



Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families



Motivational Interviewing (MI)

Information and Application Packet

Prepared by:

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF)
Division of Safety and Permanence

Please send all questions on this application to: DCFDSPMI@wisconsin.gov

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Our Vision: A Wisconsin where child welfare professionals and families are stronger partners- using Motivational Interviewing to keep more children and youth safe, stable, and thriving in their families and communities.

Purpose

This document is designed to support local child welfare leadership in making an informed decision about applying to participate in the Initial Phase of Motivational Interviewing (MI) Implementation. It outlines expectations and timelines, provides an overview of MI, and describes the key components of the MI initial implementation. The information is intended to assist local child welfare agencies with preplanning considerations and help leaders determine whether this is the right time to integrate MI into their local practice framework.

History and Vision

In 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law, and it aims to safely keep children with their families and in their homes and avoid the trauma caused by removals.

- This legislation had bipartisan support in Congress; legislators from both sides of the aisle supported the principle of Putting Families First, which is **children do best with their families**.

Wisconsin joined this national shift and has been transforming the child welfare system to be more **family-focused and collaborative in supporting children and families in-home**.

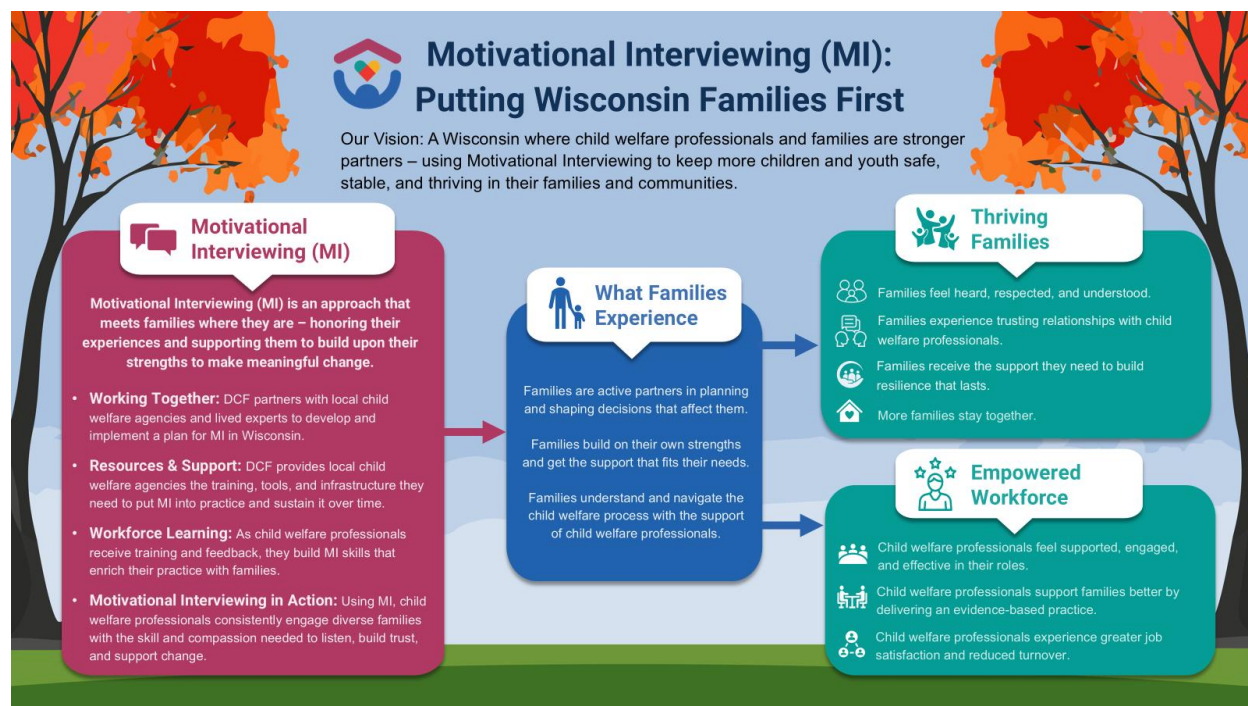
DCF committed to three key strategies to create meaningful and sustainable transformation that supports our shared vision of safe and loved children and youth in thriving families and communities.

