

DEVELOPING AN ELECTRONIC SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE REPORTING SYSTEM (eSCARS)

A Guidance Document For Counties

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Draft -- Phase I Activities



This document was compiled by NPC Research on behalf of the California Children's Justice Act Task Force.

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PLEASE NOTE!

This document (as of June 2020) is still in preliminary draft form. This document includes information compiled from current ES subrecipients about the first four steps of the 6-step process to develop and implement an eSCARS. It does not include information about the last two steps (rollout and implementation) because, as of the last round of interviews, none of the current ES subrecipients had reached the point of implementation. In the coming year (June 2020-May 2021), NPC will stay in regular contact with subrecipient staff about their eSCARS projects, and this document will be updated with the information about system rollout, implementation, and plans for sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Guide would not have been possible without the leadership and forethought of the California Children’s Justice Act (CJA) Task Force, which provided funding for four counties to collaborate on developing electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Systems (eSCARS), and the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, which administered the eSCARS grants. Three counties—Fresno, Santa Barbara, and Yolo—received CJA program grants to build their own eSCARS. One county—Los Angeles—already had a functioning eSCARS and received a CJA grant to provide technical assistance to the other three counties as they worked to build own systems.

This Guide is a product of multiple interviews with key staff from these four counties who were in the process of building or implementing eSCARS. These staff shared vital information about their experiences developing their local eSCARS, as well as recommendations for other counties planning to build similar systems in the future. These individuals were from:

- Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services Business Information Systems Division
- Fresno County District Attorney’s Office and Department of Social Services
- County of Santa Barbara District Attorney’s Office
- Information Technology and Telecommunications Division, Yolo County
- Yolo County District Attorney’s Office

We extend our gratitude to these staff members for their time and insights. It is our hope that the information compiled in this Guide will facilitate other counties’ development and implementation of eSCARS in the future to support the ongoing improvement of the broader system’s response to child abuse and neglect in California.

INTRODUCTION

The Need for eSCARS

In the State of California, the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA) requires that certain categories of professionals immediately report any suspected child abuse and neglect to county child welfare services (CWS),¹ local law enforcement, and the county district attorney's office. The county district attorney must monitor the response and resultant investigation.

The specific CANRA statute covering this required reporting is as follows:²

11166. (j) (1) A county probation or welfare department shall immediately, or as soon as practicably possible, report by telephone, fax, or electronic transmission to the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the case, to the agency given the responsibility for investigation of cases under Section 300 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and to the district attorney's office every known or suspected instance of child abuse or neglect, as defined in Section 11165.6, except acts or omissions coming within subdivision (b) of Section 11165.2, or reports made pursuant to Section 11165.13 based on risk to a child that relates solely to the inability of the parent to provide the child with regular care due to the parent's substance abuse, which shall be reported only to the county welfare or probation department. A county probation or welfare department also shall send, fax, or electronically transmit a written report thereof within 36 hours of receiving the information concerning the incident to any agency to which it makes a telephone report under this subdivision.³

A series of high-profile lawsuits against counties revealed that, in many California counties, the data system tracking and reporting capabilities of the CWS offices, law enforcement agencies, and district attorney offices do not allow for cross-reporting “immediately” or, in some cases, at all.

For years, agencies have relied on hard-copy forms (“Suspected Child Abuse Reports” or “SCARS”) that are often faxed between child welfare offices and law enforcement agencies. This process has become technologically outdated and is often insufficient for timely and reliable communication. It also challenges the district attorney's ability to practicably oversee the response and investigation of these cases. The need for an electronic system with real-time information sharing remains clear.

¹ Across counties, local child welfare services agencies use different names. In this guidance document, “CWS” will refer to a county child welfare office. The state-level office, the California Department of Social Services, will be referred to as “CDSS.”

