

# The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence

## Strategic Plan – April 2020

### Introduction

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Beginning in the summer of 2019, the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence engaged in a strategic planning process. This process was led by a team of staff members from a variety of Alliance departments, the UW School of Social Work, and Partners for Our Children. The team members were: Deanna Bedell, Kathy Brennan, Francis Calcalda, Nathan Fowler, Kebbie Green, Kabreab Hailegiorgis, Christine Kerns, Sandy Kinney, Jean Kruzich, and Aaron Olson. Christina Coad is the Executive Director for the Alliance and Kelsey James provided administrative support throughout the process. William Vesneski, a Lecturer with the School of Social Work, helped facilitate the planning process.

Several important steps were taken to develop the plan. First, a planning survey was completed in July 2019 which sought input from all Alliance team members about the organization's priorities. A survey report was prepared and distributed to all staff in August. The report unearthed several priority areas needing attention in the future plan. In September, the Alliance had an *All Staff Meeting* where survey results were presented and specific feedback about strategies needed to achieve impact on the priority areas was gathered. This feedback was reviewed and further refined by the steering committee, resulting in a rough plan in December 2019. The rough plan was further reviewed by the planning team and finalized into the following document.

This document represents the final version of the plan and the product of nine months of deliberation and engaged dialog by the committee. The plan is organized around five priority goals:

- 1) Build a Trusting Organizational Culture
- 2) Develop and Deliver State of the Art Training
- 3) Define our Role with the New DCYF
- 4) Create an Infrastructure that Supports Training Excellence
- 5) Strengthen and Navigate Partnerships

The plan identifies key objectives related to each goal, describes a variety of strategic activities that will be pursued in alignment with the goal, and identifies any potential resources that might be needed to realize the goal. Specific metrics needed to assess progress in reaching the goal will be developed in the spring of 2020 along with an implementation plan for pursuing the goals specified in the plan.

This plan is meant to be a general outline of our future work and an articulation of the Alliance's shared vision and goals. It is a living document that can be changed and adjusted to match circumstances surrounding our work. A general overview of the plan can be found on the next page; specific details follow the overview.

**Goal**

**Strategic Activities**

**Build a trusting organizational culture**

Cultivate courageous leadership

Build our team connections

Develop a platform for holding difficult conversations

**Develop and deliver state of the art training**

Produce and deliver high quality, high impact training

Elevate the learner experience

**Define our role with the new DCYF**

Grow our relationship with DCYF

Demonstrate our training expertise

Value and support professional development

**Create infrastructure to support training excellence**

Create and implement a communications and technology plan

Undertake a robust internal training initiative

Generate and organize process documentation

Provide more Support staff

**Strengthen and navigate partnerships**

Explore and sustain partnerships that enhance training impact

Extend the reach and audience for our trainings

Increase partnerships to support caregiver attendance

<b>Goal 1: Build a Trusting Organizational Culture (High Priority)</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Over the last year, there has been greater attention to our organizational culture, and as a result, it has grown and become stronger. In order to maintain this momentum, the Alliance will work to achieve the following objectives in the next two years:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Further improve <b>intergroup communication</b> and build more team cohesion across the Alliance.</li> <li>2. Build a greater sense of fairness and transparency within the Alliance by enhancing <b>inclusion</b> and increasing opportunities for leadership.</li> <li>3. Strengthen our collective understanding of <b>decision-making</b> through better communication and transparency around decision-making processes.</li> </ol>
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<p>In order to achieve our objectives, the Alliance will undertake a variety of activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Cultivate courageous leadership.</b> We seek a leadership culture that is effective, respectful, and more purposefully communicates decisions and the processes that lead to them. Leadership is distributed, not hierarchical, at the Alliance and we believe that everyone who works here is a leader. Specific behaviors we aim to promote and reward are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Using the “all Alliance email” as a communication tool, updating our colleagues as decisions are being considered and contemplated (not just after the fact), and communicating with the goal of building trust and helping all staff move past assumptions that are no longer relevant.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusion</b> – Our colleagues have great ideas; therefore, we must create spaces for them to give input in decisions and to “voice their truth” in order to build trust.</li> <li>• <b>Norm Setting</b> – We will engage in an ongoing review of our current norms for leadership and interaction among programs. Leaders must model and hold colleagues accountable for how we provide constructive feedback to one another, raise questions, answer and respond to one another, and communicate decisions.</li> <li>• <b>Frequent Updates</b> – Leaders must regularly communicate their vision, update colleagues on what’s coming, and, to the degree feasible, share information and materials ahead of meetings or discussions.</li> <li>• <b>Implementation</b> – Once decisions are made, and the time for discussion of them has past, we must collectively join in to implement decisions and sponsor them with our colleagues.</li> <li>• <b>Model sustainability</b> – Alliance leaders must work to support our employees’ work/life balance and model long-term sustainability in our work.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <b>Build our team connections.</b> We will promote more cross-pollination and team-building among our various units and programs, regardless of job title, function or whether the team member writes curricula or delivers it, serves in a backbone operations role, or helps lead groups. Specific steps we will take include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a <b>planning subcommittee</b> to plan our “All Alliance” meetings with rotating committee membership.</li> <li>• Ensuring that “All Alliance” meetings are generally <b>relevant and valuable</b> to all of our colleagues (knowing that we cannot meet everyone’s needs at every meeting).</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

