Equity Action Framework

Racial Equity in Early Childhood Systems
Four Levels of Change

PERSONAL

The individual consistently works alone and with others, to understand their own values, beliefs, implicit biases, unconscious racism, actions and relative privileges that contribute to racial inequities and equity: the individual acts to advance racial equity.

INSTITUTIONAL

Apply a racial equity/economic justice lens to their policies, practices, regulations and work culture to dismantle policies that perpetuate inequality and design/develop policies and practices that advance opportunities, fairness, access to resources, and other factors for those most effected by racial inequality.

INTERPERSONAL

Individuals and groups are effective in relating to others not like themselves, actively include those typically excluded, share power, surface issues of racial inequality in interpersonal relationships, act to support positive change, and work to reduce interpersonal conflict.

STRUCTURAL

Individuals and groups recognize that structural arrangements are interconnected and resist change; they develop approaches to advance equity that offer new or reconstituted structural arrangements; they build shared leadership and collective power that leads to change.

Model adapted from Kirwan Institute. Illustration design by Chrissie Bonner and Montréal Morant. c 2017

OCTOBER 2017

Developed by: Sherri Killins Stewart, EdD; Michelle Stover-Wright, MS; Aisha Ray, PhD

equity**leaders** ACTION NETWORK

Build INITIATIVE
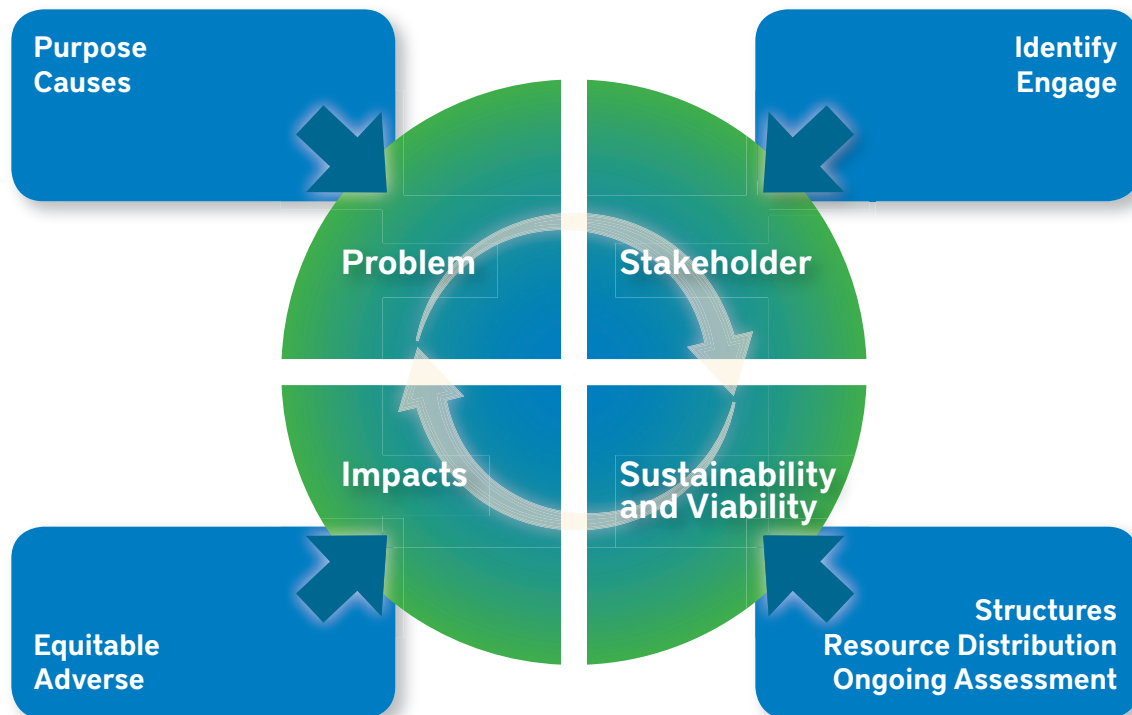Strong Foundations For Our Youngest Children

Purpose

The Equity Action Framework[1] is designed to support individuals and groups that want to advance racial equity in early childhood systems. The goal of a racial equity approach is to develop policies, practices, and programs that provide opportunities, promote fairness and access, and remediate racial inequities.