² https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PEN§ionNum=11166

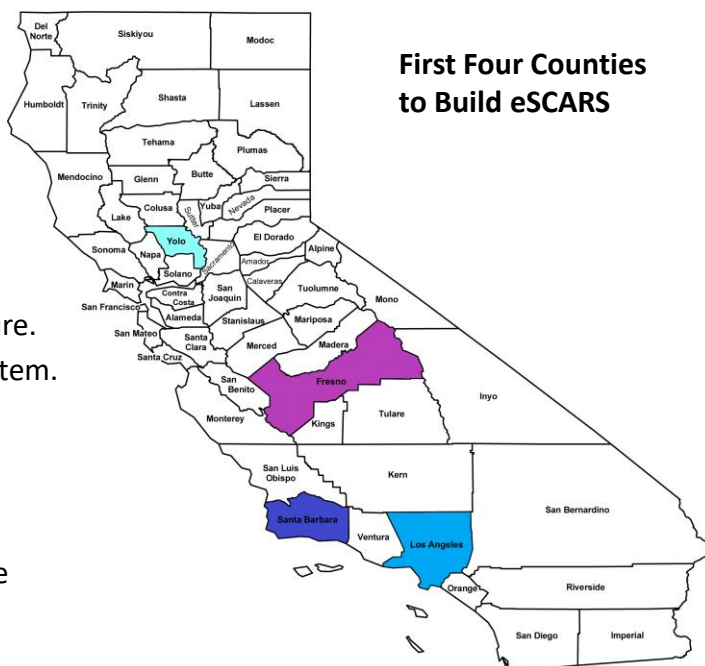
³ This same section stipulates circumstances (when a child is in CWS and is, or is at risk of being, the victim of commercial sexual exploitation, or is missing or has been abducted) that county CWS must report to law enforcement no later than 24 hours from receipt of the information for entry into the National Crime Information Center database of the FBI and to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Early eSCARS Developments

In 2005, recognizing the grave consequences of not having a system through which CWS, local law enforcement, and the district attorney could efficiently communicate, Los Angeles (LA) County began developing the first electronic Suspected Child Abuse Report System (eSCARS) in the state. Some years later, the **California Children's Justice Act (CJA) Task Force** was introduced to this system and quickly understood the potential impact for the state. Because Los Angeles's system is housed locally and managed by LA County staff, it was not possible to expand its system to include other counties.

The CJA Task Force then moved to provide grants for other counties to build their own eSCARS. The first round of CJA grants were given to Fresno, Santa Barbara, and Yolo Counties in 2016. Santa Barbara and Yolo Counties collaborated to build a multi-county cloud-based system that can incorporate additional counties in the future. Fresno County developed its own local system.

Having years of experience building, improving, and maintaining their eSCARS, Los Angeles County was given CJA funding to mentor and provide technical assistance to the other three counties that were just beginning their system builds.



This Guidance Document

The purpose of this document is to guide California counties through the steps it will take to develop their own local eSCARS, building on lessons learned by those who have done so earlier. This guidance document is a result of the first wave of these eSCARS building efforts. NPC Research⁴ staff conducted a series of telephone interviews with eSCARS project managers in each of the four counties during 2019 and early 2020. Project leads for each of the existing eSCARS programs shared their insights, experiences, successes, challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for other counties undertaking eSCARS projects in the future.

⁴ NPC Research (www.npcresearch.com) is a research and evaluation firm located in Portland, OR, that provides a range of research, evaluation, and other support services for federal, tribal, state, county, and municipal governments, as well as non-profit organizations.

eSCARS PROJECT STEPS

There are six main steps involved in the creation of an eSCARS. This section describes what counties should consider for each step:

1. Convene the key stakeholders and build support for eSCARS

2. Determine the approach to building your eSCARS

3. Negotiate with CDSS to obtain child welfare data

4. Build and test the system

5. Plan for system roll-out and sustainability

6. Implement eSCARS and conduct ongoing monitoring

The components of each step, including tips for success, are detailed in separate sections below. It is important to note that some steps have overlapping components. For example, Step 1 involves gathering key stakeholders and building support for the system. This is the main objective of Step 1, but it will also need to continue throughout the subsequent five steps to ensure that the development and implementation processes are smooth, collaborative, and uninterrupted by procedural obstacles. Project partners are strongly encouraged to collaborate and coordinate—both among themselves and in consultation with counties that have existing eSCARS—to streamline eSCARS efforts, maximize resources, and exchange information related to best practices.

STEP 1

Convene the key stakeholders and build support for eSCARS

For your eSCARS project, you will need buy-in and support from the three primary agency partners: law enforcement, child welfare services (CWS) agency, and the district attorney's office. You will also need to coordinate cross-agency communication and collaboration throughout the duration of the project. It will help to have a solid understanding of your county's existing cross-reporting protocols and how eSCARS will improve them. The key steps are listed below.

