Human Services Domain Data Definition Guidelines

Human Services Domain
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1.   INTRODUCTION

This document establishes a set of guidelines for creating data definitions for data elements within the Human Services (HS) Domain. Good, or sound, data definitions enable:

- The seamless exchange of electronic data both within HS Domain
- The integration of systems which use the same data elements
- A common understanding of data across the Human Services Domain

Establishing these guidelines supports the HS Domain strategic plan for timely and accurate data exchanges. Well-defined data has a positive impact on organizations productivity, development costs and data quality.

Data definitions represent data elements in a nontechnical way so they are clear to the reader. Good definitions help avoid misunderstanding or misuse of the data. A good data definition indicates the purpose of the data element, not how, when or where it is used.   A definition should be independent of specific organizations or technical implementations as this allows data to be reused by multiple applications. When technology is developed based on inaccurate assumptions surrounding data, the possible results are poor data quality, project delays, system deployment issues, poor business decisions and potential legal complications.

Industry standards published by the [Industry Standards Organization](#) (ISO) were used in developing these guidelines.

2.   FORMULATING GOOD DATA DEFINITIONS

Data definitions contain information which clarifies the purpose of a data element. . In work environments, a variety of backgrounds and vocabularies exist which may lead to data being defined inconsistently. Having formal, documented data definitions adopts a broader view of the data and promotes common understanding and reuse of the data.

2.1   Definition Criteria

When constructing a data definition, the following criteria must be applied. Details for each criterion are provided in subsequent sections.

1. Each data element should have a brief but precise definition.
2. Use consistent, grammatically correct language and avoid abbreviations or acronyms.

3. Each data element should be unique, having a meaning notably different from any other data element.
4. Data definitions should be clear, understandable and accurate, allowing only one standard interpretation.
5. Data definitions should not reference other data elements.
6. Data definitions should be independent of technical implementations or specific organizations.
7. Examples should be cited when needed to provide clarity.

2.2   Brief

Each data element should have a brief but precise definition. The definition should not contain extraneous information, adjectives, or flowery language. It should include as much information as necessary in a minimum amount of space and should be applicable to everything the data term defines.

Example of a flawed definition:
Person SSN – The Social Security number of the person being added to the FCR or who is the subject of an FCR query, locate request or proactive match. The FCR verifies the submitted SSN using the SSA SSN verification routines. If an SSN is not present on the FCR input person/locate request record or if the submitted SSN does not verify, the FCR will attempt to identify an SSN for the person using other information in the input record. If a verified SSN cannot be found for a person, the input record will be rejected and returned to the submitter. *(98 words)*

Example of a sound definition:
Person SSN – A number assigned to a person by the U.S. Social Security Administration. *(12 words)*

2.3   Consistent

Each data element should use consistent, grammatically correct language and avoid abbreviations or acronyms. Understanding the meaning of an abbreviation, including acronyms, is usually confined to a certain environment. To avoid ambiguity, use full words, not abbreviations, in the definitions and spell out acronyms. To ensure consistent use of commonly used terms, ensure they are defined in the Human Services Domain Data Standards Vocabulary, which is included in Appendix B.

Example of a flawed definition:
Employer Name – The name of an employer as found on the NDNH QW or W-4 files. (acronyms: NDNH, QW)

Example of a sound definition:
Employer Name – The title for a person or business who hires others to perform specific duties.

2.4   Unique

Each data element should be unique, that is, having a meaning notably different from that of any other data element. A data element should be distinguishable from every other term within the Data Standards Registry by its definition. A data element addresses only one concept, such as a person, and stands by itself without referencing other data elements. Avoid possessive language and spell out relationships.

Example of a flawed definition:
City Name – The name of the city.

Example of a sound definition:
City Name – The name of an incorporated municipality.

2.5   Clear

Data definitions should be clear, understandable and accurate, allowing only one acceptable interpretation. Do not use the name of the data element to define it. Do use simple terms which are stated in your own words and that avoid highly technical or obscure language. The reader should not have to make assumptions or use a dictionary to understand the definition. Make sure the definition contains only commonly understood words. Use the Human Services Domain Data Standards Vocabulary in Appendix B when forming definitions.

