Leadership Academy
for Supervisors

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, December 2018
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Child welfare faces exceptional leadership challenges. All child welfare levels require expertise, and agency leaders must set an agency vision, chart a course for ongoing organizational development, and support a workforce straining to improve outcomes in the face of unreasonable workloads and high turnover. Yet many child welfare leaders have inadequate leadership experience, education, or training,\(^1,2\) a deficiency that may cause them to retreat to a compliance-driven, problem-focused, and people-processing approach to leadership.

The NCWWI Leadership Academies provide supervisors and managers with opportunities to become the expert child welfare leaders that they strive to be. Academy graduates across the country are pioneering positive changes in their agencies and strengthening child welfare practice effectiveness to support the success of children, youth, and families. If implemented as designed, supervisors and managers who complete the academies will become nimble leaders, able to identify and tackle both technical and adaptive challenges and to support their organization in achieving its full potential.

About the Leadership Academies

The Children’s Bureau funded the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) to build leadership capacity and support change at all levels throughout the child welfare system. From 2008 to 2018, NCWWI developed, implemented, and refined two leadership academies: Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM) and Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS).

LAMM provides an in-person leadership development program for mid-level managers that includes preparation over a 14-week period prior to training and coaching for up to six months after training.

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LAS offers an online training program for supervisors with one-year minimum experience. Cohorts of participants spend 36 hours online, and an additional minimum of 9 hours in synchronous learning networks, to provide an opportunity for supervisors to share their progress and receive peer and instructor feedback.

Overall, participants have found the leadership academies to be relevant and valuable to their jobs. Evaluation results show that LAMM participants significantly increased application of leadership behaviors, including making informed decisions to position their organizations for success, giving staff more autonomy and professional development opportunities, increasing collaborative and consensus-building efforts, and implementing innovative practices and translating visions to actions. LAS participants increased application of leadership behaviors, including setting priorities and managing resources, encouraging collaborative and inclusive units, utilizing more collaborative and consensus-building efforts, and adapting to changes implemented.

The majority of the curricula and training materials are available online in formats that allow agencies to easily customize the content. If these materials are altered, please be sure to continue to cite the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute.  

**Fundamental Content**

While each academy addresses the specific needs and proficiency levels of its targeted population, the academies also share fundamental content that provides graduates with exposure to the key concepts needed to effectively lead change in child welfare agencies. Through the varied concepts in the curricula, learners are exposed to a cohesive and comprehensive set of competencies that they apply to the implementation of change in their agencies. This shared content provides organizations that utilize both academies an opportunity to develop a common language agency-wide. Shared content includes:

NCWWI’s Leadership Competency Framework reflects the multidimensional nature of the child welfare field and the corresponding complex and diverse body

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3 Recommended citations are included on each product.
of knowledge and skills. It describes the approach and resource documents used as the basis for the NCWWI competency framework and, for each competency, offers a definition and a proficiency ladder, as well as examples for each level.

**Adaptive Leadership**, by Heifetz, develops the skills to take people outside their comfort zones, assess and address the toughest challenges, and effectively facilitate the change process.

**Strengths-Based Leadership**, by Rath and Conchie, identifies three keys to being a more effective leader: knowing your strengths and investing in others’ strengths, getting people with the right strengths on your team, and understanding and meeting the four basic needs of those who look to you for leadership.

**Cultural Humility** is the “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person].” Cultural humility differs from other culturally based training ideals because it focuses on self-humility rather than achieving a state of knowledge or awareness.

**The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) Implementation Framework** offers an approach to support effective implementation of sustainable change efforts.

**NCWWI’s Workforce Development Framework** helps child welfare leaders understand best and promising workforce practices for developing and supporting a competent, committed, and diverse workforce, as well as an inclusive and welcoming workplace.

