

Applied Learning Communities (ALCs)

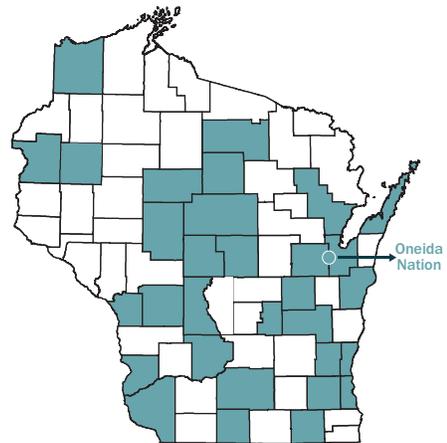
Annual Stakeholder's Report

In 2019, the Applied Learning Communities (ALCs) program launched in Wisconsin. The ALCs provide space and structure to self-selected, regional learning cohorts who are eager to engage in a facilitated study of a child welfare policy, or area of practice.

Designed in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Children & Families and facilitated by the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System, the ALCs utilize adult learning strategies to promote dialogue among Child Welfare Professionals in Wisconsin's five regions.

In 2021, over fifty interested supervisors participated in an orientation on January 28th to learn about the design and delivery of the 2021 ALC. Following the orientation, the enrollment period was open for two weeks. In total, 30 agencies enrolled (Fig. 1) and included 184 learners (Fig. 2). The ALC topic was *Engaging & Interviewing Reporters* with a focus of study on *Access Standards: Information Standards, III. A. Information that Must be Gathered and Documented in All Cases*. The related learning objectives are listed in Fig 3.

“ After working in Access for so long, it was beneficial to share information and ideas, review standards, and work as a team to create a CPS report. ”



30 agencies represented at the ALCs

- = enrolled
- = not enrolled

Fig 1.



Fig. 2.

Products of the ALC

- BPM Analysis of CPS Report
- Aggregated performance results & agency specific feedback
- 2021 ALC Handbook
- Recommendations from Agency Teams

Fig 3.

Learning Objectives
1. Examine agency on-boarding process to Access.
2. Interview colleague in Access or Initial Assessment to gain additional perspective.
3. Contrast experience with colleagues and record reflections.
4. Observe Access Interview & Discuss documentation with colleagues.
5. Recommend improvements to the Access Interviews at local agency and to state policymakers.

Each Agency Team completed four learning applications (Fig. 4) over the first 8 weeks. Two completed by individual learner; two completed by agency team.

Fig 4.

Learning Applications
Application #1: View the Access Pre-Service training and reflect on early on-boarding experience at agency, suggest improvements to on-boarding procedure.
Application #2: Discuss impressions and improvements as a team, submit to ALC facilitators.
Application #3: Interview a colleague in Access or IA to better understand their process for gathering information.
Application #4: Listen to a recording of an Access interview, document report, decide as a team what and where to document information in a final CPS report, submit to BPM and ALC facilitators (Fig. 5).

On April 15th, 2021, agency teams came together for a virtual event to deepen their learning and hear from staff at the Department of Children & Families on the topics of the Access Review tool, ICWA/WICWA information and race and ethnicity data. Participants deepened their understanding of the automated state-wide child welfare database (eWiSACWIS). This included intent and utility of documentation, significance of ICWA & WICWA compliance, importance of gathering race data at Access, and learning of ongoing support.

Ultimately, participating teams completed five learning applications. The fifth and final application includes recommendations for local and state leaders on how to improve the quality of information gathering at Access. The top recommendations are included in this report and were selected based on frequency and relevance (Fig. 7 & 8).

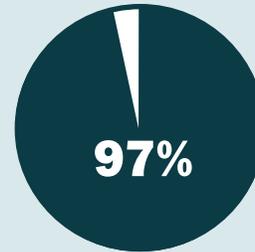
2021 Timeline

The timeline to study the policy and its implementation occurred between February and May through asynchronous and synchronous modalities (Fig. 5). A unique website was developed to organize and pace learner's asynchronous learning experience. Additionally, the WCWPDS partnered with agency supervisors/team leads to ensure team members understood directions and completed applications timely. To prepare supervisors/team leads for their leadership tasks, WCWPDS facilitated Supervisor Huddles ahead of assigning each learning application. The purpose of the Supervisor Huddle was to support their success through a Power Point presentation, talking points to share with staff about upcoming application, FAQ re: application, and suggested language to send in an email to initiate each application.