- Empowering local child welfare agencies to support families in their homes by reducing barriers and providing tools and resources.
- Keeping children and youth in family settings whenever possible.
- Supporting the workforce with solutions and improvements.

In 2025, Wisconsin held a state-wide Prevention Summit with local child welfare agencies and lived experts from across the state, as well as national experts. Based on small group discussions and state-wide surveys, Motivational Interviewing was prioritized as the next evidence-based service for state investment. Using that feedback, DCF has worked with the Wisconsin County Human Services Agencies (WCHSA) to convene a workgroup, made up of local agency leaders and lived experts who have assisted in designing and informing the implementation decisions outlined in this application packet. ***DCF thanks the MI External Workgroup for their time, energy, and passion over the last year!***

With the help of both local child welfare leaders and lived experts, the following visual was developed outlining both what local agencies can expect, and the experience and outcomes MI is anticipated to support. DCF believes that MI aligns perfectly with the strategies identified

under Family First to both support and empower the child welfare workforce and keep children and families thriving together.



Timeline and Scale for MI Implementation in Wisconsin

DCF is planning a 5-year Phased MI Implementation in Wisconsin. Initial implementation will begin in Q2 of 2027 with 3-4 local child welfare agencies selected, totaling 100-120 child welfare professionals. DCF intends to use the initial implementation year to help inform subsequent onboarding of local agencies. DCF is encouraging local child welfare agencies who are interested in helping shape MI practice in Wisconsin to consider applying to participate in the initial phase. The timeline for the MI Initial Implementation Application and Launch is found below.

Date	MI Initial Phase Implementation
October 15, 2026	MI Application Launch
October 15 - Nov 15, 2026	MI Information Calls Scheduled
November 30, 2026	Application Due
January 15, 2027	Sites Selected
February 2027	MI Statewide Implementation Team Begins
March 2027	MI Local Implementation Teams Assembled
March 2027	Local Readiness Assessment Review

April – June 2027	Intro to MI Training Held
July 2027	MI Practice Begins with Families
July 2027	1:1 Coaching/Peer Group Meetings/Supervisory MI Learning Community Begins

Notes on Funding and Sustainability

MI in Wisconsin is being implemented within existing state funding resources alone. No additional money was provided by the state legislature in support of implementation. This has meant that DCF has utilized existing resources, such as the Professional Development System (PDS) to support MI implementation.

In addition, due to resources, prioritization of staff roles for MI implementation was necessary. DCF is focusing primarily on the child protection workforce (Initial Assessment, Ongoing, Dual Youth Justice (YJ)/Ongoing) during this Phased 5-Year Implementation. Participation of Access, YJ-only and other child welfare professionals will be explored in later implementation phases.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) Overview

Objectives

MI is an evidence-based communication approach that is rated Well-Supported on the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#). MI represents a complex integration of skills that aim to evoke a person's internal motivation for change and develop a plan to act upon that change (Miller & Rollnick, 2023). MI enhances family engagement and prevention outcomes by aligning caseworker practice and supervision around collaborative, strengths-based, family-centered engagement.

How MI Implementation is Designed to Support Learning

The phased implementation of MI will introduce and support local child welfare professionals (CWPs) and their supervisors in integrating MI into day-to-day practice through a supportive approach. The focus will be on building MI skills, fostering deliberate practice, and developing confidence over time, rather than expecting immediate mastery. MI practitioners will receive training, structured coaching, and feedback opportunities for continuous skill development as they embed MI into casework. In addition, DSP will work closely with local agencies to learn from the training, coaching, and implementation what needs and adaptations are necessary to continuously improve where needed.

Participation Costs

DCF is committed to ensuring costs remain low for local child welfare agencies. Training and fidelity costs will be covered completely by DCF. MI training, coaching, peer learning, and supervisory learning groups will be hosted virtually to minimize staff time and costs associated with travel.

