

AFCARS Open Office Hours for the implementation of AFCARS 2020

Children's Bureau Data Analytics and Reporting Team

March 27, 2023

AFCARS 2020 Technical Bulletins



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families Select an ACF Office

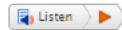
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An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

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AFCARS Technical Assistance



Publication Date: August 31, 2012 | Current as of: June 30, 2022

The Children's Bureau develops technical bulletins (TBs) to supplement official guidance and assist states and tribes in implementing child welfare policies and practices. Below are the current technical bulletins to supplement AFCARS 2020 reporting, based on the AFCARS Final Rule published May 12, 2020 (85 FR 28410) and resources for AFCARS 1993 which ends September 30, 2022.

AFCARS 2020

Technical Bulletin #20: Data Elements for Out-of-Home Care & Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Data Files

- Publication Date: October 29, 2020, Revised: January 14, 2022
- This TB gives reporting instructions and provides examples for the AFCARS 2020 out-of-home care and adoption and guardianship assistance data elements.

Technical Bulletin #21: XML File Structure & Encryption

- Publication Date: January 15, 2021, Revised: January 24, 2022
- This TB provides agencies with information required to create the AFCARS data files. It provides technical specifications on the structural layout of the XML data and shares the XML schema for the files. It also covers information on encryption of the file records.

Technical Bulletin #22: Reporting Population and Data Extraction

- Publication Date: June 22, 2021
- This TB addresses how to extract data for the Out-of-Home Care and Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Files defined in AFCARS Technical Bulletin #21. Additionally, this document includes guidance on extracting corrected files (previously referred to as subsequent files) after the required AFCARS reporting periods.

Technical Bulletin #23: Data Compliance & Data Quality

- Publication Date: June 23, 2021, Revised: June 6, 2022
- This TB provides title IV-E agencies with information on how compliance is determined and how penalties are assessed for noncompliant file submissions.

www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/afcars-technical-assistance

Technical Bulletins

Technical Bulletin 20: Regulations, Data Elements, and Examples

This includes detailed information on what and how to report each element.

Technical Bulletin 21: File Structure & Encryption

This includes the XML tags and the data groups. It also contains the encryption requirement for child record number.

Technical Bulletin 22: Reporting Population and Data Extraction

Contains how to extract the correct reporting population and data extraction examples.

Technical Bulletin 23: Compliance and Penalties

This includes the policy and rules that will be validated at the time you upload the AFCARS file and how to calculate the penalties.

Presenters



Amber Nagorski, Project Coordinator, CB, ICF Contractor

Ramnik Bagai, Project Manager, NCWDMS, ICF

Brendan Martin, AFCARS Technical Administrator, CB, ICF Contractor

Rebecca Odor, AFCARS Program Administrator, CB

Agenda

NCWDMS Updates

XML Tips

AFCARS Q&As

OMB Paperwork Reduction Act for AFCARS

NYTD Technical Assistance Brief

Option for 1993 Submission Method

Noncompliance and Penalty Timeline



Pilot Metrics



- Great participation and feedback provided by pilot users during timeframe between January 2023 to March 2023!
- Several key metrics to share with you all based on the pilot usage:
 - **236 new accounts** were created for users
 - We had **144 unique logins** from users
 - A total of **52 STTs** participated
 - **File upload and submission metrics:**

AFCARS 2020 Program File Type	# of Files Uploaded	# of Files Submitted
Out-of-Home Care	581	18
Adoption Assistance	163	18

Remember: Testing of the file upload process can continue after this pilot period has ended and can even continue through the submission periods as transmissions can be done without having to become official submissions.