**Change Initiatives** are a critical tool for hands-on learning. Applying new learning to agency work is an essential element of adult learning. Change initiatives provide a structured way to do this. The use of change initiatives allows those trained to become increasingly comfortable with the process of change—a process they can use whenever they identify an area needing transformation. They also act as a

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vehicle for connecting the workforce to the agency’s mission and serve to surface the barriers to sustainable change in the jurisdiction’s infrastructure, communication gaps, and decision-making. Evaluation data show that participants appreciated learning from change initiatives, but needed leadership buy-in and agency supports to implement them fully.

Implementation Considerations

Agencies should engage in an implementation and sustainability process right for them, knowing that efforts may change over time and the plan may need adjusted to accommodate new realities. Whatever implementation process your agency uses, make sure it is thorough, strategic, and flexible for long-term sustainability. Organizations may choose among multiple implementation approaches such as the Getting to Outcomes\(^7\) approach or guidance provided by the National Implementation Research Network. The following is a list of specific implementation considerations for the NCWWI Leadership Academies. Visit NCWWI’s Change Implementation Resource Category for more information about various approaches to implementation.

1. **Executive-level support.** Initial and ongoing support, involvement, and resources from the executive level provide a critical foundation. Without this support, portions of the academy will be hard to execute successfully, which will limit the academy’s effectiveness. The greater the commitment, the more engagement and motivation for change across the agency.

2. **Vision and goals.** Use a collaborative implementation team, representing all stakeholders, to develop a shared vision to ground the work and improve the potential for sustainability.

3. **Organizational assessment.** Employ an assessment such as the Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) to establish readiness for a baseline for evaluation and for a foundation from which to build a workforce development plan.

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4. **Agency culture and climate.** A more positive organizational culture and climate will facilitate success, while a punitive culture will negatively impact success.

5. **Infrastructure.** Strong infrastructures for communication and decision-making processes contribute to the successful implementation and sustainability of leadership academies.

6. **Generate commitment and buy-in.** Engage all levels of the organization and community stakeholders from the very beginning. The importance of this first critical step cannot be overemphasized as it will impact the sustainability of your Change Initiative.

7. **Use coaching.** Early implementation experiences and participant feedback indicated that an additional component, coaching, would result in improved program effectiveness. Managers needed the support that coaching provided to apply the skills they learned during training to the implementation of their Change Initiative and other ongoing work (i.e., transfer of learning).

Your agency may choose to implement one or both academies. Specific implementation guidelines for delivering the LAS follow. If interested, the [LAMM Implementation Guide](http://LAMMImplementationGuide) is available on [MyNCWWI.org](http://MyNCWWI.org).
The LAS curriculum develops *leadership skills for implementation of change*. It targets experienced child welfare supervisors in public, private, and tribal agencies who have already mastered the transition from caseworker to supervisor and the basics of supervision, and who can strengthen the agency by providing leadership in their role as unit supervisors. We recommend a minimum of one year’s experience as a supervisor as a requirement for registration and participation.

Delivered online, LAS includes an Introductory Module and five modules based on the NCWWI Leadership Model:

1. Introductory Module
2. Foundations of Leadership
3. Leading in Context: Building Collaboratives
4. Leading People: Workforce Development
5. Leading for Results: Accountability
Modules encourage learners to work at their own pace, coming in and out of the training as their schedule allows, or electing to enroll in only one or two of the modules instead of committing to the entire program. Each module includes case examples and scenarios specific to the role of unit supervisor. The entire online series takes about 36 hours to complete, with individual modules varying in length from 2-8 hours. View the modules here.

A 90-minute live webinar or face-to-face learning network session (LASLN) follows each module for all LAS participants. The goal of the LASLNs is to facilitate transfer of learning and to encourage supervisors to talk with their peers, sharing and receiving feedback about their practice priorities, Change Initiatives, or other aspects of the curriculum. Experienced child welfare supervisors, managers, or members of the training unit facilitate the LASLNs. Utilizing LASLNs adds approximately 9 additional hours of training time for participants.

The LAS instructional strategy asks supervisors to develop and implement a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) that identifies leadership strengths and challenges and the knowledge, skills, and abilities a supervisor wants to develop or enhance. Supervisors implement the goals of the PLP by identifying and working on a specific Change Initiative (CI) within their sphere of influence, thus building experience in implementing systems change.