Staff time will be required for training, coaching, and fidelity monitoring. A breakdown of the commitment components can be found in the table below. Additional staff time will be required for Local Implementation Teams (described in further detail on page 8). NOTE: Agencies with multiple Initial Assessment or Ongoing CPS teams may choose to have a subset of their workforce participate. This should be outlined in the application and discussed with DCF before site launch. Which staff are required to participate (if an agency recommends starting with a subset of their workforce) will be agreed upon with DCF before site launch and is requested information on the application.

Phased Implementation Components at a Glance

By applying for this opportunity, local agencies are committing to full participation in the MI activities denoted in Table 1 below and described in more detail in the following section. The audience, duration, and the anticipated timeframe are outlined.

Table 1.0 Commitment Components			
COMPONENT	AUDIENCE	DURATION	TIMEFRAME (Anticipated)
Statewide MI Implementation Group	2 Local Agency MI Leaders	Monthly Approx. 2 hours virtual	February 2027 – December 2027
Local MI Implementation Group	3-5 Local Agency MI Leaders/Staff	Monthly	March 2027 - December 2027
Local Readiness Assessment	Local leader w/ staff input	Approx. 2 hours	March 2027
Asynchronous MI Training	Supervisor/CWP	One-time training. 5 hours	April-June 2027
Live, Virtual Instructor-Led MI Training	Supervisor/CWP	One-time training. 6 hours virtual	May-June 2027
MI Service Delivery Begins July 2027			
Recorded MI Interaction	CWP	2x a year audio recording Peer Group 3x a year	July 2027-June 2028
Fidelity Coaching Session	CWP	2x a year minimum Virtual 1.0 hour	July 2027-June 2028
Monthly Peer Learning Groups	CWP	Monthly 1.5-hour groups 8 groups a year	Begin July 2027
MI Supervisory Learning Community	Supervisor	Monthly 1.5-hour virtual huddle + 1 hour of individual learning	Begin June/July 2027 – December 2027
In-Person Implementation Collaborative Meeting	Local agency leaders/Supervisor /CWP	One day	October 2027

MI Components

To further support planning and decision-making, each MI implementation component is described below. These components may be refined during the initial implementation phase in partnership with the Local Implementation Sites based on lessons learned.

MI Statewide Implementation Team

This team will be comprised of DCF MI Leadership and relevant state team members, PDS team members and 1-2 Local Implementation Team members from each selected MI site. This group will meet for approximately two hours, every month. The Statewide Implementation Team will be responsible for ensuring consistent initial implementation roll out across all sites, triaging concerns as they arise, supporting continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts and engaging in regular dialogue to better support state infrastructure and local implementation. Local MI leaders will be responsible for raising concerns identified locally to the statewide implementation team and to take back information to the Local MI Site participants.

MI Local Implementation Teams

Each site will create a MI Local Implementation Team. Because local leadership roles vary, the guidance focuses less on selecting individuals with certain titles and more on ensuring that the team members have the breadth and depth of expertise to make the implementation effort a success. This team should include 3-5 individuals who are jointly responsible for planning and making decisions about the local implementation effort. DCF suggests 3-5 individuals, as larger groups often find it hard to meet/communicate consistently and smaller teams (under 3 individuals) can be greatly impacted by turnover during implementation. The MI Local Implementation Teams can look different from agency to agency and can be incorporated into other local agency existing structures.

Responsibilities and skillsets of Local Implementation Teams include: Team members should understand how change happens locally and their role in supporting continuous efforts to improve local practice. Team members should be leaders (either formally and informally) that are perceived positively by agency staff and are considered trusted messengers. While having an existing lived experience committee/feedback loop is not a requirement for MI participation, sites are encouraged to consider the role of lived expertise in their Local Implementation Teams. Individuals who are part of the Local Implementation Team may be those who can act as a connector to key data and lived expert feedback as identified as part of the CQI process of MI.

Thought should be given to create a team that has a variety of skills and who are in positions to champion for change.