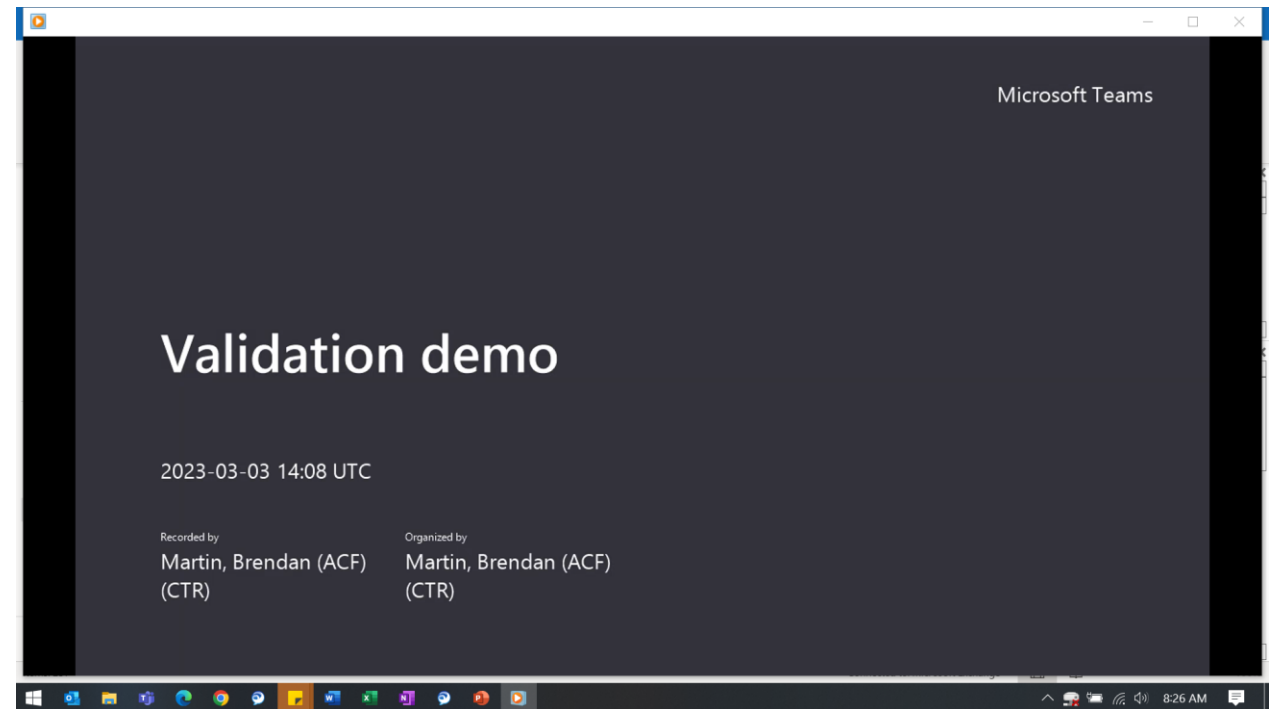
Upcoming NCWDMS Enhancements



- Based on assessment of pilot feedback, below are key priorities that are being worked on and will be deployed in upcoming releases:
 - Increase maximum size for file upload to beyond 2GB
 - Improvements to handle display of large number of error counts on Compliance and Data Quality Reports
 - Ability to export CSV file for Compliance and Data Quality report results
 - Implementing the remaining batch of data quality checks
 - Ability to generate STT Frequency and Compliance Summary reports

New Technical Training Videos

This short, 8-minute technical training video is created by The Children's Bureau Data Analytics and Reporting Team and gives a brief demonstration which shows agencies how to validate their XML files against the XSD.



www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/afcars-technical-assistance

Don't open tags unnecessarily!

Whole groups of elements may be inapplicable

Just open and close an empty grouping element...

```
<E157_E186_adoptive_parents_information/>
```

...Instead of including inapplicable empty child elements

```
<E157_E186_adoptive_parents_information>  
  <E157_marital_status_of_adoptive_parents></E157_marital_status_of_adoptive_parents>  
  <E158_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_relative></E158_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_relative>  
  <E159_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_kin></E159_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_kin>  
  <E160_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_non_relative></E160_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_non_relative>  
  <E161_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_foster_parent></E161_relationship_to_adoptive_parents_foster_parent>  
  <E162_E172_first_adoptive_parent_information>  
    <E162_adoptive_parent1_birth_date></E162_adoptive_parent1_birth_date>
```

etc.....