The document links below provide you with more information on the LAS Curriculum:

- LAS Curriculum Overview
- LAS Training Competencies and Objectives
- Leadership Competency Framework
- LAS Frequently Asked Questions
- LAS Learning Portfolio
- Personal Learning Plan (PLP) Worksheet Template
- Change Initiative (CI) Worksheet Template
Why Implement LAS?

In this time of limited resources, LAS can expand training resources for experienced supervisors by offering innovative leadership content and approaches developed and delivered by national experts and approved by the Children’s Bureau. Already developed and free of charge, you can implement the LAS at your agency at very little cost to you.

In some instances, you may also have a specific catalyst for implementing LAS, such as a priority to implement a practice model or a team meeting family engagement strategy. In other instances, leadership training and/or training for experienced supervisors may be a priority in your Children and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan or other organizational priorities. You can use catalysts such as these to support the decision to implement LAS in your agency. In fact, linking the Change Initiatives that supervisors are asked to identify in the training to a larger CI in your agency will both strengthen the larger system’s change effort and help supervisors identify a relevant CI to work on during the training.

Evaluation findings show a high level of satisfaction with the relevance of LAS and, most importantly, significant gains in participants’ self-assessment of their learning in all competency areas from pre- to post-training. Furthermore, participants report that they continued to develop their leadership skills on the job and used these skills to implement Change Initiatives after the completion of training. A copy of the LAS Evaluation Executive Summary has additional information about LAS training outcomes.
LAS Logistics and Planning Checklist

The NCWWI team is not currently funded to provide onsite supports to jurisdictions that would like to implement the LAS. The following offers step-by-step guidelines for considering the logistics of planning a Leadership Academy for Supervisors for your agency.

1 GET BUY-IN

Successful implementation happens when you have the support of key allies in your jurisdiction, tribe, or agency. Agency leadership can be your most important allies and potential champions. Getting the support of the agency director upfront will improve your chances of success and improve supervisors’ participation in the training. If you have a university partner for training, the staff of the partnership can also play important roles in planning and supporting the training.

2 CONSIDER STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

We’ve done the curriculum and technological design for you, making the LAS content and implementation materials ready to use. That said, do consider the staffing needs to implement a new training initiative. These include the leadership role in making the implementation decision and providing ongoing oversight, as well as the roles of marketing the training, coordinating the online learning, and facilitating the LASLN. If you will include a coaching component as part of LAS, define the role and expectations of coaching participants and support them in their learning.

Indiana’s state staff development team led LAS implementation.

In Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation’s agency director partnered with a university partner to develop a comprehensive action plan for their system improvement changes.
DECIDE WHO WILL BE ON THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Think about who should participate on your planning and implementation team. Successful implementation happens when those impacted by training participate in the process. Teams can include training directors, regional directors, mid-managers, supervisors, HR specialists, and others.

Implementation Team Roles:

- **Project Leader** – Provide oversight and direction for initiative: develop plans for participation (selection of participants, criteria, engaging participants, and incentives); monitor progress and make adjustments in plans; assign duties to training staff; and provide general oversight. (Approximately 5 hours per month)

- **Technology Assistant** – Address infrastructure needs: work with IT staff to identify methodology for LASLN delivery and ensure coordination with jurisdiction requirements and resources. Troubleshoot system issues that create a barrier to online access. (Approximately 10 hours per month)

- **Evaluation Support** – Promote evaluation activities and encourage completion by participants. (Approximately 5 hours per month)

- **LASLN Instructors or Facilitators** – Review LAS modules and LASLN curriculum and identify relevant connections to agency priorities and content. Plan LASLN sessions: brainstorm ideas for modifying LASLN content, develop additional materials, and facilitate practice sessions. Conduct LASLN sessions: present material, facilitate discussion, and promote dialogue and connections to key themes. (Approximately 10 hours per month)

- **Coaches** – Provide clarification and assistance in individual sessions after each module and LASLN session. Review participant Personal Learning Plan and Change Initiative and provide feedback. (Approximately 4 hours per month)