1A. Enlist each of the three main stakeholders: the district attorney's office, county-level child welfare services agency, and local law enforcement. These three agencies are required by the CANRA statute to share data about a suspected case of child abuse or neglect (CAN) *"immediately, or as soon as practicably possible"* after a report has been made to one of the agencies. Developing an effective eSCARS will require the full and continued support of leadership within the district attorney's office, county-level child welfare services agency, and local law enforcement. Ideally, the heads of each agency would be substantively engaged in the process. If that is not possible, they should appoint a high-level champion(s) to build support and sustain momentum for the project within and outside of their agency.

Whereas each county has one district attorney's office and one child welfare services agency, many counties have multiple law enforcement agencies that operate within the jurisdiction. Ultimately, all local law enforcement agencies will utilize eSCARS. However, for the initial project phases of planning and system development, it works best to enlist one (or possibly two) of the larger players. Most often, this should be the county sheriff's office, which can coordinate with the county-level district attorney and child welfare services more easily. The sheriff's office can provide feedback on early stages of system design on behalf of law enforcement needs generally. City-level police departments can be more easily engaged later in the process.

1B. Be ready and able to articulate the benefits of eSCARS for your county.

To cultivate buy-in among stakeholders, be prepared to name and discuss the key points in support of a shared data system. For example, highlight for stakeholders how an eSCARS would significantly expedite the following:

- Support your county's compliance with the CANRA law;
- Facilitate the work of the three primary agency partners; specifically, how the system would bolster CWS's ability to work in parallel with law enforcement to uncover and respond to child abuse and neglect in a timely way, law enforcement's ability to document and report the results of their investigations, and the district attorney's ability to provide consistent oversight;
- Establish a collaboration whereby the three agencies function as co-equals in child maltreatment investigations (in particular, CWS may benefit from having law enforcement involved in a criminal justice component to the work, as this can lead to justice for the victim and accountability for perpetrators);
- Promote consistency and accountability and ensure that no cases fall through the inter-agency cracks; and
- Drastically reduce or eliminate cases—and lawsuits—where children are hurt or killed as a result of criminal child maltreatment.

Note that highlighting the benefits of eSCARS for your county will be informed by conducting a review of your county's existing system for cross-reporting (described below). The results of this review—such as statistics on the percentage of cases for which no information was shared—may help persuade leaders about the need for eSCARS.

Tips

- ✓ Ensure that each agency has appointed at least one staff member as a key contact for the project and that this person is enthusiastic about eSCARS.
- ✓ Enlist the county sheriff as the primary law enforcement representative. Alert the local police chiefs about the project, not to get them involved with the eSCARS development process, but to let them know what is coming. Consider asking for their feedback on the draft protocol but be careful not to have “too many cooks in the kitchen” to avoid the system developers having to please too many people.
- ✓ Consider reaching out to other individuals, including county elected officials, such as the county chair and county commissioners, to help eSCARS become part of the county vision and to support the forward movement of the project.





Tips

- ✓ Host a kickoff meeting with key stakeholders. Give a presentation to explain the need for eSCARS in your county and the benefits of a shared system to help stakeholders understand the value for their agency and the county. Include a demonstration of an existing eSCARS system from another county so that stakeholders can see the functionality.
- ✓ Enlist the help of a passionate project leader from another county with an eSCARS to come to your county and speak about their project. If one of the primary agency partners in your county is hesitant, it can be helpful for them to speak to their counterpart in a county with a functioning eSCARS. Having those in the same position in a different county who contend with similar issues, responsibilities, and hectic schedules share their thoughts and experiences about the value of eSCARS can be a compelling strategy that wins needed support.

1C. Establish avenues for cross-agency communication and collaboration for the eSCARS project.

While a kickoff meeting, one-on-one discussions, and other activities can garner initial support and enthusiasm, the project will require sustained attention and effort. Shared agreements regarding cross-agency communication and collaboration can create helpful infrastructure to nurture and maintain these partnerships. It is critical to ensure that all parties have a common vision through cooperatively created written guidelines that describe individual and agency roles and partnership ground rules; this structure will help facilitate a more efficient development of the eSCARS.

Further, whenever possible, embedding eSCARS into routine county and individual agency work processes will help keep it front of mind for each partner and ensure it does not get deprioritized in the face of competing tasks.



Tips

- ✓ Convene a multi-disciplinary Steering Committee (and include information technology [IT] staff from each main partner agency) to oversee project progress.
- ✓ Incorporate eSCARS into the county strategic plan or other foundational documents to support its recognition, longevity, and integration into county systems.
- ✓ Continue to build energy and excitement through a monthly email newsletter to all key stakeholders to keep them abreast of project progress.