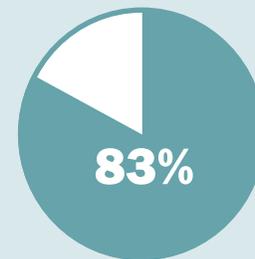
Fig 5.

Supervisor Orientations 1/28/2021 3 - 4 p.m.	
Enrollment Period 1/29/2021 - 2/12/2021	
Learning Application	Timeframe (Start/Finish dates)
Supervisor Huddle Friday, February 12th 9 a.m.	
#1: Review Access Pre-Service Training	Start: Monday, February 15th Finish: Monday, March 1st
Supervisor Huddle Thursday, February 25th 9 a.m.	
#2: Discuss Access Pre-Service Training with Agency Team	Start: Monday, March 1st Finish: Monday, March 15th
Supervisor Huddle Thursday, March 11th 9 a.m.	
#3: Study Access Standards and Respond to Questions	Start: Monday, March 15th Finish: Monday, March 29th
Supervisor Huddle Thursday, March 25th 9 a.m.	
#4: Observe Access Interview and Document the CPS Report	Start: Monday, March 29th Finish: Monday, April, 12th

Virtual ALC April 15th, 2021	
Access Reviews Start 3/29	
BPM emails feedback on 4/26	
Supervisor Huddle: Thursday, April 29th 9 a.m.	
#5: Recommend Quality Improvements	Start: Monday, May 10th Finish: Monday, May 24th



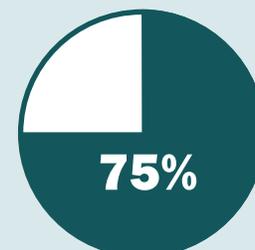
of participating staff strongly agreed or agreed that, "I had opportunity to participate on my agency team."



of participating supervisors strongly agreed or agreed that, "As a supervisor, WCWPDS prepared me to fulfill my role as a supervisor/team lead."



of participating staff strongly agreed or agreed that, "My supervisor helped me be productive during the training."



of participating staff strongly agreed or agreed that, "My supervisor helped me feel engaged & supported during the training."

Partnership with Bureau of Performance Management (BPM)

Enrolled teams wanted to improve consistent documentation of information gathered at Access. To facilitate this learning, participants were invited to listen to an Access interview, document the information in the CPS report, and then gather as a team to discuss individual differences. During discussions, if teams felt that they were not provided enough information from the reporter to make a proper screening decision, they were provided an opportunity to develop questions to ask the reporter to gain further information about the report that was made. They proposed these questions to the ALC facilitators and received further information based on the quality and design of their questions (as if they were calling the reporter back). Following discussion, the agency team completed one CPS report that represented the team's thinking and submitted it to staff at the Bureau of Performance Management (BPM) at the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

In response, BPM applied the same Access Review Tool to each agency's CPS report. This is the same tool BPM relies on to compile data for the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) work in Wisconsin. Results were analyzed and aggregated to provide feedback to the cohort. A summary of BPM's findings and recommendations is included in Fig 6.

13/30 agency teams

elected to ask for further information from the reporter.

The experience of completing a CPS report as a team allowed teams to better understand where team members agree on what information to include in the CPS report, and where to document it. The exercise helped the team evaluate and decide how the agency generally thinks about the quality of information at Access and documentation. It also provided participating agencies with knowledge about how these reports are reviewed by DCF.

BPM Findings and Recommendations

[Review the BPM Report here.](#)

Fig 6.

Strengths

- 30 local child welfare agencies completed Learning Application #4
- In general, when information was documented it was in the corresponding section of the CPS Report
- Agencies demonstrated strong documentation in Domestic Violence
- The majority (29 of 30) screened-in the CPS Report consistent with Standards

Areas of Opportunity

- Understanding when to document information about all children in the household vs. alleged victims
- Documenting the whereabouts of the alleged maltreater(s) and access to the children at time of the report
- Documenting adequate information in Family Functioning, Strengths, and Stressors
- Identifying all alleged maltreaters (i.e. the father's girlfriend, Janet)
- Identifying Present Danger and understanding In Process of Occurring

Recommendations

Agencies would benefit from a booster on the concept of ***In Process of Occurring***. In addition, agencies should document when the reporter is asked and does not know the information. This will help supervisors know when reporters should be contacted for additional information, if needed, for decision making purposes. As mentioned throughout this report, it is also important for agencies to consider who the reporter is and what information can reasonably be gathered from that individual. Improvements to the CPS Report template in eWisACWIS would help clearly identify what pieces of information pertain to alleged victims vs. all children in the household and alleged maltreaters vs. all parents/caregivers in the household.