- **Administrative Support** – Maintain participant listings: keep records of participants based on registration data and make regular updates. Schedule LASLN sessions: review calendar and select dates, and send notices and reminders to participants. (Approximately 3 hours per month)
IDENTIFY HOW THE LAS WILL ALIGN WITH OTHER INITIATIVES ALREADY UNDERWAY

Supervisors will participate if they see how training aligns with things they are already doing, such as agency practice priorities they already support. The Change Initiative (CI) provides a critical element within the LAS, offers more relevance to learners, and becomes more productive for the agency when the CI ties to priorities or initiatives already underway.

Contemplate how supervisors can align their CI selection with agency goals, providing them opportunities to move agency priorities forward while also developing and demonstrating their leadership skills. In this way, LAS becomes relevant to both agency functioning and professional development of supervisors.

CONSIDER: What other initiatives are currently underway? How will the LAS fit in with, support, and help advance other priorities? How will you coordinate the LAS with other initiatives? What role might the LAS play in meeting the goals for your state, jurisdiction, or tribal or private child welfare agency?

IDENTIFY HOW LAS WILL BE COORDINATED WITH OTHER SUPERVISORY TRAINING

CONSIDER: What training is available for new and experienced supervisors? How does LAS fit into your overall training plan? How will you coordinate LAS with existing training? How will LAS reinforce existing training?

SELECT A TARGET AUDIENCE FOR THE LAS

CONSIDER: What are your goals in implementing the LAS? Will you open the LAS to all experienced supervisors through voluntary enrollment? Do you want to begin with a pilot program? Will you limit the LAS to a select group of supervisors or ask interested supervisors to submit competitive applications?

Note: Our experience has shown that mandatory training is not effective.
7 CREATE A PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT OF SUPERVISORS AND MARKETING OF THE LAS

Once you have decided on your target audience, think about how you will recruit participants. Busy supervisors may find it hard to commit to another responsibility. Consider developing marketing materials and incentives to motivate participation. If you choose to implement an application process for supervisors’ participation, check out the LAS Application Template.

8 IDENTIFY SUPPORTS AND INCENTIVES FOR LAS PARTICIPANTS

It is challenging for supervisors to devote time to their own professional development. They need support and encouragement from their manager and peers in order to succeed; therefore, put a plan in place to formally support supervisors’ participation and reinforce their learning.

CONSIDER: How will you assure that supervisors have the necessary time away from their daily work to complete training modules? Do you have the commitment of mid-managers to support supervisors while in the LAS? Are there incentives for participation, such as consideration in promotional opportunities or other Supports and Incentives. A ceremony or formal graduation event? Will a coaching program reinforce supervisors’ learning? Will someone review and provide feedback to supervisors on their written assignments?

9 DECIDE ON A FORMAT FOR THE LAS LEARNING NETWORK SESSIONS (LASLNs)

Following each online module, supervisors participate in a 90-minute or longer LASLN discussion session. A facilitator leads each session using a suggested curriculum and PowerPoint slides, which can be customized to your agency’s
needs or requirements. Agencies and tribes differ in how they provide LASLNs (face to face, through distance technology, or a blended approach).

**CONSIDER:** How will you use the LASLNs to customize the curriculum to your priorities, data, etc.? Face-to-face LASLNs allow for more peer-to-peer and peer-to-instructor interaction; distance LASLNs can be more cost effective and save travel time. Check out the [LASLN Trainer Guides](#) and [PowerPoint slides](#).

### DEVELOP A TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF ALL LAS REQUIREMENTS, INCLUDING LEARNING NETWORK SESSIONS (LASLNs)

A published schedule detailing all LAS timelines supports successful implementation and helps the participants, facilitators, and coaches (if using) plan their time and understand LAS expectations. LAS requires about a seven- to nine-month period, or longer if desired. As you plan the schedule for delivering LAS, consider the following:

- What other initiatives is your state, jurisdiction, tribe, or agency currently implementing? How will this impact the participant's ability to complete the work in the LAS?
- What upcoming events should the schedule accommodate to allow participants enough time to complete the LAS assignments? Consider conferences or trainings, holidays, and likely vacation times.