1D. Review your county's existing system for processing suspected child abuse reports (SCAR) and discuss findings with project partners. To accomplish this task, staff in the three main partner agencies will cross-train each other on their process related to completing, investigating, sharing, and using a paper SCAR. (This step may require line staff from each agency to present to the leadership group.) There are two primary reasons for doing this review. One reason is to uncover how the paper-based SCAR process has been working in your county, including what has worked, what causes frustration for staff, and what has hindered timely cross-agency reporting. The knowledge gained from this review will identify the reasons why eSCARS is needed, contribute to a sense of common purpose among project partners, and inform the desired functionality of the eSCARS to ensure it works well for all three agencies.

The second reason to review the existing system is to ensure maximum effectiveness of the current system during the interim period until the eSCARS is operational. A case example: When a previous CJA grantee county reviewed its existing SCAR reporting, it found unacceptable delays and gaps in the cross-reporting systems. In this county, SCARs had been sent historically via fax, resulting in no one person having the responsibility to monitor cases and respond. The project team created an interim process that required staff to send SCARS by email instead of fax, set up a dedicated SCAR email account (central email repository), and hired an assistant to review all SCARS that were received. These enhanced procedures resulted in more cases being reported and followed up, while the eSCARS (which will provide an even greater benefit in closing communication gaps) was being developed.



STEP 2

Determine the approach to building your eSCARS

Once the key partners are on board, your project team will need to decide your county's approach to building your eSCARS—namely, whether you will join the existing multi-county cloud-based system or build your own standalone system—and which partner agency will lead the effort. Key considerations for this step are explained below.

2A. Decide which agency (and which staff) will be project lead.

Very early in the process—ideally at the kickoff meeting—the three partner agencies should decide which of them will lead the eSCARS project.

Generally, the lead agency should be the one with the most IT capability and project management capacity to take on and sustain the project. Having a lead agency—and within that agency a lead staff person—is essential for smooth and efficient project implementation, as it will streamline management of tasks and communication about progress. The lead agency will assume responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day project implementation (including working with subcontractors, if necessary), have the authority to negotiate and delegate tasks and timelines, regularly communicate with key stakeholders for their input, and request additional resources, if necessary.



Tips

- ✓ Appoint a staff person (or two) to be deputy project lead to ensure continued progress and minimal delays in case the lead staff person changes positions or cannot otherwise fulfill the role of project lead.
- ✓ Consider transferring some of the project lead staff's pre-existing duties to another staff person to ensure that they have sufficient time to focus on eSCARS and to keep the project adhering to agreed-upon timelines. This staff role is more involved than one might think, regardless of approach.

2B. Determine your county’s approach to developing eSCARS: Either join the existing multi-county cloud-based system (Approach #1) or build a separate local system (Approach #2). Early in the process, project partners must determine how the county’s eSCARS will be developed. Among the first four counties to develop eSCARS, two built their own standalone systems that they continue to manage locally, and two collaboratively developed a cloud-based system that can be expanded to include other counties in the future. Your county can join the existing cloud-based system or can develop your own local system from the ground up. This critical decision, which relies heavily on the local availability of the necessary resources, must be made early in the project, because it shapes all subsequent steps in the process. Both approaches are briefly described below, and some corresponding benefits, challenges, and tips are discussed.



Tips

- ✓ Consult with staff from counties that have implemented both approaches about their experiences. Involve representatives from each partner agency, including IT and line staff members. This process will allow staff to ask questions of their counterparts in other counties and see eSCARS demonstrations to better inform the decision about which approach is right for your county.
- ✓ Conduct a thorough accounting of the IT capabilities (staff and resources) of your partner agencies and keep this in mind as you consider the system development options. Ensure that key IT staff members are consulted during the decision-making process.

APPROACH #1: Join the existing multi-county cloud-based eSCARS.

Two counties⁵ collaborated on their eSCARS projects by jointly hiring a database contractor to develop a cloud-based⁶ eSCARS application that would store data for both counties. Data for each county are stored separately within the system, so that users from one county cannot see data from another county.⁷ This system was designed to be scalable so that other counties could be added to it in the future. This approach capitalizes on an existing system, and it might be a good fit for your county if your partner agencies do not have robust and readily available IT resources.