Key Functions of a Local Implementation Team

Each function should be covered by one or more team members.

Know Wisconsin child welfare work and know or are committed to learning the MI skillset. They know the breadth of child welfare professionals' casework responsibilities and are willing to learn what the training covers and how coaching and MI peer groups run.	Know how change management and implementation efforts have been rolled out in the past. They understand CWP's have multiple competing demands, so they balance ambition and reality while prioritizing fidelity.	Know how to interpret and use data for improvement: dashboards, reporting, and feedback from child welfare professionals and lived experts. They connect to larger CQI or agency improvement cycles and help others make meaning of data.	Know how to set the vision and help others see what it takes to get there. They are someone the broader workforce looks to as a positive influencer. They supply lived expert input or connect to agency lived expert efforts. They align policy and practice, build capacity and plan for sustainability.
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Executive Agency Leadership Involvement

Agency leaders help create the conditions for the success of the initial implementation by setting expectations ensuring staff participation, supporting learning during the implementation and shaping the culture of implementation. Selected sites will identify one or more executive leaders (e.g., Director, Assistant Director, Program Manager), with decision-making authority, to participate on the agency's MI Implementation Team and actively support initial implementation efforts. The application asks local agencies to name the executive leader(s), describe how they will be involved, and how they will ensure timely decision making when challenges arise. Furthermore, the application itself includes an acknowledgement from the local agency director, indicating an understanding of the MI components and approval of the application's submission.

MI Staff Training & Skill Development

REQUIRED TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS & CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS		
	Asynchronous-self-paced	5 hours
	Live, virtual, instructor-led	6 hours

Staff Training

Prior to implementing MI, CWP's will be required to complete 11 hours of total training which will be split between self-paced and live instructor-led curriculum. All training is tailored for the Wisconsin child welfare system and features scenarios and skills specific to providing MI in the child welfare context. The training will be broken down into two parts:

- **5 hours** asynchronous. This means it will be self-paced for CWP's to complete on their own. This is a prerequisite to the live, instructor-led training.
- **6 hours** will be live, instructor-led training, conducted virtually. This training will provide skill-based instruction and the opportunity to practice MI skills through role plays and feedback.

Staff Ongoing Skill Development

The research is clear that initial training on its own is not enough to sustain MI practice; as without feedback and coaching, MI skills tend to fade after training (Schwalbe et al, 2014). To practice MI as intended, CWP's need opportunities to grow their skills through feedback, ongoing support, and coaching. CWP's will receive structured coaching (paid for by DCF) to reinforce skill development and maintain MI fidelity. Coaching—delivered virtually—will combine training information with observation-based feedback to support real-time application of MI in case practice and supervision. This will be done through two key formats:

1:1 Coaching: CWP's will receive structured coaching by trained coaches to reinforce skill development and maintain MI fidelity. This ongoing 1:1 coaching support is designed to build confidence, address practice challenges, and strengthen MI skills.

- Twice a year, CWP's will make an audio recording of themselves role-playing MI skills. The Coach will review the recording and code the interaction using the Social Work and Interviewing Motivationally (SWIM) fidelity tool developed by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre at Cardiff University.
 - During the initial implementation year, DCF will hire and/or train three Coaches from different backgrounds (county practice, DCF, PDS) to understand pros/cons of each coaching background.
 - Local child welfare agencies will not be expected to code MI interactions or provide MI coach support.
 - The Coach will provide feedback, guidance, and input to strengthen the CWP's MI practice.
 - *Approximate staff time commitment: 2 hours total with coach in the first year after initial training, Annual time = 4 hours total with potential prep time (assuming 1 hour per role play prep).*

MI Peer Groups: CWP's will participate in peer group sessions that will allow for continued learning through group discussions and individual feedback. CWP's will also share recorded role plays to receive and offer feedback to peers to deepen their own understanding and skillset.

- CWP's from across the initial implementation sites will participate in MI Peer Groups.
- MI Peer Groups will meet monthly for 1.5 hours.