Local Recommendations

Participants in the 2021 ALCs studied state policy and local practice pertaining to the engagement and interviewing of reporters at the point of Access. The over-arching aim of these recommendations is to promote and enhance consistency of practice throughout Wisconsin. In conclusion, participants made recommendations for their local agencies to influence their internal training and onboarding procedures, to examine staffing structures at Access, and to increase opportunities for professional supervision and growth. These recommendations were considered by many different agencies and are slightly altered or adapted to meet the needs of individual agencies. The recommendations summarize participants' collective thinking and reflect the top three ideas for quality improvement to the Access function at the local agency.

Fig 7.

Top Local Recommendations

1. Enhance internal training and onboarding process through measures such as peer consult and shadowing opportunities.
2. Examine staffing structure at Access to support consistency in report taking and writing.
3. Increase and promote opportunities for supervision and growth between Access workers through support, feedback, and resources available.

1. Enhance internal training and onboarding process through measures such as peer consult and shadowing opportunities.

Internal Training

Consistent among agencies, they want more internal agency support and training that covers topics ranging from enhancing the current onboarding training for Access professionals to annual booster trainings on Present Danger and Likely Impending Danger at Access.

Onboarding

Agencies noted that their onboarding processes needed internal review and added structure.

Shadowing

Access professionals are requesting more opportunities to shadow within their agency. Professionals gain a better perspective of how their ability to gather information effectively affects the case trajectory for other areas.

Group Review of Reports

Agencies want a team review of Access reports to be incorporated into their team meetings where cases are discussed, and screening decisions are analyzed.

After-Hours/On-Call

Many agencies feel they would benefit from more frequent opportunities to shadow a daytime Access professional. Agencies also feel they require booster trainings to account for not taking daily reports as their primary job function.

Timeliness

Access professionals want their agency to review when trainings are received by workers, specifically the Pre-Service and Access trainings.

2. Examine staffing structure at Access to support consistency in report taking and writing.

Staffing Structure

Access professionals envision staffing at Access to be better utilized within their agencies by having:

- A single point of Access for all CPS reports
- Rotating Access duties with Initial Assessment staff
- Re-organizing the backup role for Access within an agency.

Agencies will examine possibilities for addressing within their own structure.

After-Hours/On-Call

Agencies want consistency in their reports whether taken by a full-time Access professional or an afterhours/on-call worker.

3. Increase and promote opportunities for supervision and growth between Access professionals through support, feedback, and resources available.

Supervision

Access professionals feel their agency would benefit from more supervision and guidance from supervisors regarding their Access reports. Supervisors could document such feedback:

- Ensure the focus is on the reporter's engagement
- Ask questions associated with each area in the CPS Report.
- Ensure reports are descriptive with relevant information gathered, and that it is written in a professional, clear, and concise manner.
- Complete sentences, insert professional judgment when appropriate, document "reporter was asked" when they did not know the information.

After-Hours/On-Call

Agencies feel they need to support their afterhours/on-call workers by empowering them, administering booster trainings, and giving them sufficient tools to gather the necessary information.

Supervisor Feedback/Group Review of Reports

Access professionals want to receive feedback from their supervisor regarding Access reports they have taken, and the quality of information obtained. Agencies also want a team review of Access reports included in their team meetings where cases can be discussed, and screening decisions can be analyzed.

Access Report Document

Agencies identified areas within the report that need enhancement or encouraging reminders about sufficient or accurate information including:

- Following the Access Report flow
- Finding current contact information
- Identifying tribes in a timely manner
- Identifying children with American Indian/Alaskan Native heritage (if so then further prompts to identify the specific tribe). For example, inserting yes/no check boxes to respond to a prompt like: "The reporter was asked if the child has American Indian/Alaskan Native heritage."
- Notifying the Tribe of the report in a timely manner. This would require a prompt with logic that pre-fills timeframes that correspond with the assigned timeframes.

State Recommendations

In addition to recommendations for their local agencies, participants at the 2021 ALC provided state-level recommendations to practice standards, the automated database system (eWiSACWIS), and state-wide training through WCWPDS. The over-arching aim of these recommendations is to promote and enhance consistency of practice throughout Wisconsin.

