

# EDGE: Evidence-Driven Growth & Excellence

*EDGE is a long term, cohort-based training program designed to strengthen child welfare managers' skills in evidence based decision making. Participants learn how to ask mission-critical questions about the performance of the child welfare system, use administrative data to generate and interpret the answers to those questions, and use the resulting evidence to brainstorm local/state level improvement efforts. The program involves onsite classroom learning, homework and practice exercises, coaching from experts, and opportunities for students to apply new concepts and skills to self-initiated, job-relevant projects. **EDGE is targeted to senior managers and the analysts who support them.***

## Purpose of the Course

As evidence-based decision-making becomes an expectation in the field of child welfare, managers' job descriptions are shifting to require analytic skills. Today, child welfare managers are expected to access evidence about system performance, interpret the meaning of analytic results, and apply that meaning to decisions about how the agency should work with families and children. EDGE responds to the evolving role of managers by building the specific set of evidence use skills required for this type of work. In this long-term, immersive program, participants learn best practices for performance measurement and apply those skills to real world problem solving scenarios they face in the field.

## Who Should Participate

Although EDGE may be customized for various types of managers, it is most effective when cohorts contain a combination of analysts (i.e., individuals responsible for analysis and reporting) and program managers (i.e., individuals responsible for making decisions that shape what staff do with children and families). We work closely with child welfare leadership to identify participants whose positions are best matched to the EDGE content.

## Course Structure

- Nine in-person sessions over an eight month period. Each session is two days long.
- Delivered to a cohort of participants (typically 24 or fewer).
- Incorporates classroom-style learning, interactive exercises, homework assignments, and student-initiated projects.
- Students receive ongoing coaching from instructors and work directly with jurisdiction-specific data, enabling participants to reflect on actual trends in their systems.

## Content Overview

EDGE begins by mapping out the cyclical improvement process and providing tools that hold staff accountable for evidence use at each phase. Students learn best practices in performance measurement and problem solving rooted in a set of priority concepts. Priority concepts are reinforced throughout the course via lecture, interactive practice exercises using real agency data, and homework assignments. Following the classroom learning period, students form small groups and apply their new skills to a self-identified performance improvement problem. With support from coaches, group members use evidence to identify an outcome that

needs improvement and conduct their own grassroots research to uncover the potential drivers of that outcome.

Core elements of the EDGE curriculum include:

- **Building a theory of change.** Participants are introduced to a four-part template for problem solving using administrative data analysis to support decision making.
- **Starting the process of improvement with a question.** We focus on analytic questions that enable managers to identify opportunities for improvement in CPS and foster care systems. Examples include:
  - What proportion of substantiations result in placement in foster care?
  - How long do children typically stay in foster care? How does length of stay differ by child age?
  - What proportion of children exit to permanency within 12 months? Has this rate changed over time?
  - What proportion of reunified children reenter foster care, and how does the reentry rate vary across the agency's administrative units?
- **Matching analytic methods to articulated questions.** At its core, this involves teaching participants to differentiate between entry cohorts, exit cohorts, and point in time populations and to understand the implications of each.
- **Interpreting reports.** Participants learn how to interpret reports on core child welfare outcomes. Exercises use the system's actual child welfare data in order to maximize the relevance of practice exercises and the ready application of new skills to real managerial challenges.

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