⁵ Santa Barbara and Yolo Counties jointly contracted with SyTech Solutions (www.sytechsolutions.com) to build the cloud-based system.

⁶ This approach is referred to as both “Approach #1” and “cloud-based eSCARS” throughout this document. In contrast, “Approach #2” is where a county builds its own “standalone eSCARS,” even if this county houses its standalone system in the cloud.

⁷ If users in one county wish to view data for a case that crosses county lines, they can request to view these data, but they must receive permission from the other county in order to do so.

Benefits of Approach #1:

- The system is already built. Therefore, approach #1 would expedite the time from project inception to rollout, as compared to approach #2, which would require time to build an entirely new system.
- The process to add your county to the existing system will still require negotiation with CDSS regarding access to your county's child welfare data. However, the precedent is in place and, theoretically at least, that should mean a quicker pathway to approval.
- A cloud-based system is easily accessible by staff from multiple agencies, and rigorous security protocols can be implemented.
- The cloud does not require local physical hardware (servers/storage, etc.), which reduces the necessary investment by your county to procure these resources and maintain them over time.
- The cloud is centralized, which streamlines any necessary fixes or revisions to the system. When a glitch is found, the source code is corrected, which pushes the correction to all users simultaneously.
- The potential for data sharing between the counties that utilize the cloud-based system is higher, and would be more efficient, than sharing between counties with standalone systems. Sharing data would support comprehensive investigations of cases that cross jurisdictional lines and those that involve families or individuals who have relevant case histories in other counties. It may also facilitate locating suspects.
- If all counties joined this system, the ability to request and share data across county lines would be much more efficient, which would have direct impacts on the abilities of local county agencies to investigate and follow up on cases.
- Training materials for the cloud-based system would be available from the counties already using this eSCARS (see Step #5 below), which would streamline rollout for your county and reduce any duplication of effort.

Challenges of Approach #1:

- While the data elements inherent to an eSCARS would likely be consistent across counties, local needs and usage could still vary. Standardization becomes more difficult with multiple users.
- Every county using the cloud-based system will have to agree on any changes to the collaborative system. For example, if County A wants a particular search feature, and County B does not need it, they will have come to an agreement about it.
- Participating counties will need to establish a collective procedure for how to pay for costs related to ongoing technical support and maintenance. This agreement may need to be renegotiated as new participating counties join the effort.

APPROACH #2: Build a standalone eSCARS for your county.

Two counties⁸ built their own standalone eSCARS. For these projects, county staff designed, developed, and continue to perform the ongoing maintenance and upgrades for the system. This choice makes sense if your county has robust and ready IT capability, or if your county authorities will not allow an external IT contractor to access CWS and/or law enforcement data. It is possible for your county to choose to build a standalone eSCARS and also choose to hire a contractor to build some or all of the system. If contractors will be hired to build some or part of the system, many counties would need to initiate a bidding process. Appendix A lists some of the contractor specifications that your county may consider when developing your request for proposals.

If your county chooses to build a standalone eSCARS, your project may still benefit from the work done by previous counties. Specifically, counties with their own standalone eSCARS are likely to be willing to share their source code with your developers to jumpstart their progress. However, this information sharing is dependent on each county's information security requirements. Before moving forward, be sure to investigate whether the county supplying or receiving the code will need to implement individual Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA). Code sharing will be a challenge if either county will not allow individual NDAs.

Benefits of Approach #2:

- Your county would have total control over the database content, functions, and maintenance. The system can be tailored to your county's specific needs and operations.

⁸ Los Angeles and Fresno Counties built and manage their systems locally, using county staff time to do it.

Challenges of Approach #2:

- It is likely that building a standalone eSCARS from the ground up would take more time than joining the extant cloud-based eSCARS in Approach #1.
- While receiving source code from a previous county can give your developers a helpful starting point, it is not always a straightforward win. As with any other real-time data system, eSCARS code is continually being revised and improved. When county staff are writing and revising code for their local purposes, they may not engage in systematic annotation of their revisions (e.g., updating codebooks or crosswalks), which can cause version control issues. When your developers are trying to apply another county's code to your local system, and they do not have updated codebooks for each version of the code, these issues can require hours of sleuthing to understand and correct. Further, because the code is continually being improved, older versions become outdated quickly, which can cause confusion and render some shared code obsolete.⁹
- Training materials for staff in each of the three partner agencies would have to be developed locally to reflect the specific eSCARS built for the county (see Step #5 below).



