National Information Exchange Model (NIEM)
Family Services Domain
Brief for the Children's Bureau
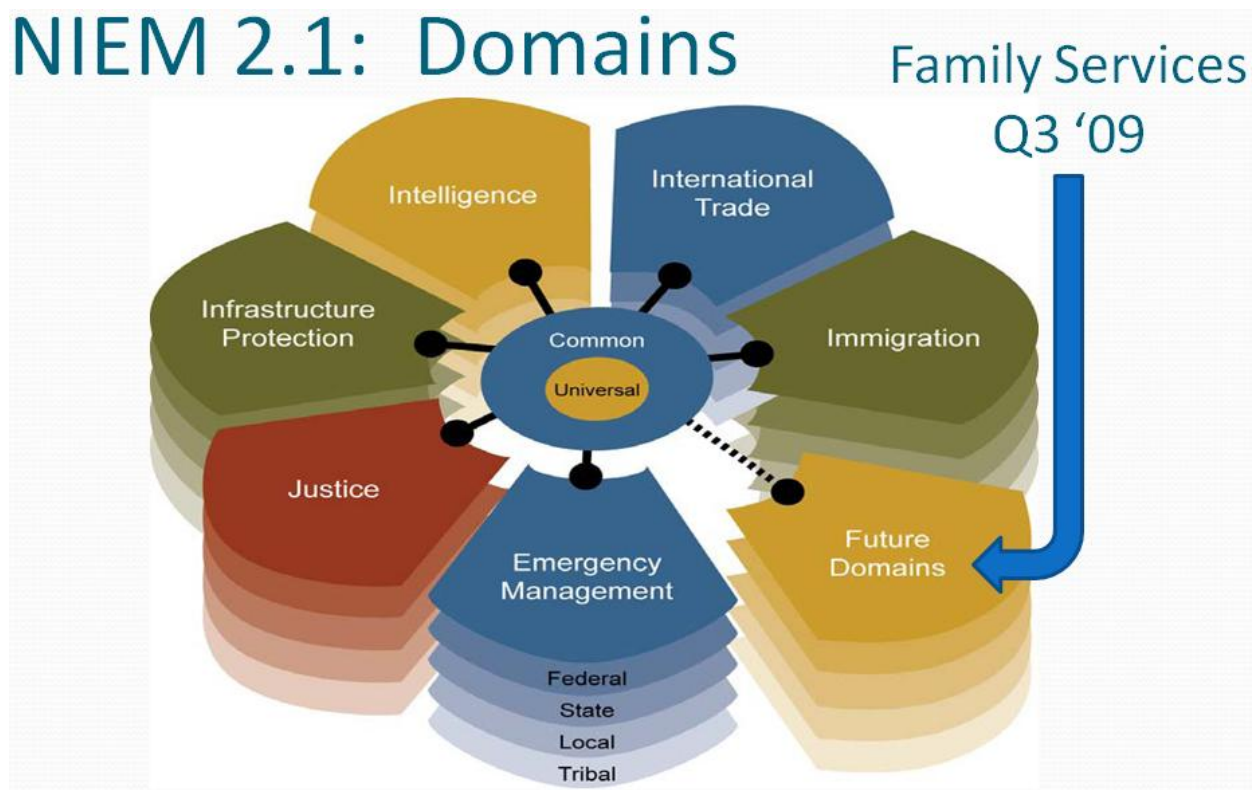# March 31, 2010

The National Information Exchange Model (NIEM) was updated in September 2009 to add several new domains, including the Family Services Domain. The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview of NIEM's Family Services Domain.

The Family Services Domain's Place in NIEM

Structurally, NIEM starts in a Core of data elements that describe person, place, and object concepts used by multiple communities of interest. An example of a NIEM Core data element is "Person Birth Date," a concept used frequently by Justice, Immigration, Intelligence, and other domains.

Emanating from NIEM Core are multiple Domains, each containing domain-specific concepts. An example is "Warrant Probable Cause Text": this element resides in the Justice domain, because criminal-justice practitioners are the experts concerning arrest and search warrants, and their data exchanges use this concept most frequently. However, if practitioners in another community of interest – say, Immigration – need to include the concept of "Warrant Probable Cause Text" in one of their data exchanges, they can easily incorporate the Justice element into their schema.

Thus, NIEM Core and NIEM's Domains – including the Family Services Domain – are graphically depicted as follows:

Origins of the Family Services Domain

In April 2008, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) published two national reference models for XML messages between a state/local CSE agency and the court with jurisdiction over child-support enforcement cases[1]. The first message contains the CSE agency's case-initiation data, called the "Initial Request for Remedy"; the second message contains the court's child-support order. These two XML schema use NIEM's predecessor, the Global Justice XML Data Model (GJXDM).

In October 2007, the Court/Child Welfare National Exchange Template (NET) Project was formed, and it included representatives from the Children's Bureau and two of its National Resource Centers: Child Welfare Data & Technology and Legal & Judicial Issues. During NET's first year, it created four national reference models for data exchanges between a state/local child welfare agency and the court with jurisdiction over abuse and neglect cases[2]:

1. Dependency Petition
2. Adjudication Order
3. Service Plan
4. Court Report

NET's XML specifications are NIEM-conformant, meaning (1) whenever appropriate, they reuse data elements that exist in NIEM Core or one of the NIEM Domains, and (2) for concepts not already represented in NIEM, they create new data elements according to NIEM's Naming and Design Rules.

In early 2009, OCSE, NET, and the National Center for State Courts collaborated to develop the inaugural content for the Family Services Domain by extracting data elements from the six child-support and child-welfare schema described above. An example of a Family Services element is "AFCARS Permanency Goal Code," a list of permanency goals recognized in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. Including this data concept in the Family Services Domain means (1) the list of AFCARS Permanency Goals can easily be reused in exchange schema, and (2) the governing body of the Family Services Domain would be responsible for updating the list, if the AFCARS Permanency Goals were ever changed.

What Does the Family Services Domain's Future Hold?

As new data-exchange schema are developed and implemented, and as new data-exchange partners are welcomed into the Family Services community of interest, additional concepts can be added to the Family Services Domain. In other words, the possibilities for future Family Services data elements will arise from new exchanges between existing partners or new exchanges with new partners. Examples might include:

- The three new court-child welfare agency administrative exchanges published by NET at the end of 2009 (placement, representation, and court event notifications)
- Queries to locate active protection orders (also known as domestic violence restraining orders)
- Requests for home studies to support the interstate placement of children (ICPC)
- Juvenile Justice (delinquency); youth corrections and probation

The Family Services Domain's governing body will meet in early May 2010 to plan for the future.

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[1] *See* DCL-08-19 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/DCL/2008/dcl-08-19.htm.
[2] *See* http://www.ncsconline.org/childwelfarewiki.