

**Risk Pool Peer Review Committee Process**  
**Draft for Review and Discussion**  
**January 12, 2014**

The department's Protocol for Requesting Risk Pool Funding for fiscal year 2015-2016 outlines the process by which Community-Based Care Lead Agencies may apply for potential funding from the Risk Pool appropriation provided in the General Appropriations Act.

A key part of the review process is the work of the Peer Review Committee. The statute (409.990(7), F.S.) and the department's protocol (Exhibit A: Protocol for Requesting Risk Pool Funds FY 15-16) define the scope of the work of the Peer Review Committee. This document summarizes the activities required of the Peer Review Committee and provides a general framework for the fact-finding activities of the committee which include review of the application, review of additional relevant data including case dynamics and expenditure patterns and conducting an on-site visit with each applicant Lead Agency.

Based on this review and analysis the Risk Pool Peer Review Committee will:

- Verify that the applicant meets the statutory criteria for eligibility which includes validation that the applicant's financial need was caused by circumstances beyond the control of the Lead Agency's management.
- Determine if continued on-site technical assistance is appropriate.
- Make a final recommendation to the Secretary regarding approval or disapproval of the application which may include access to the risk pool or other funding shifts to resolve the shortfall.
- Determine the amount of funding and mix of funds to be made available.
- Recommend specific limitations or requirements on the use of additional funds that are linked to correction of factors that caused the funding shortfall.
- Identify any follow-up actions or additional documentation needed from the Lead Agency or Region, and
- Report on any technical assistance activities completed and remaining and/or recommendations for future technical assistance.

The specific areas of review and analysis will vary based on the unique needs and circumstances of each Region, Circuit and Lead Agency, however the following framework provides an outline for organizing the work of the Peer Review Committee.

**1. Findings related to the need for services and commitment of resources**

- 1.1. What is the relevant community context within which the child welfare system operates?
- 1.2. This may include incidence of calls to the hotline, child poverty in the area, local factors that influence the need for services, etc.
- 1.3. Factors may also include community resources available to meet the needs of children and families such as Children's Services Councils, local governmental resources or other unique factors.

**2. Findings related to protective services including removals, referrals for post-investigative services, activities to protect children without removal and use of resources focused on prevention and intervention.**

- 2.1. What are the rates of removal, rates of verification and other measures from protective investigations that affect the need for child welfare services? How have these measures changed over time and how do they compare with other areas of the state?
- 2.2. What activities are in place to provide support to protective investigators and families to permit children to remain safe in their homes?
- 2.3. What services are provided with funds used for prevention and intervention?
- 2.4. What evidence exists to show that investment in prevention and intervention services are, in fact, resulting in reduced flow of children into out-of-home care rather than just adding to the cost of services?
- 2.5. How well integrated are the CPI, safety management and intervention services components? Are there case transfer issues that affect performance?

**3. Findings related to provision of services for children in care (both in-home and out-of-home).**

- 3.1. What is the composition of the children in care including age cohorts, placement types, use of specialized higher costs settings, use of congregate care, etc.
- 3.2. What is the cost of various placement types? To what extent are the rates paid for foster care (including care with various rates of intensity), congregate care consistent with statewide norms (considering community context)? Have these rates remained relatively consistent over the past few fiscal years?
- 3.3. What is the cost for dependency case management? Is this consistent with norms for such services? Have these rates remained relatively consistent over the past few fiscal years?
- 3.4. To what extent is the Lead Agency appropriately utilizing non-child welfare funding for services (such as DCF SAMH Funds, Medicaid, and other non-DCF funding sources).
- 3.5. What evidence exists that case management services are well-managed by the Lead Agency?

**4. Findings related to exits from care including exits to permanence.**

- 4.1. What is the performance of the Lead Agency in the recognized measures of children achieving permanence? Do these findings indicate that children are not remaining in care for longer than necessary? Are these permanency achievement rates consistent across placement settings?
- 4.2. What contextual factors (such as Children's Legal services, dependency court dynamics, etc.) influence time to permanence for children served by the Lead Agency?
- 4.3. Has there been a change in number of exits or time to exit that is materially influencing the cost of out-of-home care?

**5. Findings related to funding, fiscal trends and fiscal management.**

- 5.1. How has core services funding changed over time? How has the Lead Agency managed these changes? What adjustments to the available array of services have been made?
- 5.2. How have any changes to core services funding contributed to any projected deficits for SFY 2015-2016?
- 5.3. In what ways are funding dynamics in the Lead Agency unique or atypical of funding in other Lead Agencies?
- 5.4. What is the amount of the anticipated deficit for the current year? How reliable and valid are these projections?

- 5.5. Are their options other than Risk Pool funding available to reduce the deficit?
- 5.6. If the Lead Agency meets the criteria for Risk Pool funding, but the amount of funding available is insufficient to cover the projected deficit, what other options are available?
- 5.7. Are there fiscal practices that could be completed with greater efficiency in order to reduce the projected deficit?
- 5.8. Has the most recent CPA audit indicated any issues that would affect the financial health of the organization?

**6. Findings related to overall management.**

- 6.1. To what extent is there clear and effective communication between and among the Region, the Lead Agency, the Sheriff (if applicable), case management organizations and other key community partners?
- 6.2. How actively and effectively does Lead Agency management track programmatic performance and fiscal performance?
- 6.3. What actions have been taken by the Region and/or the Lead Agency to resolve the fiscal issues without accessing the Risk Pool? What further actions are planned?
- 6.4. If potential corrective actions or technical assistance is recommended by the Peer Review Team, what is the commitment of the Region and the Lead Agency to follow through on those recommended actions?

**7. Other factors or considerations noted on the application or determined relevant by the Peer Review Committee.**

**8. The areas identified above are illustrative of the expected areas for review and analysis, but additional factors may be identified in the application or suggested by findings during the course of the Peer Review Committee's work.**

**Principles to Guide the Work of the Peer Review Committee**

- Each member of the Peer Review Committee has been selected based on his or her extensive experience and expertise in child welfare. The processes outlined for the work of the group are intended to help organize thinking to make the process as efficient as possible. However, the extensive expertise and experience of the members of the group is highly valued and observations in addition to the items outlined here are welcome and appreciated.
- Each member of the Peer Review Committee is encouraged to enter into each review with fresh eyes. As much as possible, please be guided by the best available data and your current observations.
- Applicant Lead Agencies and their Regions have worked hard to avoid accessing the Risk Pool and to resolve their fiscal issues internally. The Peer Review Team will enter each review respectful of the diligent work that has been done.
- The On-Site Review is not only an opportunity to share expertise by the Peer Review Committee but also to learn from the applicant Region and Lead Agency. We will strive to not only share best practices where relevant but also to identify best practices to share with others.
- Applicants have been encouraged to base their analyses on standard measures utilizing authoritative sources such as FSFN and the department's accounting system. The Peer Review process will encourage reliance on standard rather than idiosyncratic program and performance measures.

- Time is of the essence. It is imperative that Risk Pool funds be distributed prior to the end of the fiscal year and that applicant Lead Agencies know as soon as possible what funds have been approved. The Peer Review Committee is mindful of the urgency of the task and committed to ensuring that our activities are completed as quickly as possible consistent with our duty to ensure that the statutory requirements governing the Risk Pool funds have been met.