Question:

There is no list of the data quality advisory checks in the technical bulletins. How can I get a list of the checks?

Answer:

The data quality advisory checks are not set in stone. As our CB Data Team gets a better look at the data coming in, we have the ability to revise, add, and delete the data quality advisory checks to help identify potential errors in the extraction of the data and assure the highest quality of data.

To see a list of the current data quality advisory checks (also called data quality rules):

- view an uploaded file in NCWDMS,
- click on the data quality report, and
- then click on “View all rules for this program type.”

Question:

I uploaded a file and NCWDMS shows some errors in the Data Quality Report. Some of those are marked as errors, but the data we entered are correct. What should we do to address these errors?

Answer:

The data quality advisory checks are designed to identify other potential issues in the quality of data submitted. They assess a wider range of issues than those covered by the compliance rules. These include issues related to continuity between files, CFSR data quality checks, and additional frequency checks.

The checks cannot be specific and sensitive enough to show only significant issues for every state and tribe. We will endeavor to get more precise as time goes on. For now, take a look at any errors indicated on the Data Quality Report. Sometimes, especially where there are fewer child records in the file, the data you reported might be correct and there is no need to resubmit. Other times, the error might indicate an overall issue with the extract of your file and you would want to resubmit.

Question:

Will CB be releasing new program/syntax files for states to use when calculating the new CFSR administrative data indicators now that changes have been made to some metrics, and the move to AFCARS 2020 is changing the format of the files used to calculate those metrics?

Answer:

The new syntax for Round 4 code is available and posted to the CB website. A guide for its use is available through the CBC for States. Both are reachable through this link: [CFSR Round 4 Syntax](#). We will update that syntax as appropriate to reflect any changes necessary as a result of the transition to AFCARS 2020.

Question:

Is a living arrangement that is less than 24 hours considered a part-time placement? And should we report those?

Answer:

- Technical Bulletin #20 states that “the agency should report a date for each living arrangement. If there is more than one living arrangement, the submitted file should include an entry for the date of each living arrangement. Agencies will be guided by their own policies and data system constraints on the number of events, such as short runaways, part-time placements, and short-term medical stays, that would be counted as living arrangements for the child’s record.”
- We do not believe that living arrangements that are less than 24 hours should be counted as a part-time placement. Thus, they should not be reported.

Proposed Information Collection Activity: Federal Register Notice

- CB published this notice on March 17.
- It is a part of the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act administered through OMB every three years.
- This extension request is unrelated to any potential new regulatory activity that may occur subsequently. This request is for public comment on the burden calculations. It does not seek comment on the data elements that have been through the rulemaking process culminating with the AFCARS 2020 Final Rule.

Federal Register / Vol. 88, No. 52 / Friday, March 17, 2023 / Notices 16449

project will be included in the specific ConiC submissions. CDC requests a three-year clearance. The estimated annualized burden for this generic data collection is 59,465 hours. There is no cost to respondents other than their time.

ESTIMATED ANNUALIZED BURDEN HOURS

Type of respondents	Form name	Number of respondents	Number of responses per respondent	Average burden per response (in hours)
Individuals or Households	Developmental Projects & Focus Group documents	35,000	1	1.5
Volunteers	Developmental Projects & Focus Group documents	300	1	1.5
Individuals or households, Volunteers, NHANES Participants, NHANES Participants	24-hour developmental projects	200	1	25
Subject Matter Experts	Developmental Projects	1,000	1	1.5
	Focus Group/Developmental Project Documents	15	1	1

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Proposed Information Collection Activity: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) #0970-0422
AGENCY: Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.
ACTION: Request for public comments.
SUMMARY: The Children's Bureau, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is requesting a three-year extension of the data information collection for the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) that was implemented as part of the AFCARS final rule published in May 2020 (85 FR 28410). There are no proposed changes to the information collection published as the final rule in May 2020.
DATES: Comments due within 60 days of publication. In compliance with the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, ACF is soliciting public comment on the specific aspects of the information collection described above.
ADDRESSES: You can obtain copies of the proposed collection of information and submit comments by emailing infocollection@aclf.hhs.gov. Identify all requests by the title of the information collection.
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Description: State and tribal title IV-E agencies are required to report AFCARS case-level information on all children in foster care and children who have been adopted or placed in a