Within the schedule consider the following:

- An orientation session for agency leaders, participants, facilitators, and coaches prior to beginning the first module.
- Specific times for LASLN facilitator preparation calls and coach preparation calls.
- A graduation event to acknowledge the accomplishment of completing LAS.

Here is a guide to how much time (at a minimum) each module typically requires and how long you may want to allow participants to complete each.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Online hours to complete</th>
<th>Time to complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Module</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Leadership</td>
<td>6.5 hours</td>
<td>7 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading in Context</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading People</td>
<td>8.5 hours</td>
<td>7 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading for Results</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Change</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check out the [Sample LAS Cohort Calendar](#) and [LAS Cohort Calendar Template](#) to assist you in planning.

**11 DECIDE IF YOU WILL PROVIDE COACHING TO YOUR LAS SUPERVISORS**

A positive impact on transfer of learning happens when coupling training with coaching. Coaching helps supervisors apply new knowledge to the successful development and implementation of their Individual Change Initiative and Personal Learning Plan. In some locations, previous LAS graduates become coaches for new LAS participants after training.

**CONSIDER:** Do you want to add coaching? Who will you utilize as coaches? Use the [LAS Coaching Toolkit](#) to plan for coaching and review the manual with your coaches.

**12 DECIDE IF YOU WILL INCLUDE A REVIEW OF LAS ASSIGNMENTS**

Evaluation indicates that when participants get feedback on their assignments, outcomes improve. In addition, in a state such as Indiana where graduation from LAS was a part of the criteria for promotion to management positions, an element of rigor in the program became necessary so that only those who have demonstrated mastery of the competencies graduate with a certificate of...
completion. Raters can include faculty from a university social work program, the participant’s immediate supervisor, and/or the participant’s coach. If you choose to conduct a review of LAS assignments, check out the LAS Assignment Rating Guide as a helpful resource.

### COORDINATION OF INDIVIDUAL CHANGE INITIATIVES

The identification and development of an individual Change Initiative provides a fundamental learning strategy. CIs are more relevant to learners and more productive for the agency if they are tied to priorities or initiatives already underway.

**CONSIDER:** How will you provide parameters for supervisors to align their CI selection with your priorities surrounding safety, permanency, and well-being? Who might you include in decision-making regarding your CI parameters?

### CHANGE INITIATIVE SUPPORT

Supervisors can apply their leadership skills through the identification and development of a Change Initiative, though experience has shown that this powerful learning tool requires support for supervisors to succeed. The Change Initiative Resource Guide for Supervisors includes examples of CI goals and a sample of a completed CI worksheet to support participants as they begin planning their CI. The LASLNs provide an important opportunity for supervisors to discuss their CI experience with facilitators and peers; however, it is not unusual for supervisors to need individual assistance, particularly in choosing topics and defining the scope of the change. As you implement LAS, consider how you will support supervisors as they develop their CIs.

### DEVELOP AN EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE LAS

Implementing LAS requires an investment of time, energy, and resources. An evaluation provides the opportunity to monitor a return on your investment. The LAS Evaluation Guide provides suggestions and materials for you to explore how to incorporate evaluation into your LAS planning. Consider how you will assist in
facilitating these evaluation activities and support participation in the evaluation activities.

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PLAN POST-GRADUATION SUPPORTS FOR SUPERVISORS

Once participants have completed the LAS curriculum, they continue working on their Personal Learning Plan and implementing their Change Initiative. Support for these efforts helps keep them on track and ensures successful transfer of learning and integration into practice. Direct supervisors of LAS participants can use the LAS Post-Graduate Coaching Guide to provide support at regularly scheduled supervision sessions in the 12 months following graduation. Supporting materials for training on the use of this guide are in the LAS Post-Graduate Coaching Guide PowerPoint, and LAS Post-Graduate Coaching Guide PowerPoint Script.