Whether working at national, state, county, or municipal levels of government, in private-public partnerships, community organizations, foundations or other entities, the Equity Action Framework provides an intentional process for examining and addressing racial equity challenges or problems that contribute to inequity. This process relies on identifying and engaging all stakeholders, including the intended beneficiaries of policies, programs, and interventions. The Equity Action Framework also can be used to support work between early childhood leaders who want to advance racial equity across early childhood systems, such as health, mental health, early learning, child welfare, or family support.

Key Sections

1. **Areas of Authority, Influence and Goals**

2. **Understanding the Problem and Causes**

3. **Stakeholders**

4. **Impacts**

5. **Sustainability and Viability**

Purpose
Causes

Identify
Engage

Problem

Stakeholder

Impacts

Sustainability
and Viability

Equitable
Adverse

Structures
Resource Distribution
Ongoing Assessment

1 Adapted from Keleher, T. (2009). Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide, Race Forward, Applied Research Center. Available online at https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf

1. Areas of Authority, Influence, and Goals

The Equity Action Framework begins with an assessment in which one is asked to examine possible racial equity issues and challenges in the area in which one has responsibility and authority, and in areas in which one may have influence but not direct responsibility. (Note: If teams are using this tool, they should gather information on all team members in relation to authority, influence, and goals).

1. **Authority and Influence**

    A. In your current position, what are the specific activities you are responsible for in relation to early childhood systems work (e.g., are you a staff person with full or partial responsibility for child care licensing, maternal and child health, early learning or some other area, policy, initiative or advocacy)?

    _____

    _____

    B. In your current work, what types of decisions are you accountable for making?

    _____

    _____

    C. Does your current position offer you opportunities to influence others with whom you come in contact (e.g., through committee meetings, interdepartmental activities or partnerships) in areas of work affecting children, families and/or communities over which you do not have direct authority?

    _____

    _____

    D. In those areas where you have "influence but not direct administrative authority" which decisions, issues, or areas do you influence by consulting others?

    _____

    _____

2. **Goals**

    A. In your current position (e.g., authority and influence), what universal goal do you seek to achieve that benefits young children, their families, and communities through your work? ("Universal goal" refers to a goal you have for all children.)

    _____

    _____

    B. In your current position (e.g., authority and influence), what is your "equity goal" that would benefit racially diverse children, their families, and communities?

    _____

    _____

NOTE: In this document 'authority' refers generally to responsibilities and rights associated with a particular administrative position (e.g., director, administrator, assistant administrator) to make decisions, give directives, and enforce policies. In contrast, 'influence' in this document refers to an individual's ability to effect another (a co-worker, a supervisor, the governor) or something (a policy) because of their status, role, reputation, expertise, or other factors. Individuals who have administrative authority often have influence (a supervisor can influence a subordinate's career); but individuals can influence without having administrative authority (e.g., community members, advisors, colleagues from other agencies).

3. **Tools and Decision Making**

   A. In your current position, are you generally able to influence early childhood policy, programs, initiatives, and budgets, etc. to:

   ❑ A great extent   ❑ An extent   ❑ To a small extent   ❑ Not at all

   B. Who are the primary decision makers needed to advance the program, policy, budget, or systemic change to reduce racial inequities?

   1. _____

   2. _____

   3. _____

   4. _____

4. **Beneficiaries**

   A. What population would you like to receive primary benefit?

   ❑ Children   ❑ Families   ❑ Workforce   ❑ Communities

   ❑ Other: _____

   B. What geographic area are you working to impact?

   ❑ State   ❑ Regional areas within states   ❑ Local communities

   ❑ National or multiple states   ❑ Other:_____

   C. How have beneficiaries informed the definition of the equity goal that is intended to benefit young children, families, and communities?

   Examples: Children, Families, Communities, Workforce

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. **What are the characteristics of the young children, families, communities, or the workforce impacted by the issue (e.g., high-poverty communities; rural, urban, suburban poverty; highly-resourced or poorly-resourced communities; hospitals; libraries)?**

   Examples: Race, Ethnicity, Social Class, Urban/Suburban/Rural, Immigrant(s), Community Characteristics: highly, moderately, or poorly resourced (e.g., hospitals, housing quality, libraries, etc.)