Fig 8.

Top State Recommendations

1. Increase and promote opportunities for agencies to receive feedback on work products.
2. Prioritize enhancements to eWiSACWIS that promote efficiency at Access.
3. Refine practice standards to account for complex family compositions.
4. Develop a training on How to Take a CPS Report.

1. Increase and promote opportunities for agencies to receive feedback on work products.

Agencies want predictable opportunities for receiving feedback on the quality of interview, information gathered, documentation, and analysis at Access. Agencies had various ideas for how they can ensure feedback is provided at the local agency (Fig. 7). Additionally, they identified ways that state partners at the Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System can deliver on-going feedback.

Technical Assistance

Access professionals want concrete people and resources to contact when having questions on policy and procedure that is supported across the state. Another suggestion was to include public facing information for what to expect during the CPS process and a FAQ that addresses myths of the process as well. State-produced documents may ensure more consistent practice and help agencies talk about the Access function with a uniform approach.

Provide tailored documentation feedback to agencies

Agencies want to receive agency-specific feedback from Access records reviews conducted by CQI to identify areas of improvement.

Community of Practice

Access professionals are seeking further opportunities to learn from and work with other counties to create consistency between agencies. Specific topics that agencies would like to collaborate on include Present & Likely Impending Danger identification and screening decisions.

2. Prioritize enhancements to eWiSACWIS that promote efficiency at Access.

The work product at Access is the Child Protective Services, or CPS, report. The report is generated in the state-wide automated system (eWiSACWIS). It also captures the supervisor's decision-making on safety in the home by identifying a screening decision. The report includes information received and documented from the reporter. The below list of eWiSACWIS enhancements is likely to promote efficiency at Access.

Functionality

Access professionals suggest an autosave feature for Access reports and the addition of cell phone numbers. They also feel the CPS report is not user friendly to transfer information into eWiSACWIS. They suggest changing the format of the report to reduce time spent on its production.

Changes to CPS Report template

Reduce Repetition

Access professionals find the CPS report to be too repetitive. They want it to be simplified and straightforward. Suggestions include combining caregiver functioning with family stress/strengths and reducing how often alleged maltreater access to the child is documented.

Ensure each section includes one question

Access professionals find they miss information when questions are bundled together into one question. For example, the sections inquiring about child and parental protective capacities. They suggest having multiple part questions separated into their own individual box, so nothing is missed. They want the questions to be made as specific and clear as possible.

Include the rationale for each section

Access professionals would like clarity on the purpose of each section and how it informs decision making. For example, there was a specific note asking about clarification regarding domestic violence. Information about domestic violence is captured in its distinct section as well as the maltreatment section. Some Access professionals were not clear that one section is capturing information about the **impact** to the child (maltreatment) and the other describes the **dynamics** of domestic violence. A statement about purpose and how the information informs decision making may provide clarity and increase the focus of information gathering during the interview with the reporter.

Insert checkboxes as an alternative to text

Access professionals suggest adding a check box to the CPS report that identifies that the reporter was asked and did not know the information. They also suggest that for different questions on the report, having a box for yes/no responses with skip logic to describe affirmative answers.

Records checks

Professionals want clarity on if CCAP history can be narrowed to only relevant information. There were questions about if including this information in a CPS report can cause implicit bias when reviewing a report, and how to mitigate this information influencing the screening decision if the criminal or CPS history is not relevant to the reported concern.

Additionally, Access professionals think the requirement to complete various records checks at the point of Access is inefficient. Access professionals believe it would be beneficial for eWiSACWIS to have the ability to automatically pre-fill any CPS history into the report rather than having to copy and paste the information. They also desire a feature that pre-fills information from CCAP and SOR. Since CCAP and SOR data is stored in different databases, this may be a challenging feat. For this reason, an alternative solution includes simply rewording the question, so it requires the Access professional to view the records and make meaning of it considering the reported concern. For example, the question may read: Based on the records check (CPS history, CCAP, and SOR), what information must be considered when assessing the reporter's concern?

Elevate Safety Decision Making

Safety decision making precedes the screening decision and informs the response time. The analysis of present and likely impending danger is nestled within other sections of information that inform decision making, rather than capture a decision point. For this reason, Access professionals are requesting present and likely impending dangers be listed on the report to ensure each safety threat can be considered briefly. Also, professionals are unclear and would like further guidance about how a report can have present danger when the danger is not playing out at the time of the report.