ANNUAL BURDEN ESTIMATES

Instrument	Total number of respondents	Total number of responses per respondent	Average burden hours per response	Total burden hours	Annual burden hours
AFCARS-Recordkeeping	69	3	8,358	1,730,106	576,702
AFCARS-Reporting	69	6	17	21,114	7,038

www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-03-17/pdf/2023-05427.pdf

Technical Assistance Brief: Mapping Common Elements Across Data Collection Systems

- This document highlights the similarities and differences between the below elements across AFCARS 2020 and NYTD
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Education
 - Special education
 - Federally recognized tribes
- It provides crosswalk tables on how each data system collects and reports these elements.

NYTD
National Youth in Transition Database

Technical Assistance Brief
Mapping Common Elements Across Data Collection Systems

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Children's Bureau (CB) is responsible for the implementation and management of the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) which are regulated data collections. There are a number of common data elements that are reported across these two data collections. This document highlights the similarities and differences between race, ethnicity, education, special education, and federally recognized tribes across NYTD and AFCARS 2020 and provides crosswalk tables on how each data system collects and reports these elements. Additional information on these data elements can be located in programs-specific documents^{1,2}.

This technical assistance brief provides information on mapping similarities and difference between NYTD and AFCARS 2020 from the NYTD perspective. The brief uses the term "young people" when referring to youth or young adults who are part of the NYTD served population and/or NYTD survey. Both the NYTD and AFCARS 2020 regulation make reference to leaving data elements blank. For this technical bulletin and the purpose of data reporting, blank is synonymous with null or no data reported.

Race

NYTD elements 6 – 12 and AFCARS 2020 elements 13 – 20 indicate a young person's race. The reporting of race is similarly defined in NYTD and AFCARS 2020. The definitions of race from the regulations are located in *Table 6*. Data mapping comparisons are located in *Table 1*.

Similarities in Reporting Race for NYTD and AFCARS 2020

- In general, a young person's race is determined by how they define themselves. Specifically, for NYTD, the state may not determine the young person's race without consulting them.
- The state collecting race information must select all possible racial combinations, as applicable.
- The state may select "unknown" when a young person does not know their race or cannot communicate their race or ethnicity. Unknown may also be used if the young person is multiracial, and one or more race is unknown.
- If a young person or their parent or legal guardian does not want to provide their race, the state should select "declined." The state should not assume a young person's race if a young person declines. If race information is declined, the other racial categories should be reported as "no" (NYTD elements 6 to 11).
- A state must indicate "yes" or "no" for NYTD elements 6 – 11. If "yes" is reported for NYTD elements 6 – 11 then NYTD element 12, race-declined, cannot be yes.

¹ NYTD Technical Bulletin 1 https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd_t1.pdf
² AFCARS Technical Bulletin 20 <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-tb-20.pdf>