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Understanding the Problem and Causes

The equity framework is designed to support leaders in advancing equity through policy, practice, and programs. The tool is designed to actively promote early childhood systems that are explicitly and measurably equitable and to advance change that ensures children are not disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, and/or social class.

To use the tool effectively, a group of leaders should work together to ground the answers to the actual work for which they or their team are responsible.

The process of advancing racial equity is not linear and as you collect information you may need to review or update information from earlier steps. In the best-case scenario, we would ask you to begin by talking to the intended beneficiaries to determine the barriers, opportunities, programs, services, or initiatives they feel would support their role and benefit their ability to support optimal development in young children. However, we realize that many leaders are driven by the recognition of institutional and structural inequities and have a specific area of work or outcome which they are attempting to achieve and may, therefore, begin this process with a specific problem. However, as new information is collected, be aware that the initial problem may shift or be redefined.

The Inequity Problem

1. **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE–IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM.**
    Select a problem related to disparities and inequality in early childhood (e.g., suspension and expulsion of African-American boys, rates of admission and completion of higher education for black early childhood teachers) that you are responsible for solving within your role and responsibilities. (Consider this your "equity problem.") What is the equity problem's ecology —especially its root causes? Who benefits and who does not from current actions and solutions related to your equity problem? In relation to your equity problem, how do you measure success in your current job? Do your current actions reduce racial disparities or discrimination?

2. **IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT RACIAL INEQUITIES.**
    Which racial/ethnic groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by the issues your equity problem seeks to address? How are they affected differently? What quantitative and qualitative evidence of inequality exists? What evidence is missing or needed? Which populations receive maximum benefits and which have fewer benefits associated with access to programs, services, and opportunities for which you are responsible within your early childhood system?

3. **EXAMINE THE CAUSES.**
    What factors may be producing and perpetuating racial inequities associated with this equity problem? How did the inequities arise? Are they expanding or narrowing? Does the work for which you are responsible address the root causes you have defined? If not, how could it?

3. Stakeholders

1. **IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS.**
   Identify stakeholders associated with your equity problem. Think about the entire "universe" of stakeholders—go beyond the "usual suspects." Which racial/ethnic groups have and which do not have access to the resources, programs, and services you are responsible for designing, regulating, or distributing?

2. **ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS.**
   Have stakeholders from different racial/ethnic groups—especially those most adversely affected—been informed, meaningfully involved, and authentically represented in the development of programs, policies, and initiatives related to your equity problem? Who's missing and how can they be engaged?

4. Impacts

Once the problem is identified and stakeholders are engaged, a full assessment of existing impacts and alternatives should be explored to determine what would increase opportunity and lead to the desired impacts.

1. **ADVANCE EQUITABLE IMPACTS.**
   Considering the programs, policies, and practices for which you are responsible, what positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, may result from your focus on the equity problem you have identified? Which racial/ethnic groups could benefit? Are there further ways to maximize equitable opportunities and impacts?

2. **CONSIDER ADVERSE IMPACTS.**
   In relation to your equity problem, what adverse impacts or unintended consequences could result or have resulted from your work (e.g., policy, program, practice, or other actions)? Which racial/ethnic groups could be negatively affected? How could adverse impacts be prevented or minimized?

3. **EXAMININE ALTERNATIVES OR IMPROVEMENTS.**
   Are there better ways to reduce racial disparities and advance racial equity in relation to your equity problem? What provisions could be changed or added to ensure positive impacts on racial equity and inclusion?

5. Sustainability and Viability

Reduction of inequities requires structural changes, continuous assessment, measurement of success, and unintended consequences.

1. **EXAMINE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION.**
   What are the opportunity structures and patterns of resource distribution (e.g., barriers, pathways, resources) that need to be understood and addressed if this equity problem is to be addressed and you are to succeed? How can universal goals be supported through targeting resources and supports?

2. **ENSURING VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY.**
   Is the equity problem and your means to addressing it realistic and adequately funded with mechanisms to ensure successful implementation and enforcement? Are there provisions to ensure ongoing data collection, public reporting, stakeholder participation and public accountability? What advisory or governance body is responsible for guiding strategic interventions related to your equity problem?