3. Refine practice standards to account for complex family compositions.

There are many unique and different compositions of families and living arrangements. The more varied and dynamic the family is, the more challenging it is to interpret proper application of the practice standards. Specifically, there are challenges in determining the reference person and report name, defining the household, and deciding on responsibility when the report of alleged maltreatment is made to one county and the alleged maltreatment or threat to safety involves a household in a different county (i.e., multi-county reports).

Reference vs. Report Name

Practice Standards do not inform users on data entry into eWiSACWIS. To achieve consistency, Access professionals need further clarification for identifying the reference person and report name for the Access report. A [flowchart](#) is available for making this determination. However, this job aide varies in degrees of awareness and familiarity since it is a stand-alone document, rather than embedded in the practice standards. Additionally, the two available job aides provide conflicting guidance about determining and documenting the reference person. The flow chart indicates that if there is shared custody of the child, depending on certain criteria, the father would be listed as the reference person. However, the eWiSACWIS-specific job aide typically indicates the [‘female head-of-household’](#) as the reference person, leading to confusion for child welfare professionals.

Household

When there is more than one family sharing a household, it is unclear whether to represent everyone in the family or the entire household in the CPS report. Factors that complicate who is represented in the household include children who are intermittently in the home and living between two households in different counties. Access professionals want clarity on information to gather for each different household member relative to their position or representation in the report.

Jurisdiction

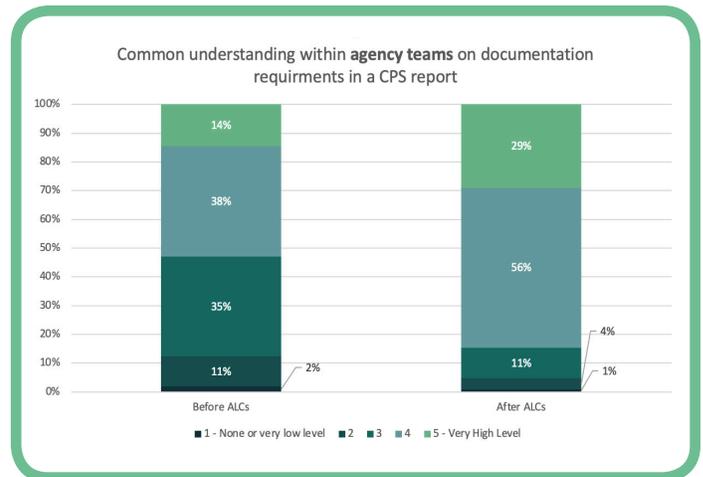
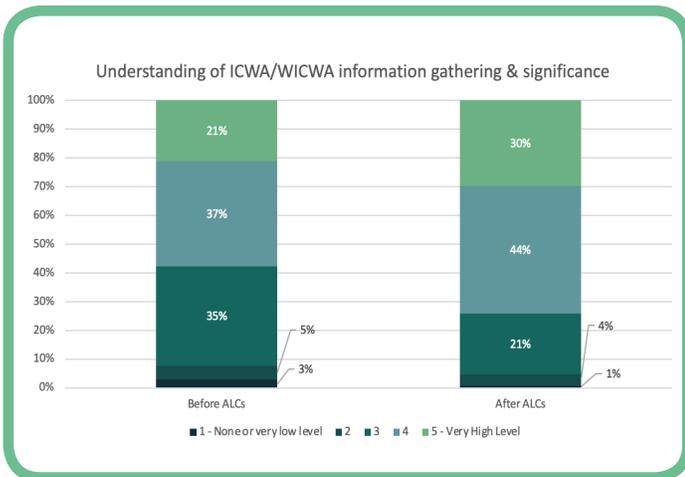
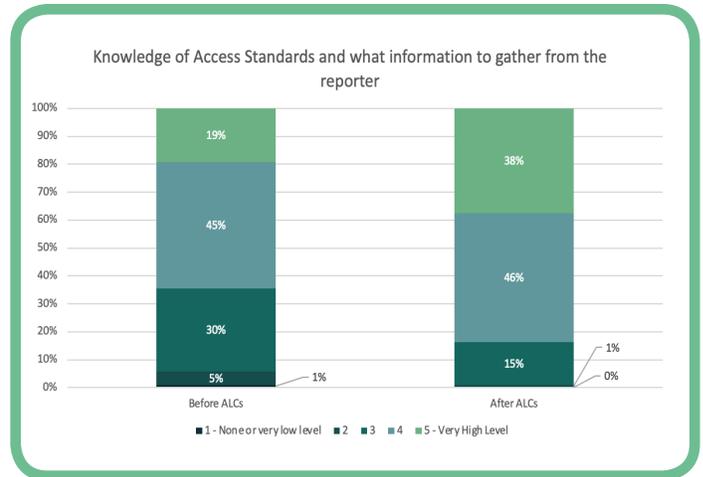
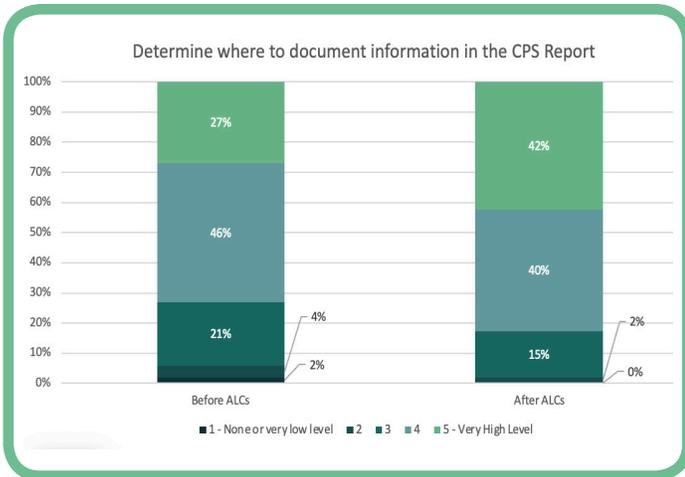
There are concerns that jurisdiction is not consistently determined across agencies, and they are requesting further clarification when determining which agency has the responsibility for a screened-in CPS Access report. Clarification is particularly valuable when families do not have a home, two adults are in a caregiving role, &/or there are multiple sets of children with different pairs of parents in one household. Currently, Access professionals consult the *Wisconsin Inter-County Agreement on Venue, Jurisdiction, Placement and Funding Responsibility in CHIPS, JIPS, and Delinquency Cases* to supplement practice standards and determine which county is responsible for performing an initial assessment. The document is perceived to have equal status as practice standard even when its application does not provide a precise fit for the multi-county reports that occur at Access. The document itself acknowledges, “the agreement cannot possibly cover all situations that might arise and open communication and good social work practice, on a case-by-case basis, are vital to ensure that the best interests of children, families, and the public are served.” The acknowledgement is particularly relevant at Access when decisions about venue, placement, and funding do not apply to the isolated decision about whether a case is advanced for further, formal assessment.

