract the necessary information from other sources, like case notes, then the agency must respond with null or blank.

Follow up Question:

For a child that is not school age, could we default E37: Special Education to “No?”

Answer:

There is a distinction between defaulting and mapping.

Defaulting means:

- Prefilling data with common values.
- Automatically selecting a value from a list if a worker does not pick a value.
- Examples of defaulting or inappropriately assigning values:
- Defaulting and storing for "Is the youth pregnant" to “No.”
- Writing logic in your system that if the worker does not select “male” for the child, then it stores the child’s sex as “female”.

However, mapping is a separate concept from how the data is stored in your system.

For example, if the system has a field that stores the date of a health assessment and there is no date entered, the AFCARS extract could map the blank/null date to “No” for E22: Health Assessment.

For the question above, if the special education field in your system is left blank for all non-school aged children, then that blank could map to "No" for E37: Special Education.

Follow up Question:

Our system doesn't store many of the new elements like E106: Victim of sex trafficking prior to entering foster care. Does it then follow that if we couldn't collect the information on the a current removal that began years ago, that we can report "no?" Or is that considered inappropriate defaulting?

Answer:

If the agency's data information system does not directly collect and store information associated with an element, or if there is no process to extract the necessary information from other sources, like case notes, then the agency must respond with null or blank.

If you have not asked or researched the response to this element, then you may not report "No" for that child.

However, we would like to note that for this element, you can ask the child/parent/other systems at any time, not just upon intake, about whether the child had been a victim of sex trafficking.

Question:

What do we do about too large files?

Answer:

Right now, NCWDMS is able to accept files up to 2.6 GB.

1. If your file size is bigger than 2.6 GB, review your XML to see if it is able to be reduced. Email AFCARS@acf.hhs.gov for technical assistance on the issue.
2. Split your XML file into 2 different files following the TA provided by AFCARS@acf.hhs.gov. This will allow you to see the individual errors in the file, but *will not* give you an overall compliance determination.

Question:

If we submit more than one file before the end of the submission period, do we have to indicate which one will be considered the final submission?

Answer:

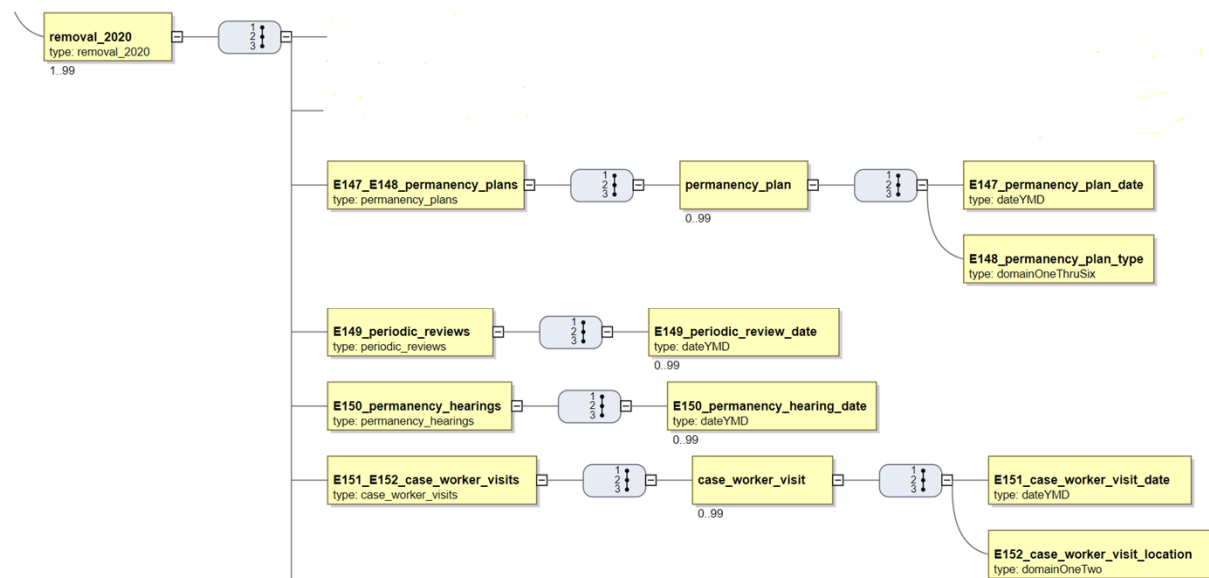
If more than one file is uploaded AND submitted in NCWDMS before the end of the submission period, the most recent one will be considered your official submission.

