

Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide

In a division like ours, some people write and interpret policy and some people carry it out in the field, with counties, Tribal Nations, providers, and the people we serve. That divide is real, and when the two sides do not understand each other, policy and practice drift apart, and trust frays.

Content

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What each side often misses. People at the central office may not see how a rule actually lands in a kitchen-table conversation or a county office. People in the field may not see the legal, fiscal, and statewide constraints that shaped the rule. Both views are partial, and both are needed.

How to bridge it.

- Assume the other side has information you do not. Lead with curiosity, not blame.
- Bring field reality into policy early. Ask the people who implement a change what will actually happen when it meets the real world, before it is final.
- Bring policy context to the field. Explain the why and the constraints, not just the what.
- Spend time on the other side. Shadowing, ride-alongs, and joint problem-solving build understanding that no memo can.
- Translate, do not jargon. Each side has its own shorthand. Say things in plain language the other side can use.

Why it serves equity. Disparities often hide in the gap between how a policy reads and how it is delivered. Closing that gap is how good intentions become good outcomes for the people we serve.

The goal is one division, not two camps. We are all working on the same thing from different vantage points.

Verify current authority, preserve rights and exceptions, and route interpretation questions using Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide to verify current authority, preserve rights and exceptions, and route interpretation questions.

Choose the sections of Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

Check the stated limitations and evidence status for Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide; escalate when current authority or individual context is missing.

Review the result with the affected person, team, or community and revise the apply policy rights and compliance approach when it creates a barrier or unintended effect.

For policy regulatory analysts, use Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide to verify current authority, preserve rights and exceptions, and route interpretation questions; trace each recommendation to current authority, preserve exceptions, and document the decision record. Start by verify current authority, preserve rights and exceptions, and route interpretation questions using Working Across the Central-Office and Field Divide.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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