4. Develop a training on How to Take a CPS Report.

Access professionals want a training about documenting CPS reports and specifically documenting in eWiSACWIS. DCF has published *Access-Creating a CPS Report* on the Knowledge Web, however, its focus is on the technical creation of a report and does not include an explanation of each section and corresponding rationale for inclusion. Access professionals think this additional information would support their interview/information gathering because the connection between information and its influence on decision making is clear. Access professionals also want trainings conducted in person by the state that provide documentation practice and mock phone calls.

ALC Evaluation Results

All ALCs participants, including supervisors and their staff, were invited to individually complete a survey to evaluate their experience throughout the learning process. Of the 184 learners, 104 total responses were received. This included participation by 28 counties and one tribe. Of the survey respondents, 40% were CPS Access professionals or CPS Supervisors/Managers. The remaining 60% were CPS Initial Assessment, Ongoing, Youth Justice, and/or 'Other' professionals. Many of the survey respondents were veteran child welfare workers. Under 10% of respondents had less than a year of experience, 40% had between 1-10 years of experience, and 44% of respondents had over 10 years of Access experience.



The handbook, [Getting to the Heart of Access: Engaging & Interviewing the Reporter](#), was developed to support practice requirements related to information gathering (*CPS Access Standards: Information Standards, III. A. Information that Must be Gathered and Documented in All Cases*). To access the link above and other report documents, visit the [ALC website](#).

What parts of the 2021 Virtual Applied Learning Community did you find the most valuable?

Household composition discussion
Access Standards review
Reference person discussion
Colleague interview
Pre-service training Data Boards
Resources Recommendations
Receiving Feedback Handbook
Intra agency Teamwork
ICWA Questions to dig deeper Documentation
Intercounty discussions
Supervisor Support Access Review Tool
Gathering information review **LA#4***
Onboarding process