3. **IDENTIFY SUCCESS INDICATORS AND USE ROBUST ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES.**
   What are the success indicators and progress benchmarks that you will use/are using to assess your equity problem? How will impacts on racial equity be documented and evaluated? How will the level, diversity, and quality of ongoing stakeholder engagement be assessed? How will this assessment inform the on-going work? How are all stakeholders engaged in assessment?

Equity Action Framework WORKSHEET

KEY QUESTION OR AREA OF INQUIRY	ASSESSMENT/ANALYSIS
The Equity Problem	
1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE–IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM. Select a problem related to disparities and inequality in early childhood (e.g., suspension and expulsion of African-American boys, rates of admission and completion of higher education for black early childhood teachers) that you are responsible for solving within your role and responsibilities. (Consider this your "equity problem.") What is the equity problem's ecology–especially its root causes? Who benefits and who does not from current actions and solutions related to your equity problem? In relation to your equity problem, how do you measure success in your current job? Do your current actions reduce racial disparities or discrimination?	
2. IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT RACIAL INEQUITIES. Which racial/ethnic groups are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by the issues your equity problem seeks to address? How are they affected differently? What quantitative and qualitative evidence of inequality exists? What evidence is missing or needed? Which populations receive maximum benefits and which have fewer benefits associated with access to programs, services, and opportunities for which you are responsible within your early childhood system?	
3. EXAMINE THE CAUSES. What factors may be producing and perpetuating racial inequities associated with this equity problem? How did the inequities arise? Are they expanding or narrowing? Does the work for which you are responsible address the root causes you have defined? If not, how could it?	
Stakeholders	
1. IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS. Identify stakeholders associated with your equity problem. Think about the entire "universe" of stakeholders–go beyond the "usual suspects." Which racial/ethnic groups have and which do not have access to the resources, programs, and services you are responsible for designing, regulating, or distributing?	
2. ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS. Have stakeholders from different racial/ethnic groups–especially those most adversely affected–been informed, meaningfully involved, and authentically represented in the development of programs, policies, and initiatives related to your equity problem? Who's missing and how can they be engaged?	

Equity Action Framework WORKSHEET

KEY QUESTION OR AREA OF INQUIRY	ASSESSMENT/ANALYSIS
Impacts	
1. ADVANCE EQUITABLE IMPACTS. Considering the programs, policies, and practices for which you are responsible, what positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, may result from your focus on the equity problem you have identified? Which racial/ethnic groups could benefit? Are there further ways to maximize equitable opportunities and impacts?	
2. CONSIDER ADVERSE IMPACTS. In relation to your equity problem, what adverse impacts or unintended consequences could result or have resulted from your work (e.g., policy, program, practice, or other actions)? Which racial/ethnic groups could be negatively affected? How could adverse impacts be prevented or minimized?	
3. EXAMININE ALTERNATIVES OR IMPROVEMENTS. Are there better ways to reduce racial disparities and advance racial equity in relation to your equity problem? What provisions could be changed or added to ensure positive impacts on racial equity and inclusion?	
Sustainability and Visibility	
1. EXAMINE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION. What are the opportunity structures and patterns of resource distribution (e.g., barriers, pathways, resources) that need to be understood and addressed if this equity problem is to be addressed and you are to succeed? How can universal goals be supported through targeting resources and supports?	
2. ENSURING VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY. Is the equity problem and your means to addressing it realistic and adequately funded with mechanisms to ensure successful implementation and enforcement? Are there provisions to ensure ongoing data collection, public reporting, stakeholder participation, and public accountability? What advisory or governance body is responsible for guiding strategic interventions related to your equity problem?	
3. IDENTIFY SUCCESS INDICATORS AND USE ROBUST ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES. What are the success indicators and progress benchmarks that you will use/are using to assess your equity problem? How will impacts on racial equity be documented and evaluated? How will the level, diversity, and quality of ongoing stakeholder engagement be assessed? How will this assessment inform the ongoing work? How are all stakeholders engaged in assessment?	

Notes

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____