

COI REGIONAL GROUP (CATAWBA)

INTER-COUNTY COLLABORATION PROFILE

What is it?

- A voluntary network of counties that created a formal system for managing COI cases.

Which counties participate?

- Catawba, Burke, Caldwell, Lincoln and Alexander
- Iredell County maintains a COI relationship with Catawba and Alexander but not Burke, Caldwell or Lincoln
- Mecklenburg, Wilkes, and Cleveland counties were previous members of the COI Regional Group but no longer participate
- Catawba County is the “lead county”, it facilitates the assignment of COI cases by maintaining a rotation schedule.
- The table below shows which counties are “partnering counties” for COI cases for each “home county” in the group. Partnering counties must share a border with the home county.

	Partnering County
Alexander	Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell
Burke	Caldwell, Catawba, Lincoln
Caldwell	Alexander, Burke, Catawba
Catawba	Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Iredell, Lincoln
Iredell	Alexander, Catawba
Lincoln	Burke, Catawba

How does the group operate?

- The primary goal of this collaboration is to provide timely, high quality services to neighboring counties in an efficient and cost effective manner in situations identified as COI for the home county (where the child/family resides; where the report is initially received).
- A case may be identified as a COI upon the initial receipt of the CPS report or during the early stages of investigation.
- Once a conflict has been identified, the home county will contact Catawba County to inform them of the conflict and be assigned a partnering county to work with.
 - Partnering counties must border the home county and are assigned COI cases on a rotating basis (alphabetical). However, if there has been a COI with the same family within the last year, then the case will be assigned to the same partnering county that had previously handled the case.

- The following information should be provided to Catawba County by the home county when reporting a COI: casehead/primary client, type of case, screening decision, and reason for COI.
- During non-business hours, the home county can contact the Catawba County's CPS Social Worker on-call to notify Catawba County of the conflict and be assigned a partnering county.
- Once a partnering county has been assigned, the home county will provide the partnering county with the report/record and completed **Conflict of Interest Information Sheet**. It is then the shared responsibility of the home and partnering counties to determine how information regarding the report/investigation will be shared moving forward.
 - For example, if the home county requires information regarding the resolution of the case for their records, they must request that documentation from the partnering county on their own.
- An up-to-date contact sheet will be maintained by the COI Regional Group so that CPS social workers and their supervisors know who to be in touch with from partnering counties when exchanging information regarding COI cases.
- It is not the responsibility of Catawba County to verify whether the case is a true COI or to mediate the working relationship between the home and partnering counties when deciding how a case will be handled. Any disputes regarding COI cases must be resolved by the home and partnering counties.
 - If the home and partnering counties cannot reach a resolution, a **Grievance Form** can be completed and submitted to Catawba County for review by the COI Regional Group.
- If a partnering county does not take a case because it is (a) determined that there is no COI or (b) the report is screened out, then it is the responsibility of the partnering county to notify Catawba County. If the partnering county does not take the case, it will not be counted as an assignment in the COI rotation.
- Catawba County will maintain a log using SharePoint that will document COI cases, partnering county assignments, and rotation schedule.
 - Program Directors from each participating county will have access to the log.
- CPS Program Directors from participating counties (and CPS social workers when appropriate) meet every other month to discuss COI cases, any Grievance reports received by the group, and any changes to the group's operation.

Have there been any unintended consequences resulting from the group's formation, positive or negative?

- The meetings held by the COI Regional Group provide the CPS Program Directors from participating counties a regular opportunity to network, provide program updates, ask questions, and share best practices. Information shared and topics discussed at the meetings do not necessarily have to relate to the management of COI cases in the area.
- Counties can maintain better working relationships for all programs and services when the assignment of COI cases is standardized and equitable.

What are some of the challenges associated with COI cases and does Catawba County think that the group’s operation effectively addresses those challenges? What challenges still exist?

- The exchange of COI cases can be difficult, particularly in areas where neighboring counties differ dramatically in staff, available resources, or practice orientations.
 - The COI Regional Group helps to address some of these challenges by ensuring that smaller counties with fewer resources are not regularly receiving COI cases.
 - Unfortunately, there have been situations where the differences between county size, resources, and staff have been too much of a challenge for the COI Regional Group to address. For example, Mecklenburg County had to develop automated intake services to accommodate the volume of reports that they were receiving. This change to their process made it too difficult for them to continue participating in the COI Regional Group.
- Counties that receive COI cases can sometimes feel as though they are doing the work of another county. This can be especially true if the receiving county is already stretched thin in terms of resources and staff.
 - The standardization of the COI assignment process has helped to relieve some of the tension that counties used to feel when they considered handling COI cases “a favor” to neighboring counties; there is now an expectation among the participating counties that they will handle each other’s COI cases when it is their turn on the rotation. The COI Regional Groups formalizes and standardizes this quid pro quo.
- Counties may differ in their policies regarding record retention, releases of confidential information, etc.
 - Because the COI Regional Group does not mediate the sharing of information between counties once a partnering county has been assigned, it does not help to address any challenges related to differing policy and protocol.

What recommendations would Catawba County make to other counties that are considering forming such a group to handle COI cases in their area?

- Each county that participates should have a designated COI social worker (and backup) that can provide consistency to how COI cases are handled by their county, serve as the contact person to the other counties, maintain resources that can assist in COI cases, and understand the referral process for the other counties in the group.
- Document the number of COI cases that each county in the group reports as the home county and the number of COI cases each county takes on as the partnering county. This allows the group to ensure that no county is over-burdened and may be useful in situations when counties are unable to reach a resolution regarding COI cases.
- Counties who are considering a COI collaboration should take judicial districts into consideration, as this often plays a substantial role in the way CPS cases are resolved.

What supporting documents facilitate the group’s operation?

- Memorandum of Understanding
- COI Information Sheet
- COI Case Procedures (out-of-date/unavailable to SSWG)
- COI Regional Group Contact List
- Grievance Form
- Supervisor Information
- Social Worker Information