⁹ For counties developing their own standalone eSCARS that are willing to share their code with other counties in the future, consider this at the outset and have your developers write code with this goal in mind. When it comes time to share the source code, to the extent possible, deploy it as one solid package that is stable and complete. This approach will save considerable time for future developers of new county eSCARS.

STEP 3

Negotiate with CDSS to obtain child welfare data

Child welfare data from the state (California Department of Social Services; CDSS) are foundational to every county's eSCARS. For the eSCARS platform to be functional, it needs to be populated with CDSS data as close to real-time as possible. Obtaining approval to access these data can be a cumbersome and time-consuming process. Your county should start negotiations with CDSS to obtain your county's CWS data very early in your eSCARS project. Although this is listed as Step #3, you do not need to have Step #2 completed before beginning this effort. Keep in mind that the data sharing agreement will articulate the specific data elements (i.e., information) to be shared and the technical mechanisms by which the data are shared (e.g., system specifications, security parameters, timing).

3A. Start negotiations with CDSS about data sharing agreements as soon as possible. This negotiation will need to take place regardless of which approach your county takes to build the system, though the details of the agreement will differ based on your chosen approach. Counties that developed eSCARS previously have found that the negotiations with CDSS often became protracted, required multiple attempts to connect with the right staff person, and involved long periods of waiting for responses. Begin to establish communications and relationships with the appropriate CDSS staff early on to help streamline this process. Be prepared for delays and find ways to keep your project's momentum during these periods.



Tips

- ✓ Identify the right people within CDSS to discuss data access.
- ✓ If your communications to CDSS go without reply or get stalled, enlist the help of your county and state elected officials to help facilitate a meeting with CDSS staff.
- ✓ Obtain an approved CDSS data sharing agreement from a county with a functioning eSCARS to use as a template.

Data sharing negotiations may differ depending on whether your county is joining the existing multi-county cloud-based system (Approach #1) or building a standalone system (Approach #2).

APPROACH #1: Join the existing multi-county cloud-based system.

The existing cloud-based eSCARS has the data fields defined, other counties have received approval from CDSS for these data elements, and there is a technical mechanism in place to download the data from CDSS to the eSCARS. Theoretically, this existing infrastructure should facilitate your county's data request because you will be requesting to expand the existing data sharing agreement between CDSS and the other counties to include your county.

Benefits of Approach #1:

- The technical pieces of the data sharing agreement will be covered by the existing system. Therefore, this should be a quicker and easier process for subsequent participant counties.

Challenges of Approach #1:

- None have been identified.

APPROACH #2: Build a standalone eSCARS for your county.

If your county is building a standalone system, your county will need to **negotiate an independent data sharing agreement with CDSS**. For this agreement, you will need to outline the specific data elements that you are requesting and articulate the process by which you will access, download, and store the data.

When considering the list of data elements, **obtain as much information as possible from the SCAR to make it actionable for law enforcement to respond quickly (i.e., names, addresses, etc.)**. From CANRA 11667, necessary data fields include:

- Name, business address, and telephone number of the mandated reporter;
- Capacity that makes the person a mandated reporter;
- Information that gave rise to the reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect and the source or sources of that information.

If known, the following should also be included:

- Child's name, the child's address, present location, and, if applicable, school, grade, and class;
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the child's parents or guardians; and
- Name, address, telephone number, and other relevant personal information about the person or persons who might have abused or neglected the child.

Benefits of Approach #2:

- Your county can tailor your data request to fit your local agencies and conditions.

Challenges of Approach #2:

- Your county would have to negotiate the technical pieces of a data sharing agreement with CDSS anew. Consider that it may be easier for your local CWS agency to obtain permission to access CDSS data, rather than another partner agency.

3B. Have your system developers become familiar with “business object” reports. Currently (as of May 2020), all counties seeking to access CDSS data will need to do so, once approved, by downloading and importing the data into their eSCARS as a “business object report.” This is true for counties regardless of whether they are using Approach #1 or Approach #2 for their local system. This “business object” extract must be downloaded to a physical hard drive and then mapped onto and imported to eSCARS. As of May 2020, CDSS data were not available for access in real time. Instead, there is a data delay of 48-72 hours, for both system build approaches.¹⁰

Prior to the new statewide California Automated Response and Engagement System (CWS-CARES) system being rolled out,¹¹ your developers will need to ensure that your eSCARS is compatible with both the old and new state CDSS systems so that it can stay operational through the state’s database transition. Fortunately, this will not be an issue if your county is creating your eSCARS after the CWS-CARES system is up and running.

