



RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Who we are

Action Research works with child welfare systems across the country, providing information, analysis, and support to illuminate paths to better outcomes for children, youth, and families. We partner with government leaders, frontline staff, think tanks, service providers, and foundations to generate insight and drive system reform. We are nationally recognized for our child welfare expertise and for producing innovative research to drive decision-making.

What we do

We work on a range of policy topics within child welfare including foster home recruitment, kinship placements, permanency, and prevention services, among other areas. We tailor each project to the needs of our partner and produce accessible results that program staff and funders can use to make concrete decisions.

Our work takes multiple forms:

- We conduct operational and exploratory research to understand how child welfare policies, practices, and systems are functioning, translate findings into strategic recommendations, and then help our partners leverage these recommendations to improve outcomes for children and families.
- We evaluate program models and interventions to learn what is working – and what work remains to be done. We seek to understand the context, history, strengths, and challenges of particular approaches, complementing statistical quantitative techniques with focus groups, interviews, and on-the-ground work to assess program operations.
- We help develop and launch strategies to analyze system outcomes and performance. We design and support systems that utilize administrative data to allow leadership and staff to monitor progress, strengthen services, and improve outcomes.

In addition to rigorous designs and multiple research methods, we tap into sources of knowledge that are often overlooked. We have developed particular expertise in analyzing administrative data, an under-utilized resource that often produces findings unobtainable elsewhere. We pair the results of data analysis with the perspectives of clients, front line workers, middle managers, executives, and external stakeholders to form a comprehensive picture of how policies and programs are experienced.

We are committed to creating strong relationships with our partners. We invest in building trust with stakeholders, seek to minimize the burden of research on operations, and communicate actionable insights as they develop. With our wide range of clients, we have a reputation as an “information Switzerland”: a place that the child welfare community can rely on for accurate, reliable, and useful information.

What we are looking for

Action Research seeks an enthusiastic and self-motivated individual to work as a Research Associate leading a portfolio of projects aimed at improving child welfare and juvenile justice-related programs. This is an excellent opportunity for professionals building their applied research career and/or a career within government using data to drive tangible system improvements.

Ideal candidates will have:

- *A passion for improving outcomes for children, young people and families* – you recognize that contact with the child welfare system has long and lasting impacts on children and families, and are committed to advancing work to keep children safe, stable, and in families;
- *Experience using data to generate actionable insights* – you know how to use data as a powerful tool to provide insight and inform change;
- *Strong project leadership skills* – you have a history of managing multiple research projects, from the initial development stages through to completion;
- *Great attention to detail* – you recognize the importance of getting it right, and are comfortable operating on a team where we check and recheck our work; and
- *Comfort working both independently and as part of a team* – while you can advance a project on your own, you are excited to collaborate with others; you know when to ask for support from your colleagues.

We are committed to inclusion, embrace diversity as an organization, and believe these values are essential to our work. The American child welfare system has a disproportionate impact on families of color, low-income communities, LGBTQ youth, and other vulnerable populations. As an organization that seeks to make child welfare systems more responsive to clients and more effective in its services and operations, our staff must reflect diverse backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.

Role you would play

Working with a small dedicated team, the Research Associate will analyze administrative data, conduct qualitative research (including surveys, interviews and focus groups), and partner with clients to better understand programs, systems, and opportunities for improvement. You will design research, perform quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and will share insights from this work with government leaders, practitioners, nonprofit executives, youth and parents, and other stakeholders. You will actively contribute to the growth and quality of our organization, collaborating with other staff on analytic methods, ensuring that high quality work is completed on time and within budget, serving as a thought partner for colleagues and developing proposals to advance our work.

You will manage a portfolio of research, such as current projects to:

- Develop appropriate performance measures and analyze administrative data to monitor child welfare system performance;
- Support the implementation of new and innovative services to allow children and youth to stay safely at home, rather than enter foster care;
- Evaluate programs that support older youth transitioning out of foster care;

- Leverage data to improve the recruitment, training, support, and retention of foster parents; and/or
- Design strategies to increase reunification, and where that is not possible, streamline adoption and subsidized guardianship of children and youth in foster care.

Specific responsibilities and activities may include some or all of the following:

- Working with the monitors of federal child welfare class action litigation, by analyzing administrative data to verify progress towards required reforms and performance goals;
- Analyzing and generating insight from administrative data on program and system performance, including developing statistical models and geographic displays of data;
- Drafting data collection instruments, conducting interviews and focus groups, and synthesizing results;
- Presenting findings from quantitative and qualitative research, evaluation, and policy analyses to diverse audiences – both in formal and less formal reports and presentations for government partners, stakeholders and funders;
- Supervising and providing mentorship to Research Assistants, Research Analysts and interns;
- Acting as liaison to clients and partners;
- Advancing our work by drafting Institutional Research Board (IRB) submissions for research involving human subjects and writing research proposals; and
- Implementing initiatives and undertaking business development as needed to build on Action Research’s organizational capacity.

Specific requirements

- A Master’s degree or equivalent in public policy, data science, public health, economics, sociology or other related discipline with a minimum of 4 years of relevant full-time work experience, preferably in the public sector or an applied research setting;
- Knowledge of and experience with quantitative and qualitative research design and analytic methods; as well as performance measurement, business process analysis, and other types of public policy assessment;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills with the ability to convey complex research findings to broader audiences, and to develop clear, visually compelling reports for government, nonprofit, and private sector partners;
- Knowledge of child welfare, social services, poverty prevention, juvenile justice, youth services, or related fields;
- Proficiency in SPSS, Stata, R, SAS, or similar statistical package (syntax writing required);
- Exceptional interpersonal skills with the ability to create and maintain working relationships with government and other partners;

- Ability to work on multiple projects effectively and efficiently, both independently and collaboratively with a team;
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office, especially Excel and PowerPoint, and comfort using online applications including Box, Slack and other coordination tools; and
- A commitment to a collegial workplace.

Additional valued strengths that are appreciated but not required

- Experience supervising and/or mentoring staff;
- Experience using SQL, GIS or other mapping software, and other analytic software;
- Experience in grant-funded research and with working with IRBs for research involving human subjects; and/or
- Spanish fluency.

What you can expect from Action Research

- *Salary range* – \$72,000 to \$88,000 depending on skills and level of experience.
- *Excellent benefits competitive with national high-quality nonprofit research organizations* – Benefits include health insurance, student loan repayment program, pre-tax flexible spending account, pre-tax transit check, and after one year, eligibility for 401(k) and education benefit. Generous holiday, vacation, personal, and sick time.
- *Intentional professional development* – As part of a small and highly active team, the Research Associate will have opportunities for government and other client interactions. Action Research will also invest in your professional growth and help you advance both subject matter and technical expertise.
- *Vibrant and flexible work environment* – You will get to know your colleagues through weekly “learning lunches” which provide opportunities to share and explore interests, including those that may not be apparent in our day-to-day work.

How to Apply

Please send a cover letter explaining your interest in the mission of Action Research, a resume, and a short writing sample to hr@actionresearch.io with a subject line of “Research Associate Opportunity”.

Due to the large number of applications, emails and phone calls to Action Research staff are strongly discouraged. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

Action Research is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All qualified applicants will be considered for employment without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender expression, military status, prior record of arrest or conviction, citizenship status, current employment status or caregiver status.