EDGE: Evidence-Driven Growth & Excellence

Course Overview

Purpose of the course

Evidence-based decision-making is becoming standard practice in the field of child welfare. Most importantly, evidence-based policies and practices are associated with better outcomes for children and families. Additionally, contracting organizations and government entities expect agency leaders to use evidence to inform their allocation of resources. In this context, child welfare agencies are wise to support a robust evidence-use practice.

EDGE focuses primarily on building **capability** for evidence use. Participants learn foundational concepts pertaining to the process of improvement and theories of change, and they learn techniques and methods for generating, acquiring, processing, and applying evidence to that process. The class boosts **motivation** for evidence use by contextualizing new skills in job-relevant examples. These examples illuminate what is at stake for leaders and clients, driving home the importance of using evidence correctly. Finally, the class offers new **opportunity** for evidence use, linking participants to agency-specific evidence and introducing them to repositories of evidence relevant to the process of improvement.

Importantly, *EDGE* recognizes that evidence use is essential at all junctures of the cyclical process of improvement, not only at the point where agencies must decide which interventions to implement with children and families. Though the selection of interventions is a critical juncture for evidence use, *EDGE* spends considerable time "further upstream," building participants' ability to defend the claim that their agencies have outcomes in need of improvement in the first place. From there, the course moves on to illustrate how evidence is required at subsequent stages of the problem-solving process.

Target audience

EDGE is appropriate for both public and private child welfare agencies. The curriculum is designed for two types of leaders/managers:

- Members of senior leadership who are responsible for using evidence to make policy and practice decisions that shape the agency's work.
- Directors and managers responsible for developing evidence and delivering it to senior leaders so that evidence may inform leadership decisions. These individuals may be directors of CQI/QA/Research departments, or they may "wear many hats" among which data analysis and other evidence gathering plays a central role.

Modules

Core content

Session 1: The process of improvement and the role of evidence

This session provides an overview of the course and introduce core concepts and terms related to the process of improvement. We lay out the demand for evidence in policy and practice decision-making and provide a definition of the term "evidence."

Session 2: Forming questions and collecting the data needed to answer them

In this session we differentiate between child and family outcomes and the elements of agency process, quality, and capacity that drive those outcomes. From there, we discuss the types of data agencies must collect if they want to answer questions about performance: who clients are, what happens to them while they are in care, and when those things happen.

Session 3: Best practices in evidence building

In this session we explain how to convert curiosities about agency performance into actual analytic questions. Then, we teach best practices for answering those questions including basic analytic principles for measuring likelihood ("What happens to children in our care?") and speed ("How long does it take?"). These practices ensure that analytic results are valid, reliable, and representative—i.e., that they constitute evidence.

Session 4: Variation and detecting opportunities for improvement

In this session we explain how to compare populations of children in order to gain insight into where improvement efforts might be warranted. From there, we introduce the concept of risk adjustment and we review the Balanced Scorecard, a tool that uses real data to compare participating providers on core outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Session 5: Measuring change over time

In this session we introduce techniques for measuring change in performance over time. We teach methods for developing baselines and targets and for comparing actual, future performance to those benchmarks. Finally, we demonstrate the Baseline-Target-Actual (BTA) Report, a tool that analyzes actual agency data in order to set baselines and targets and track performance over a prospective window of time.

Session 6: Working with your BTA report

In this session participants work with their own customized BTA Reports. We also take time to reflect on the coursework to date and segue to the webinar and coaching portions of the program.

Follow-up webinars

Webinar 1: Evidence for developing a hypothesis

A strong theory of change makes a claim about what is driving the outcome in need of improvement. That claim should be supported by evidence. In this session we apply best practice performance measurement techniques to the developing a strong hypothesis.

Webinar 2: Using evidence to support an intervention — The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare

Evidence based practices (EBPs) are those for which scientific research demonstrates their intended effect on children and families. This session introduces the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC), an online resource that helps agencies identify and implement EBPs that are responsive to the populations they serve.

Webinar 3: Using evidence to monitor implementation

In order to attribute change in outcomes to specific practices, we must have evidence that our practices are implemented with fidelity to process, quality, and capacity standards. In this session, we discuss how to monitor implementation using best practices in measurement.

Webinar 4: Evidence use and strategic planning

In the final session we recap the core concepts of *EGDE* and review the role of evidence use in organizational strategic planning. Group discussion focuses on the application of evidence to decisions about the investment of agency resources.

Coaching

Prior to beginning *EDGE*, participants are asked to submit documents that their agencies regularly use to inform or describe the process of improvement. The rationale for collecting these materials is the idea that if agency decision-making is documented, and the agency uses evidence to inform decisions, then one should be able to detect in those artifacts evidence of evidence use in practice. Toward the end of *EDGE*, instructors review each participant's report packet and provide written feedback on the extent to which the submitted reports reflect the evidence use principles and skills taught in class. That feedback is used as fodder for a one-on-one, agency-specific coaching session.