<b>Goal 1: Build a Trusting Organizational Culture (High Priority)</b>	
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inviting compelling <b>guest speakers</b> who deliver valuable content and unite us as a team.</li> <li>• Developing a shared understanding of the <b>meaning of “safety”</b> in the context of a diverse political landscape. This definition should align with our status as part of the School of Social Work at the University of Washington. It should also value maintaining positive relationships within the team while also recognizing our desire to engage and challenge ourselves. People should feel safe – but also challenged – in keeping with our university mission.</li> <li>• Organizing and holding <b>team building activities</b> that foster deeper interpersonal connection. We must continue to bring a heightened sense of intentionality to team building over the next two years.</li> <li>• Recognizing that our statewide footprint and <b>remote worksites</b> can lead to disconnections. We must seize opportunities to connect in-person, whenever possible, and err on the side of over – rather than under – communicating.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Develop a platform for holding difficult conversations.</b> As in any organization, we all must contend with challenging topics; many of these frequently involve personnel issues and organizational structure. We will take steps to help make conversations around these issues easier to hold. To that end we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to build a culture where <b>difficult conversations</b> can be respectfully held without penalty or fear of retaliation.</li> <li>• Support the <b>use of dialogue</b> and engage in real conversation with one another.</li> <li>• Focus on <b>understanding decisions</b> rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with them.</li> <li>• Use the <b>Ladder of Inference</b> and take responsibility for co-creating norms.</li> <li>• Consider the development or creation of <b>new committees</b> to help build peer support.</li> </ul>
<b>Resources Required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Goodwill</b> and intentionality on all members of the Alliance staff.</li> <li>• Potential <b>consulting assistance or coaching</b> around events and team building.</li> <li>• Possible addition of <b>two committees</b> (for “All Alliance” planning and peer support).</li> <li>• Greater use of <b>technology tools</b> to support enhanced communication.</li> </ul>

<b>Goal 2: Develop and Deliver State of the Art Training (Medium Priority)</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Curriculum development and training – for a wide audience – is at the heart of what we do. Both are equally critical to the Alliance’s work and mission. Moving forward, the Alliance will further strengthen our leadership role in the field by attending to the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Trauma and Attachment:</b> Ensuring that our trainings are anchored in the most current understanding of trauma and attachment and their implications for children, youth and families as well as for the people who work with them.</li> <li><b>2. Modalities:</b> Reaching a wide audience by presenting Alliance training materials in different modalities including live classrooms, webinars and a e-learning venues.</li> <li><b>3. Adult Learning:</b> Continually researching and deepening our understanding and use of current research on adult learning styles.</li> <li><b>4. Technology:</b> Staying up-to-date on technology and deploying the best tools available to reach our audience.</li> </ol>