- CWP's are expected to attend a minimum of 8 meetings in a year.
- CWP's will be asked to bring 3 role play cases to be shared over the course of the year. This will also provide CWP's an opportunity to learn and practice MI-skills from peers in a low-stakes, learning focused way.
- MI Peer Groups will be facilitated by Coaches who can provide additional technical assistance and feedback.
- *Approximate time commitment: 12 hours per year in Group Setting, 3 hours of prep outside of class (assuming 1 hour per role play prep) = 15 hours per year.*

Supervisor Training & Skill Development

Initial Supervisor Training

Prior to implementing MI, CW Supervisors will be required to complete the same 11 hours of total training discussed above. Supervisors will attend a supervisor-only version of the 6-hour instructor-led virtual training so that Supervisors have a chance to practice skills and ask questions of trainers about the content, without doing so in front of their staff. Also, separate training for supervisors allows CWP's the opportunity to participate in training without oversight from their supervisor.

MI Supervisory Learning Community

While supervisors will not be coding MI interactions or providing direct fidelity support, supervisors play a vital role in developing and supporting staff's use of MI in day-to-day interactions with families. Research has clearly shown that supervisors are instrumental to the successful implementation of evidence-based models (Singh, 2023). During the MI Summit, focus on leaders receiving training and support around MI was identified as crucial to support MI implementation. As a result of this feedback, supervisors will be asked to participate in a MI Supervisory Learning Community, based on the Applied Learning Community structure, which will offer virtual huddles in a cohort model, combined with asynchronous materials/in-agency discussion. *Approximate time commitment: Monthly 1.5-hour meetings over 6 months. 1 hour monthly independent learning. Total approximate time commitment: 15 hours*

Total Supervisor Initial Training Time: 11 hours

Total Supervisor Skill Development over 1 calendar year: 15 hours

MI Fidelity & CQI

Coaching and Coding

Fidelity monitoring ensures adherence to the evidenced- based model and is a requirement under FFPSA, as well as a core component of CQI. Coaches and MI Peer Groups will help assess adherence to MI principles and skill proficiency using the skill development structure outlined above. Results will be used to identify strengths, target areas for growth, and inform the focus and intensity of coaching.

CQI & Data

During the Statewide Implementation Meetings, the teams will engage in structured data and CQI activities. System enhancements to eWiSACWIS are underway to support documentation of MI service delivery. Teams will review eWiSACWIS documentation and fidelity data, as well as test targeted strategies across sites to inform continuous improvement. Teams will use information from the Statewide Implementation Meetings to strengthen practice at the local level and help inform future phases of implementation across the state.

MI Claiming and County Costs

As mentioned above, with the exception of staff time, local child welfare agencies will not have additional expenses for participating in MI implementation. DCF will be incurring all costs for training, fidelity support, coaching, peer groups, and supervisory support.

Under FFPSA, states are able to be reimbursed a percentage of approved expenses when using state or local funding on certain evidence-based practices (EBP), like MI. It should be noted that the majority of expenses incurred (training, coaching, fidelity) will be by DCF and reimbursement of these funds will likely go into supporting rolling out MI to other local child welfare agencies in upcoming phases.

It should also be noted that states are able to claim **staff time** when implementing the EBP at a higher reimbursement rate. While initial claiming is expected to be relatively low as Wisconsin learns the necessary processes for prevention claiming, further conversation will be warranted as DCF begins seeking FFPSA reimbursement. Before implementing MI in additional sites in 2028, DCF intends to have further conversation with local child welfare agencies regarding how reimbursement and claiming revenue are distributed. To date, discussion has included 1) reimbursing local agencies directly, 2) supporting/stabilizing state-wide CFA, 3) using funding to support expansion of prevention services to local agencies with fewer resources.

Child Welfare Professional Documentation Requirements in eWiSACWIS for Federal Claiming

DCF is anticipating rolling out documentation efforts in the eWiSACWIS system to allow for easy identification of MI in 2027. While some documentation requirements will exist, these are expected to have a minimal impact on the workforce. Training/technical assistance will be provided. CWP's will be asked to identify MI as a service during their case plan development from an existing drop down. CWP's will also be asked to provide minimal information when completing their case notes (if MI was used with a family and the length of time of the interaction), this information will be used to support federal claiming.