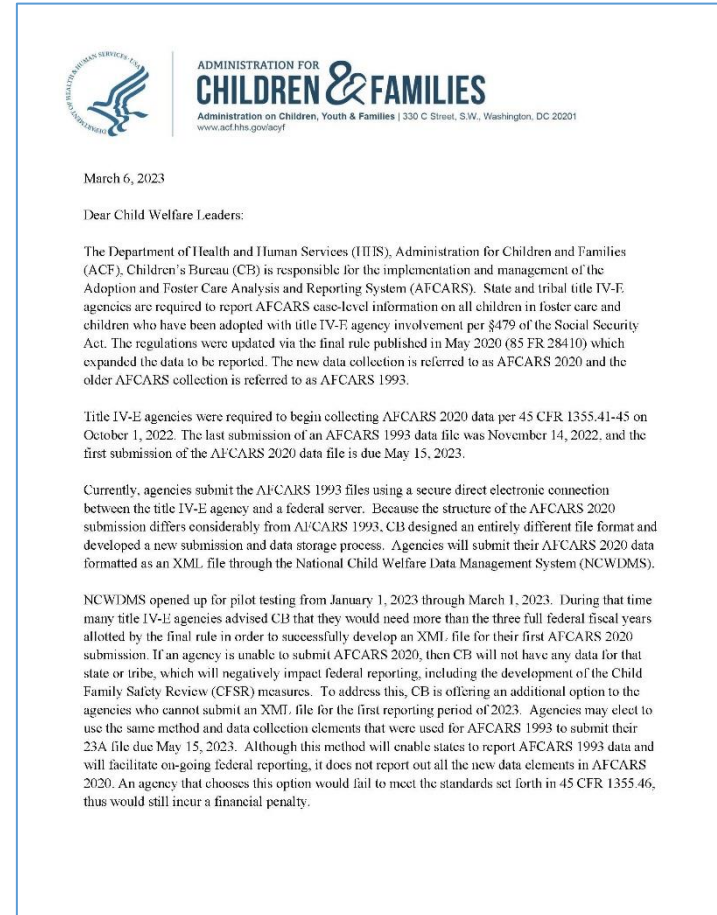
www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/nytd-technical-assistance-brief-no-15

Table 1 - Mapping Race

Element Name	NYTD Data Element #	NYTD Data Constraint/Value	AFCARS 2020 Data Element #	AFCARS 2020 Data Constraint/Value
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	No Yes	13	0 = No 1 = Yes
Asian	7	No Yes	14	0 = No 1 = Yes
Black or African American	8	No Yes	15	0 = No 1 = Yes
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	9	No Yes	16	0 = No 1 = Yes
White	10	No Yes	17	0 = No 1 = Yes
Unknown	11	No Yes	18	0 = No 1 = Yes
Abandoned			19	0 = No 1 = Yes
Declined	12	No Yes	20	0 = No 1 = Yes

Additional Transmission Option

- If an agency is unable to submit an XML file, then CB will not have any data for that state or tribe, which will negatively impact federal reporting, including the development of the CFSR measures.
- Agencies may elect to use the same method and data collection elements that were used for AFCARS 1993 to submit their 23A file due May 15, 2023.
- There will be a penalty with this method.



www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/afcars-federal-guidance

Options to submit a 23A AFCARS file:



Compliant AFCARS 2020 XML file with all elements

- all AFCARS 2020 elements
- compliant file
- submitted in NCWDMS

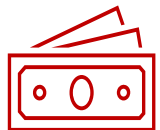
If not, then



Noncompliant AFCARS 2020 XML file with all elements

- all AFCARS 2020 elements
- errors that make the file noncompliant
- submitted in NCWDMS

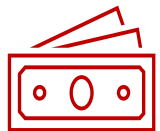
If not, then



Noncompliant AFCARS 2020 XML file with some elements

- only the AFCARS 2020 elements that are already in the agency's information system
- noncompliant file
- prioritize elements related to CFSR
- submitted in NCWDMS