<b>Goal 2: Develop and Deliver State of the Art Training (Medium Priority)</b>	
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<p><b>1. Produce and deliver high quality, high-impact training:</b> The Alliance will produce trainings for our partners, staff, and clients by creating content that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Considers ease of use</b> – Participants in training need to feel comfortable and able to participate. Specific to online trainings, the Alliance will attempt to consider all user needs like availability of internet and modes of learning like phones, tablets and laptops. We will also maintain live, in-person trainings, as necessary, to reach our audiences.</li> <li>• <b>Reflects our best collective thinking</b> – We will develop content and deliver training in ways that builds on feedback and input from the staff required to deliver the materials. The lived experience and insights of our colleagues is crucial to delivery and content.</li> <li>• <b>Keeps content innovative, creative and fresh</b> – In child welfare related trainings the Alliance will be relevant and cutting-edge, focusing on current topics like trauma, attachment, disability, and ACEs; we will strive to keep up with the latest research and knowledge in the field.</li> <li>• <b>Maximizes efficiency</b> – Reduce the use of printed handouts, consider new and different technology solutions, and streamline our work processes. We will emphasize delivering high quality product with an eye toward conserving our time and resources.</li> <li>• <b>Nurtures community partnerships</b> – The Alliance will continue to cultivate its relationships with community partners and tap into the skills and expertise of staff who have deep connections to community as well as assist those who do not have these relationships cultivate them.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Elevate the learner experience.</b> The Alliance will consider the learner experience to be of the utmost importance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering hindrances <b>to learners</b> such as, but not limited to: childcare for caregiving participants, language barriers in standard handouts and printed curricula.</li> <li>• Focusing on evidence <b>informed trainings</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Holding high expectations</b> for learner outcomes.</li> <li>• Emphasizing <b>learner-based approaches</b> that deeply consider adult learning theory and maintaining high standards that meet every learners’ needs.</li> <li>• Soliciting <b>learner</b> feedback and considering suggestions from our audiences. The learner is a respected part of the Alliance team and their suggestions and concerns will remain in high regard.</li> <li>• Considering the use or incorporation of <b>other evidence-based curricula</b> that meets our high standards and clearly meets the needs of our partners, staff and clients.</li> </ul>
<b>Resources Required</b>	<p><b>Materials:</b> The Alliance will recognize the need for resources as they pertain to staff and learners ensuring that the materials needed for optimal learning are present. These may include physical supplies (e.g. printed curricula, classroom supplies, flipchart paper, markers) as well as food and refreshments for longer trainings.</p> <p><b>Technology:</b> The Alliance will continue to review and identify the best technology platforms for our work (including Webex or Zoom); we remain dedicated to finding technology options that support our colleagues. Leadership will consider newer platforms as they become available, deeply consider staff input on these decisions, and continually scan the environment for new modalities.</p>

<b>Goal 3: Define Our Role with New DCYF (Medium Priority)</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>The Alliance’s partnership with DCYF is fundamental to our work and our mission. Given this, we must utilize the next two years to further deepen this mutual relationship. More specifically, we aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore innovative and collaborative opportunities to improve our curricula and their delivery.</li> <li>• Expand learning opportunities for different audiences.</li> <li>• Identify ways to increase our positive impact for the people and communities served by DCYF.</li> <li>• Strive to be a more active partner that helps define – and meet – DCYF’s needs in a proactive, consultative way.</li> </ul> <p>Together, we will support one another’s desire to build and nourish a vibrant learning culture among the systems that serve vulnerable youth and families.</p>
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Grow our relationship with DCYF:</b> The Alliance will work toward a deeper collaborative relationship with DCYF that positively impacts the people and communities served by it. To do this, we will pursue the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner to develop and deliver an <b>enhanced Supervisor Core Training</b> that reflects our commitment to innovation and collaborative curriculum design.</li> <li>• Utilize DCYF <b>Quality Practice Specialists (QPS)</b> to partner and collaborate in Regional Core Training (RCT). This will include inviting QPS to each RCT cohort.</li> <li>• Seek participation in <b>DCYF monthly Field Operations meetings</b> with Regional Administrators and Deputy Regional Administrators. This is the space where policies, procedures and directions are decided for child welfare. It is also the place where the Alliance needs to have a presence to help contribute to a building a learning culture within DCYF.</li> <li>• Hold <b>quarterly meetings</b> with DCYF staff, DCYF stakeholders and advisory groups, including caregivers, RDS meetings, staff meetings, LICWAC, 1624, youth (Passion to Action, Mockingbird Society), Regional Advisory Groups, and key tribal partners.</li> <li>• Seek <b>consistent access</b> for trainers and coaches to DCYF offices, conference rooms, email and printers.</li> <li>• Work to build ongoing <b>collegial partnerships</b> between trainers, coaches, and local DCYF offices.</li> <li>• Develop structures for <b>concrete feedback</b> from all levels of DCYF.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <b>Demonstrate our training expertise:</b> The Alliance will actively promote its knowledge and expertise with our DCYF partners and step more fully into opportunities to make a positive contribution to our key partner’s work. We will do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively communicate with DCYF about what the <b>Alliance can offer</b> in terms of our expertise and qualifications and how we can help meet their needs.</li> <li>• Create opportunities for those with <b>expertise in caregiving</b> to share their insights and observations with DCYF staff with the goal of improving foster parent retention.</li> <li>• Clarify the role/scope of responsibility for our trainers and coaches to do outreach and recruit for courses they teach.</li> <li>• Collaborate with DCYF in defining the <b>role of subject matter experts</b> in curriculum development and approval of training.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<p><b>3. Value and support professional development:</b> The Alliance will promote learning innovation among its staff and deepen our own expertise and capacity through professional development. Specifically, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop professional development expectations for Alliance staff.</li> <li>• Ensure there is a professional development plan for all staff.</li> <li>• Make space for and support professional development</li> <li>• Model a learning culture at all levels of the organization.</li> </ul> <p>In general, professional development is an organizational responsibility – not an individual task. The Alliance may explore the possibility of all staff becoming certified or trained in a particular body of knowledge.</p>
<b>Resources Required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialog with DCYF about roles and responsibilities including use of resources, communication and feedback loops.</li> <li>• Staff time to develop a consistent communication and feedback loop.</li> <li>• Resources for Alliance staff to obtain needed professional development.</li> <li>• Staff time to do outreach and recruitment for trainings.</li> </ul>