Questions and Information

All questions about the MI Application should be emailed to DSPDCFMI@wi.gov.

Two virtual information sessions will be offered to discuss this opportunity and answer local agency questions. Local agencies considering applying for the MI Initial Implementation Phase are encouraged to attend. The dates, times, and links for these information sessions are below.

November 3rd, 11:00 am-12:00 pm

[November 3 zoom link](#)

November 16th, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

[November 16 zoom link](#)

Access the electronic application via <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal> case practice. Applications must be submitted electronically by **November 30, 2026**. Sites will be selected by January 15, 2027.

MI Application and Readiness Assessment Instructions

Applications must be submitted electronically using the link above by November 30, 2026. **The application questions are outlined below solely for advanced review and planning purposes, please access the electronic application via <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/motivational-interviewing>.**

Local agencies are encouraged to submit concise responses and not exceed **200** words per question. DCF will evaluate applications based on the quality and completeness of responses as well as readiness for participation and learning. DCF plans to establish three to four sites and will consider geographic representation in selection.

In addition, the table below includes a description of what DCF will look for when reviewing the five open-ended questions. Remember, the readiness assessment is one input which DCF will weigh alongside the rest of the application.

Looking for	5 = Well developed	3 = Partly developed	1 = Needs development
Clear purpose	The response says plainly what the agency means to do and why, in the local agency's own words.	The response is general or restates DCF language without making it local.	The response does not answer the question asked.
Specific and concrete	The response names real examples, real numbers, or real commitments a reader could follow up on.	The response describes intent but stays at the level of principle.	The response offers no detail a reader could check.
Realistic	The response acknowledges constraints and explains how the local agency will work within them.	The response mentions constraints but does not say how they will be handled.	The response describes conditions as ideal with no constraints noted.
Consistent	The written responses and the rating responses tell the same story.	There are small gaps between what is written and what is rated.	Written and rated responses conflict without explanation.

Initial Readiness Assessment – See Appendix A

The narrative questions on the application correspond to key domains on the MI Readiness Assessment. In addition to these narrative questions, the Readiness Assessment also includes 14 questions rated on a five-point Likert scale. The leader of the local child welfare agency must complete the Readiness Assessment and submit it at the same time as the electronic application. **The child welfare leader is asked to complete the Readiness Assessment based on their perspective.** If selected for Phase 1, DCF will provide additional guidance on using the MI Readiness Assessment with the local agency team prior to initial implementation beginning.

Application Questions

Part 1: General Information

Local Child Welfare Agency Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Application point of contact (*Name, Email, Phone*): Click or tap here to enter text.

Who will be the primary Senior Leader overseeing the MI implementation (*Name, Email, Phone*): Click or tap here to enter text.

Who will serve as MI Implementation Lead (primary contact for DCF)? (*Name, Email, Phone*)

- *Note: The application point of contact, the primary Senior Leader, and the MI Implementation Lead can be the same person.*

How many child welfare workers is the local agency interested in seeing trained total?

- IA Click or tap here to enter text.
- Ongoing Click or tap here to enter text.
- Dual Role (IA/Ongoing) Click or tap here to enter text.
- Dual Role (Ongoing/YJ) Click or tap here to enter text.

Clarifying notes on above numbers if applicable: Click or tap here to enter text.

Would you prefer staff participate in peer groups with; (select all that apply):

- CWPs in their own county ☐
- CWPs in other counties ☐
- CWPs in their same job responsibility ☐
- CWPs in other job responsibilities ☐

How many supervisors will be trained? Note: Direct supervisors for staff in the implementation phase are required to complete the 11 hours of Intro to MI training.

Each agency will identify 3-5 members of a Local Implementation Team. If known, describe who will participate in the agency's MI Local Implementation Team (include

name, title, and anticipated role in the MI initial implementation phase, see key functions of an implementation team on page 9). If unknown, describe your approach to building an implementation team if selected.