Example of a flawed definition:
Disbursement Date – The date money was disbursed. (Circular: definition repeats the term)

Example of a sound definition:
Disbursement Date – The date money was paid directly or credited to the account.

2.6   Reference

Data definitions should not reference other data elements. Definitions should stand on their own and not be defined in terms of each other, avoiding circular reasoning.

Example of a flawed definition:
Employer-EIN – Indicates the employer identification number for the employer listed in the employer name field. (References another data element: employer name)

Example of a sound definition:
Employer EIN – A unique tax number associated with an organization.

2.7 Independent

Data definitions should be independent of technical implementations or specific organizations. Data is logical, not physical, and definitions should state what the data element is and avoid how or when it is used. Do not include processing, editing or formatting specifics in the definition. Beware of system-specific definitions, which may be considered accurate within the context of one group but may not be accurate for a broader audience.

Example of a flawed definition:
First Name – The first name of the person who is being added to or changed on the FCR, or who is the subject of a request for locate. (Refers to FCR)

Example of a sound definition:
First Name – The given name of an individual.

2.8 Examples

Examples should be cited when needed to provide clarification.   Examples should not be inclusive of all possible values for the data element. Street Number – A numeric identifier assigned to a particular unit or location along a street.
Example: **12345** Centreville Road – **12345** represents the street number.

For questions or comments about this document, contact the Human Services Domain POC at interoperability@acf.hhs.gov.

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

DATA STANDARDS REPOSITORY (DSR) - A database containing information about the data elements used in the child support enforcement community.

INDUSTRY STANDARDS ORGANIZATION (ISO) – A nongovernmental entity that forms a bridge between the public and private sectors using a network of the international standards institutes to develop and publish industry specific guidance.

METADATA – Information about data that describes, explains, locates or otherwise makes it easier to retrieve, use or manage data.

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT (OCSE) – A federal agency responsible for the administration of the child support program created by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. Access the OCSE website to learn more.

APPENDIX B: DATA STANDARDS VOCABULARY

Term	Definition
Accrual	A cumulative increase in value over a period of time.
Address	Location where a person or an organization can be contacted.
Arrearage	Past due, unpaid child support owed by the noncustodial parent.
Attorney	A person representing an entity in a legal matter.
Case ID	Unique identification number assigned to a request/referral for IV-D services.
Child	A person not yet of legal age.
Child Support	Financial support paid by a parent to help support a child or children of whom they do not have custody.
Child Support Enforcement	The act of or actions pertaining to locating non-custodial parents or putative fathers for the purpose of establishing paternity; creating and modifying child support orders; and collecting and distributing child support payments.
City	The name of a municipality located within a state, commonwealth, province or other such geopolitical subdivision of a country.
Complaint	A formal document filed in a court containing allegations and requested action.
Consent	To give approval to what is done or proposed by another.
Cooperation	When the receiver of child support helps the child support agency identify and locate the noncustodial parent, establish paternity and/or obtain child support payments.
Country	The geopolitical subdivision of land with internationally recognized boundaries.
Court Order	A legally binding instruction issued by a magistrate, judge or properly empowered administrative officer, usually in a court of law.
CP	Custodial party.
CSE	Child support enforcement.
Custodial Parent	The person responsible for the primary care of a child.
Custody	Having legally responsible for the primary care of a child as determination by a court of law.
Date of Birth	The specific month, day and year that a person was born.
Decree	The judicial decision of a litigated action, usually in