<b>Goal #4: Create infrastructure to support training excellence (Medium Priority)</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>This objective specifically deals with establishing tools, resources, and processes that support the Alliance’s staff and helping them be more successful in the workplace. This objective includes attending to the following: creating or expanding process documentation, improving internal training on technology tools, and making better use of internal communication tools throughout the organization. Building a stronger infrastructure will support the Alliance in more efficiently handling our work and removing some of the barriers that get in the way of maximum impact.</p>
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<p>The Alliance will engage in the following strategic activities to create, build and strengthen our infrastructure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Create and implement an internal communications and technology plan</b> that outlines a clear process for sharing information within the organization. This activity also requires: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing <b>easy-to-use technology</b> to better support staff that is designed with the user in mind.</li> <li>• Developing and deploying a better <b>data management system</b>. Including: better organizing our internal resources around it, strengthening our equipment, and increasing user support.</li> <li>• Developing an improved onboarding and offboarding plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Undertake a robust internal training initiative</b> on best practices concerning the following: travel, contracting, conference and retreat planning, purchasing, pre-authorization process for purchasing, reservations, contacts, etc., procurement timelines and workflow.</li> <li><b>3. Generate and organize process documentation</b> including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handbooks for each position that details how work is performed.</li> <li>• Frequently Asked Questions for staff</li> <li>• Instructions for accessing UW resources</li> <li>• External listserv for communicating with workforce/training participants.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Provide more support staff</b> for each of the Alliance training centers to allow for better LMS use and conference room scheduling.</li> </ol>

<b>Goal #4: Create infrastructure to support training excellence (Medium Priority)</b>	
<b>Resources Required</b>	<p>The Alliance will need to make better use of technology and deploy resources to accomplish the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update or provide staff phones and enhance our use of mobile technology.</li> <li>• Provide more stable and dependable video chat and web conferencing options.</li> <li>• Provide better access to DCYF technology and IT assistance.</li> <li>• Update online storage space for the resources that are developed to support best practices and staff.</li> <li>• Develop a system for identifying and scheduling training spaces to hold classes and training on contracts, payments, and reservations.</li> <li>• Consider hiring additional staff in FinOps to support expanding operations.</li> </ul> <p>Alliance operations staff will work to evaluate needs for each unit.</p>
<b>Goal #5: Strengthen and Navigate Partnerships (Low Priority)</b>	
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Because they are essential to our work, the Alliance will work to deepen and expand our partnerships and collaborations with the goal of strengthening curriculum design and delivery. A key component of this objective is expanding our reach and building new audiences for our training expertise and continuing cultivate strong supportive relationships with our Tribal partners.</p>
<b>Strategic Activities</b>	<p>To accomplish our objectives and strengthen our partnerships, the Alliance will pursue the following three key activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Explore and sustain partnerships that enhance training impact.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Alliance expertise increases and becomes more specialized, we will support individual staff members to become “points of contact” on key skills or aspects of practice.</li> <li>• We will support staff who can become valuable resources for strengthening partnerships with experts in the child welfare field.</li> <li>• Potential examples include: Positive Discipline, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, DWGJ, SAMSHA Simulation project, Kinship Navigators, NCAST, Trust Based Relational Intervention TBRI.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>2. Extend the reach and audience for our trainings across all of DCYF staff</b> as well as licensed providers, system partners in courts, and the Tribes. To do this, we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze what is currently available from the Alliance and identify priority gaps.</li> <li>• Crosswalk professional development and training that is provided outside of the Alliance with what is needed internally and desired by our DCYF partner.</li> <li>• Conduct a needs assessment – as needed – with DCYF, system partners in courts and Tribes.</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>3. Increase partnerships to support attendance at caregiver training</b> through direct assistance such as space, food, childcare, transport, and/or other in-kind support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Alliance staff who will nurture these relationships.</li> <li>• Reach out to partners to co-locate trainings and share space.</li> <li>• Potential examples include: Microsoft, Kinship Navigators, Coordinated Care, churches, children museums, military, foster parent support groups etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<b>Resources Required</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inventory current staff expertise and partnerships.</li> <li>• Formalize the process to expand our offerings and trainings across the Alliance</li> </ul>