Each of the following implementation team functions should be covered by at least one implementation team member:

1. Know the practice and the local context.
2. Know and lead change management.
3. Use improvement cycles.
4. Promote and take part in systems change.

What role will lived experts serve in MI initial implementation? If unknown, describe your approach to exploring lived experience input as part of the agency's phased implementation process. Current experience with lived experience engagement is not a requirement for MI initial implementation.

Part 2: Narrative Questions

Narrative Questions are meant to be addressed in 200 words or less than 5-10 sentences per question.

1. Why is the local agency applying to implement Motivational Interviewing? Describe specifically what observable outcomes the agency is hoping to achieve by implementing MI.
2. How would the local agency prioritize staff and supervisor time to accommodate training and ongoing skill development? Consider adjustments the agency is willing to make both during the initial implementation phase and long-term to sustain MI.
3. Describe the processes, practices, and/or structures that enable child welfare professionals to meaningfully participate and contribute to planning and implementation of change efforts. If applicable, use examples from recent projects or efforts to illustrate.
4. Part of any implementation is learning and making changes to improve. How does the agency currently evaluate practice and manage improvement efforts?

Closing Question

5. If the local agency were selected, describe what supports and resources might be needed from DCF to support successful participation and learning. Are there any areas that you think would be most helpful to talk through in the Statewide Implementation Team?

Director Acknowledgement

I have reviewed our agency's responses to the MI Implementation Application and agree to the commitments outlined in the Motivational Interviewing Information Packet. I approve the submission of this application and, if selected, support our agency's participation in the MI implementation process.

Director Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A: MI Readiness Assessment

Guidance for counties applying to Phase 1

Readiness Assessment Overview

The readiness assessment is a set of questions about the degree to which a local agency has the necessary capacity to take on implementation of Motivational Interviewing (MI) and sustain it over time. It asks about the conditions that tend to influence whether a new practice can be successfully adopted: whether people understand the reason for the practice, whether there's time, whether workloads leave room for learning something new, and whether the agency has the habits and processes to support the practice change.

The readiness assessment consists of fourteen questions rated on a five-point Likert scale; which is located in Part 3 of the MI Initial Application Form. You can access the electronic application via <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal> case practice.

How will this Readiness Assessment be used?

DCF will use results for two purposes. First, results will help the state tailor support to Phase 1 sites by identifying common areas of need among applicants. Second, results will inform selection of Phase 1 implementers. The readiness assessment will be one input among others and will be considered alongside the rest of the application content.

Selected phase 1 sites will also use the results for planning. Readiness Assessment responses will serve as an important source of information for the local implementation team to revisit and consider. Reflecting on the Readiness Assessment responses during planning is part of the purpose of using the assessment. The questions are built to draw attention to the things that help sustain a new practice and prompt the kind of internal conversation that makes planning better.

How this assessment was created

This Readiness Assessment was adapted from the Change and Implementation Readiness Assessment Tool published by the Capacity Building Center for States, which is a general tool for child welfare agencies working through any kind of practice change. Chapin Hall and DCF collaborated to adapt it for implementation of MI specifically. Two Wisconsin workgroups, one inside DCF and one with local leaders and lived experts, contributed input to ensure it was customized to Wisconsin's context.

Guidance for completing the assessment

The leader of the local child welfare agency must complete the Readiness Assessment and submit it at the same time as the electronic application. **The child welfare leader is asked to complete the Readiness Assessment based on their perspective.** If selected for initial implementation, DCF will provide additional guidance on completing the MI Readiness Assessment with the local implementation team prior to Initial Implementation beginning.

Tips for completing the Readiness Assessment

- The rating scale is as follows: 1= *not in place at all*; 2= *in early development*; 3=*somewhat in place*; 4=*mostly in place*; 5=*fully in place*.

- Answer for the part of the agency that MI will be implemented in. If different units would answer differently, pick the rating that fits the team which will be trained in Phase 1.