Question:

How many permanency plans and caseworker visit information should be reported?

Answer:

Permanency plans and caseworker visits are reported at the removal level. This means that each removal will report all the caseworker visits and permanency plans that happened during that removal. If the child had more than one removal, then each removal will report the associated caseworker visits and permanency plans. In summary, all caseworker visits and permanency plans are reported.



Question:

What happens next if our agency submits a noncompliant file for the 23A reporting period?

Answer:

If your state submits a file that is noncompliant (including submitting a file through the 1993 submission method), you will receive a letter from CB officially notifying you of the noncompliant status in June.

You will have until November 14, 2023 to submit another file through NCWDMS that is compliant.

If you still don't have a compliant file, then you will receive a letter from CB by March 30, 2024 that notifies you of the

- noncompliant status,
- amount of the penalty, and
- 30 day deadline for submitting the decreasing adjustment before interest accrues.

You will receive an updated penalty amount by September 30, 2025 if there were any increasing or decreasing adjustments on the CB-496 for the FY23 3rd quarter.

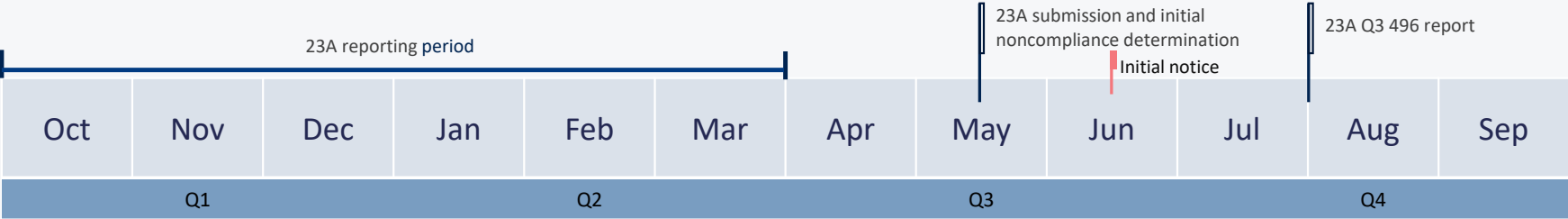
You will have 30 days to submit an adjustment to your CB-496 before interest accrues.

Example for 23A Noncompliant AFCARS File

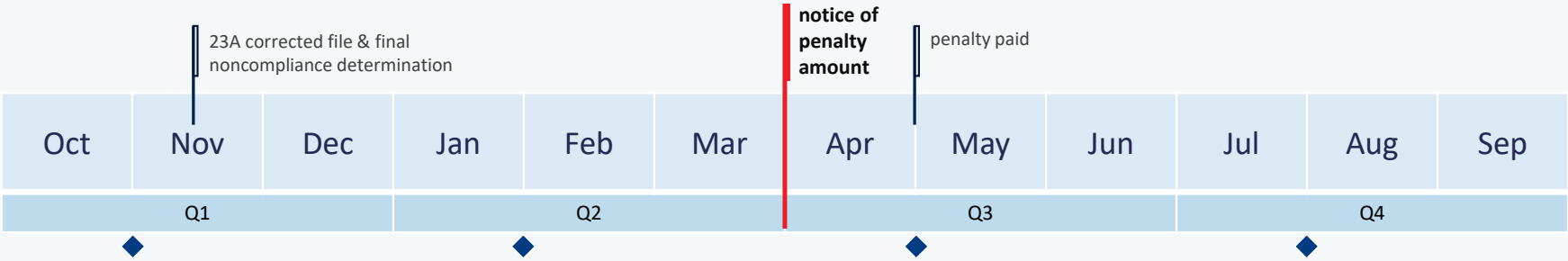
KEY

CB-496 FY 23 Q3
prior quarter adjustment

FY 23



FY 24



FY 25