If not, then

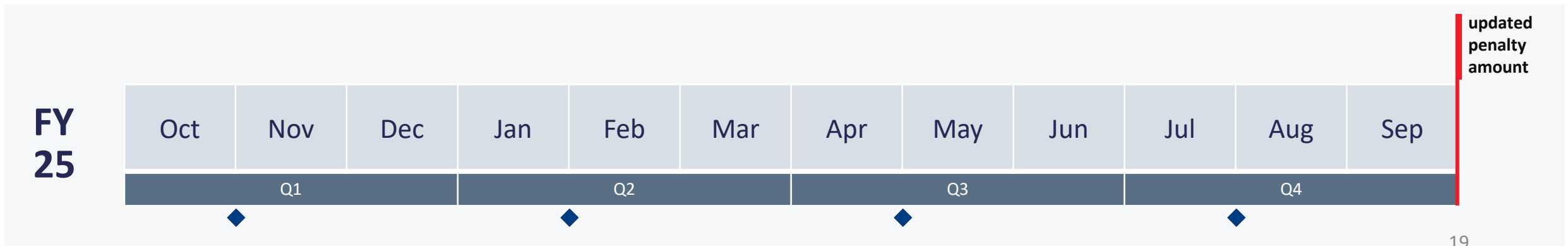
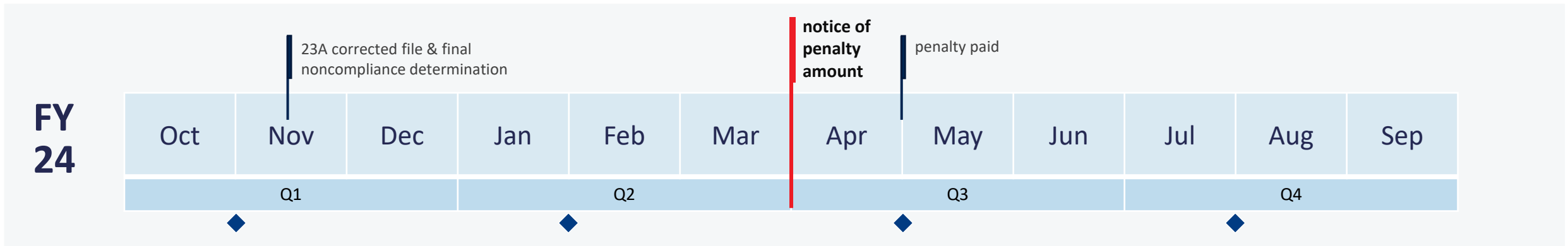
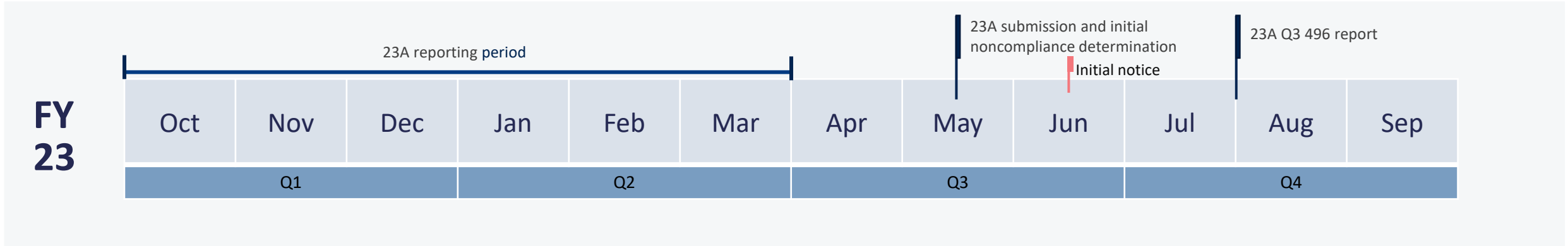


Noncompliant AFCARS 1993 TXT file

- only data elements from AFCARS 1993
- noncompliant file
- submitted as a secure direct electronic connection to NIH server

Example for 23A Noncompliant AFCARS File

KEY ◆ CB-496 FY 23 Q3 prior quarter adjustment



Next Steps



- Continue to work in NCWDMS by uploading files, viewing the reports, and submitting files as part of the extended pilot.
- On **March 31, 2023**, all files that have been submitted in NCWDMS as part of the pilot will be deleted.
- NCWDMS will be open for uploads and submissions on **April 1, 2023**.
- The last AFCARS Office Hours will be **April 24, 2023** with the same log in as today – no registration.
- Deadline for submission of the 23A files is **May 15, 2023**.

For Help



For technical issues with NCWDMS

- NCWDMS Help Desk e-mail box: NCWDMS-HelpDesk@icf.com
- NCWDMS Help Desk number: (888) 851-3111

For any programmatic issues

- AFCARS Resource Mailbox: AFCARS@acf.hhs.gov