Term	Definition
	equitable cases. Example: divorce decree
Default	The failure to meet a legal obligation within the prescribed time frame.
Dependent	A person not yet of legal age who is under the care of someone else.
Disbursement	The allocation of something collected to the appropriate parties.
DOB	Date of birth.
Employee	A person who accepts a position to perform a job for someone else in exchange for money.
Employer	An organization which hires people exchanging specific skills or knowledge for money.
Father	A man who is recognized by law as the male parent of a child.
Federal Employer Identification Number	A unique number assigned to all employers by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).
Federal Information Processing Standard Code	A code used by the child support community to identify a U.S. state U.S. county and expanded to include tribes and foreign countries.
Fee	An amount of money charged for a professional service.
FEIN	Federal Employer Identification Number.
FIPS	Federal information processing standard.
Foster Care	Financial support provided to a person, family or institution that is raising a child that is not their own.
Garnish	Enacting a legal proceeding where financial assets are withheld for payment of a debt.
Guidelines	A standard set of parameters which are used to set boundaries around something.
Income	Any periodic form of payments to an individual, regardless of source.
Initiate	To cause the beginning of something.
Interstate	Two or more states involved in an activity.
IV-A	Title IV-A of the Social Security Act.
IV-A Case	A formal request where a custodial party has asked for or received public assistance benefits from their State to support a child or children under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act.
IV-D	Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.
IV-D Agency	An organizational unit within a state that has the responsibility for administering the state plan for child support under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.

Term	Definition
IV-D Case	A formal request or referral for child support where the custodial parent or the noncustodial parent has requested or received assistance in locating a noncustodial parent, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing child support obligations or in the collection and disbursement of child support payments.
IV-E	Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.
IV-E Case	A formal request for financial support given to a person, family or institution that is raising a child or children that are not their own.
Joint	Sharing of something in common by two or more people.
Judgment	A determination by a court of law.
Jurisdiction	The legal authority which a court or administrative agency has over particular persons and over a defined geographical area.
Law	Binding rules of a community enforced by a controlling authority.
License	Permission granted by a recognized authority where sufficient evidence has been provided which meets the established requirements to legally engage in a business, occupation or activity.
Lien	A claim on property which prevents the sale or transfer of that property until a debt is satisfied.
Litigation	A dispute that is brought before a court.
Locate	To seek out and determine the position or site of an individual, property or business.
Location	A place of settlement, activity or residence.
MAO	Medical Assistance Only.
Medical Assistance Only	Public assistance which is restricted to only providing health benefits to the recipient.
Medical Support	Health benefits provided by both or either parent for their child (children).
Member	An individual who is part of a group.
Mother	A woman who is recognized by law as the female parent of a child.
Name	A distinctive designation given to a person, animal or thing.
NCP	Noncustodial parent.
Noncustodial Parent	The parent who does not provide primary care of a child, but has an obligation to pay support for the child.
Non-IV-D Case	Child support services which are being provided by

Term	Definition
	a private attorney or a unit of state or local government outside the IV-D program.
Obligated	Being committed to a formal agreement where a promise to do something is made.
Obligation	A formal agreement to do something which can be legally binding.
Obligee	A person or entity named in a formal agreement to which something is promised.
Obligor	A person or entity named in a formal agreement who has promised to do something.
OCSE	Office of Child Support Enforcement.
Office of Child Support Enforcement	A federal agency responsible for the administration of the program created by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.
Offset	The amount of money collected from an administrative payment in order to satisfy a debt.
Organization	A group of people who form an administrative and functional structure pursuing the same goals.
Paternity	Legal establishment of the father of a child by voluntary acknowledgement of paternity; court or administrative paternity order; or marriage.
Payee	A person or organization who is the recipient of funds.
Payor	A person or organization making a payment.
Person	A human being.
Petition	A formal request submitted to the court or administrative tribunal describing the dispute and specific action requested.
PF	Putative Father.
Putative Father	The person believed to be the male parent of a child without legal validation.
Reciprocity	A mutual exchange of privileges in which one entity grants certain privileges to another entity on the condition that they receive the same privilege in return.
Referral	Being recommended to someone or for something.
Spousal Support	Court-ordered financial support for a prior mate as part of a divorce.
State	A geopolitical subdivision of a country.
TANF	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
Telephone	An apparatus which converts sound into electrical impulses for transmission to a distant point.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	A program which provides public assistance to poor families on a time-limited basis.

Term	Definition
Tribunal	A court, administrative agency or quasi-judicial entity authorized to establish, enforce or modify a court order.
Wage	Money that is paid or received on an established periodic basis for work or services rendered.