¹⁰ The LA County eSCARS, built several years ago, allows a nightly data pull from the CDSS Data Mart. Unfortunately, this process is no longer possible and all other county eSCARS are subject to a 48-72 hours data delay.

¹¹ CWS-CARES will replace CWS-CMS as CDSS’s statewide data system. The new system is expected to roll out in late 2020.

STEP 4

Build and test the system

Once your county has determined which approach it will use to build your eSCARS, system development can begin. Although listed as Step #4, the database development work can begin after the completion of Step #2 and continue alongside the performance of Step #3. Succinctly put: Do not wait for CDSS approval to begin developing your system.

4A. Begin system development. The initial steps for system development will vary based on the approach being used by your county.

APPROACH #1: Joining the multi-county cloud-based eSCARS.

Contact eSCARS project managers in Santa Barbara or Yolo Counties to begin discussions about expanding the cloud-based system to include your county.

Work with the database developers to build out the existing system to include data for your county.

APPROACH #2: Building a standalone eSCARS for your county.

Contact eSCARS project managers in Fresno or Los Angeles Counties about the possibility of obtaining their source code. If your county decides to build its own standalone eSCARS, your project leads should contact staff in Fresno or Los Angeles Counties (both of which currently have functional standalone systems) to request their help and their source code. If your county contacts one of these counties to share code or receive consultation, ensure that both parties have considered the logistics of the technical assistance relationship, including the completion of any necessary memoranda of understanding (MOUs), NDAs, contracts, or other approvals.

Tips

- ✓ If creating a mentor relationship between county staff for providing code, technical assistance, and other troubleshooting, ensure that the relevant staff members in both counties are approved and allowed to serve in these roles, as evidenced by signed MOUs, and have time to undertake these responsibilities.
- ✓ Process all requests for technical assistance, code, or other information through a single assigned staff person in each county to log what information is shared, to ensure that information is shared securely, and to keep clear records of requests, billing/invoices, etc.

4B. Work to incorporate the needs of each partner agency into your eSCARS to ensure the most user-friendly and functional system possible. During the system development, engage the primary agency partners to identify the needs of staff within each agency. What would make the system the most functional for them? What would best support their ability to report, investigate, and follow up with relevant child maltreatment cases? In addition, utilize the results of the existing SCAR review to articulate the cross-reporting gaps that need to be addressed by the eSCARS. Naming these needs and process gaps early will help ensure that the system development addresses as many of them as possible and renders the most functional system.



Tips

- ✓ Be sure to build in mobile device access.
- ✓ During the SCAR process review, include the perspectives of line staff from the three agencies and incorporate their stated needs into their eSCARS design.

4C. Beta test the system. Once the eSCARS is built, it may be necessary to do a pilot import of CDSS data to test its structure and functionality. Once the system is functional, it will be ready for a subset of users to beta test. The testing should be done by a small number of users, ideally someone from each of the three partner agencies who will ultimately use the system. This group might include CWS social workers or hotline staff, law enforcement officers, and district attorney staff. These testers should attempt to use the system as they would—for example, CWS staff would enter data for a case, law enforcement officers would review data and enter information, and district attorney staff would review and audit information. Testing should occur on office computers and on field equipment (e.g., laptops, tablets, mobile devices). System compatibility should be tested with the multiple operating systems. After a period of testing, the users should provide direct feedback to the eSCARS project team and system developers, who will rectify any glitches.



Tips

- ✓ Let the steering committee and/or core collaboration team be the first users to pilot the system.



STEP 5

Plan for rollout and sustainability

*****NOTE: THIS SECTION WILL BE FURTHER DEVELOPED DURING THE 2020-2021 GRANT PERIOD*****

At the time of the last round of interviews for the first phase of this document, just one of the three counties had begun planning for system rollout. None had actually rolled it out yet. NPC will interview these counties in the coming year to learn about their experiences with rollout and will include the findings of those interviews here. What follows is preliminary text only.

STEP 6

Implement system and conduct ongoing monitoring

*****SECTION TO BE DEVELOPED DURING THE 2020-2021 GRANT PERIOD*****

At the time of the last round of interviews for the first phase of this document, none of the three counties had begun system implementation. NPC will interview these counties in the coming year to learn about their experiences with implementation and include the findings of those interviews here.