

# A QUICK GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE Institutional Analysis

## Addressing Systemic Issues that Contribute to Poor Outcomes

An Institutional Analysis (IA) is a set of quantitative and qualitative diagnostic tools that, together, help child welfare, juvenile justice and other public intervention agencies confront the structural contributors to poor outcomes for the children and families that they serve.

IAs seek to understand the full experience that families have when they encounter these systems. The **Center for the Study of Social Policy** (CSSP) has conducted IAs in child welfare in selected jurisdictions to bring to light how policies, administrative requirements, workers' experiences and job descriptions, accountability systems, linkages among agencies and institutional cultures ultimately play a role in certain children and

families achieving significantly worse outcomes than others being served by the same agency. Our work has primarily focused on how these dynamics play out with African American and Latino children and families.

The IA process is steeped in the theories that undergird institutional ethnography and is buttressed by implementation science and research.



## Key Elements of an Institutional Analysis

# 1

IAs are usually prompted by an agency's concern over trends in its outcome data, for example, rates of entry into foster care, reunification patterns, foster care length of stay and/or timeliness to adoption or guardianship. Data analyses shape the specific scope of the inquiry.

# 2

IAs explore how workers at specific stages of intervention are organized to act. Through case processing maps, interviews, observations, case reviews and text analyses, IAs help elucidate problematic patterns, assumptions and routines that inform case practice and shape the experience of families

# 3

With each new bit of insight produced by data collection and analysis, the IA produces findings and conclusions supported by multiple sources of evidence. Agency leaders come away with knowledge about the root of these challenges; how to work with families, community members and advocacy organizations; and a more informed planning process for ensuring equity in outcomes.



## For More Information

CSSP developed the Institutional Analysis to understand why families of color are over-represented in child welfare systems and achieve worse results than other families. When a child welfare system works well, all children are kept safe, nurtured and have permanent families.

In concert with the work of CSSP's Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, IAs offer child welfare administrators tools to improve children's safety, permanency and well-being and institute accountability for positive outcomes for all those served.

In 2015, CSSP is producing a series of papers based on the IA methodology to augment the field's knowledge about these issues. Look to CSSP's website, [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org), to read more in-depth works, including:

■ ***The Institutional Analysis: Uncovering Pathways to Improving Public Systems & Interventions for Children and Families***

■ ***Fresno County Department of Social Services: Confronting Racial Inequities and Disproportionality to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes for Children & Families***

■ ***Better Outcomes for Older Youth of Color in Foster Care***

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