PURPOSE

The Cox/Henderson administration believes that all Utahns should have equal opportunity and access to positive life outcomes. The administration acknowledges, however, that women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ communities in Utah have unique historical socio, cultural, and economic barriers preventing them from participating fully in our state. These barriers can be dismantled with thoughtful and cross-sector partnerships, proper systems restructure, and leadership buy-in across Utah state government.

The following toolkit has been created to empower and aid state leaders, decision makers, and program managers to pause and thoughtfully conduct assessments that consider the greatest gaps, disparities, and potential consequences that can occur as a result of the proposed programs or initiatives. The guide is also meant to help decision makers move beyond the standard practice of developing initiatives in isolation of the people most impacted by the policies proposed and instead include diverse representatives to engage in the process at the onset.

Adapted from the University of Virginia’s Toolkit for Equity-Minded Decisions & Policies, and The Center for Racial Justice Innovation “Racial Equity Impact Assessment” tool, the sample tables outline examples of concrete steps that can guide stakeholders in their process of developing an Equity and Opportunity Impact Statement, which can serve as a supporting document to the analysis and decision-making process for proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans, and budgetary decisions.
The premise behind Equity and Opportunity Impact Statements is that “policies often have unintended consequences that would be best addressed prior to adoption of new initiatives. [Stakeholders and] leaders have an opportunity, and an obligation, to ensure that their policies and practices at the very least do not exacerbate any unwarranted disparities. Equity [and Opportunity] Statements offer one means by which policy makers can begin to engage in a proactive assessment of how to address these challenging issues in a constructive way.”¹ In this sense they are similar to fiscal and environmental impact statements, which routinely are conducted and are now widely viewed as responsible mechanisms of government.

Equity and Opportunity Impact Statements are particularly important when exploring, discussing and developing plans for resource distribution because it is incredibly difficult to reverse and redirect the funding once it has been allocated. These Statements can help revise the process in which proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans, and budgetary decisions are made by examining proposed actions through an equity lens to help minimize unintended adverse consequences in a variety of contexts. It is important for the sake of transparency, accountability, and honoring the contribution of frontline leaders, to develop concrete action steps in partnership with community stakeholders and include the names and roles of people involved in the process.

It is also important to acknowledge that equity and opportunity work can be challenging and difficult to navigate. That is why we consistently invite leaders and decision-makers to engage in this work with courage, which requires vulnerability. Brene Brown defines vulnerability as ‘uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure’ and argues that you can’t get to courage without going through vulnerability.² “Vulnerability is the courage to show up and be seen even when you can not control the outcome.”³

Courageous leadership can help guide our approach to create a path towards a more inclusive state that is invested in the success and well-being of every Utahn. Because if the future is to be bright for any of us, it must be prepared for all of us but it is only through a deep commitment by people in positions of power where practices can be reimagined, barriers within systems can be dismantled, resources can be fairly and equitably distributed, and dignity and compassion can be integrated as a standard practice of service delivery within our organizations.

¹ SOURCE: Marc Mauer, Racial Impact Statements Changing Policies to Address Disparities
² Counsel, Jane, Executive Central, Brene Brown and Courageous Leadership, found at executivecentral.com
³ Id.
EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT: PROGRAM AND INITIATIVES

This first section of the guide is intended to aid you in examining your programs and initiatives by pausing to intentionally ask the necessary questions about existing inequities, untapped partnerships, and possible lack of representation in the decision-making process. The responses can then be used to develop an Equity and Opportunity Impact Statement.

Step One: Identify Stakeholders

- What groups, organizations or individuals may be most involved with, affected by, and/or concerned with the issues related to the proposal, policy, practice, plan, or decision?

Step Two: Engage Stakeholders

- Have those stakeholders most involved or impacted been informed, meaningfully involved, and authentically represented in the development of the proposal, policy, practice, program, plan, or decision?
Step Three: Identify and Document Inequities

- Which groups, organizations, or individuals are currently most advantaged and most disadvantaged by the issues this proposal, policy, practice, program, plan, or decision seeks to address?
- How are they affected differently?
- What quantitative and qualitative evidence of inequality exists?
- What evidence is missing or needed?

Step Four: Examine the Causes

- What factors may be producing and perpetuating inequities associated with this issue? How did the inequities arise?
- Are the inequities expanding or narrowing?
- Does the proposal, policy, practice, program plan, or decision address root causes? If not, how could it/they?
Step Five: Clarify the Purpose

- What does the proposal, policy, practice, program, plan, or decision seek to accomplish?
- How does it/they align with our mission and values?
- Will it reduce disparity?

Step Six: Consider Unintended Consequences

- What adverse or unintended consequences could (or has previously) result(ed) from this type of proposal, policy, practice, plan, or decision here or somewhere else?
- Is there research on this topic and prior case examples that could be reviewed?
- Is it possible some groups would be more negatively affected than others? Is that necessary or could it be minimized?
Step Seven: Advance Equitable Impacts

- What positive impacts on equity and inclusion, if any, could result from this proposal, policy, practice, program, plan, or decision?
- Are there further ways to maximize equitable opportunities and impacts?

Step Eight: Examine Alternatives and Improvements

- Are there better ways to achieve the purpose and align with our goals?
- What provisions could be changed or added to ensure positive impacts on equity and inclusion?
Step Nine: Ensure Viability and Sustainability

- Is the proposal, policy, practice, program, plan, or decision realistic and adequately funded with mechanisms to ensure successful implementation and/or enforcement?
- Are there provisions to ensure ongoing data collection, public reporting, stakeholder participation, and public accountability?

Step Ten: Identify Success Indicators

- What are the success indicators and progress benchmarks?
- How will impacts be documented and evaluated?
- How will the level, diversity, and quality of ongoing stakeholder engagement be assessed?
EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY INTERNAL REFLECTION: POLICIES AND PROCESSES

The second section of the guide is intended to aid you in examining your area’s written and unwritten policies with an equity lens. The reflection questions can be used to guide a team discussion or individual written reflection. These opportunities for introspection and identifying areas of opportunities to increase equity and better serve historically underserved communities should again, be facilitated with compassion and an invitation to lead with equity for greater outcomes for those we serve and hope to better serve.

Step One: Identify Written & Unwritten Practices

What policies/practices are in place in our school/unit?

- What formal written policies govern how our area/unit is organized, operated and distributes resources and opportunities? (e.g. employee tuition support)
- What unwritten/informal decision-making processes and practices determine how we organize, operate, and distribute resources and opportunities?
Step Two: Individually Examine Formal & Informal Practices

1. Foundations of the Policy/Practice:
   - What is the intent behind the policy/practice? What are the desired outcomes?
   - Who is responsible for policy/practice implementation and oversight?
   - How is the policy/practice communicated to policy decision makers and individuals impacted by it?

2. Equity in Language:
   - Does the policy/practice make normative/stereotypical assumptions?
   - What types of words are used to describe individuals/groups identified in the policy/practice?
   - Is there language that includes or excludes communities that have been historically minoritized? (e.g., “She/He” > “They”)

3. Accountability for Equity

- At what points in the policy/practice are there points of individual discretion? Are those points structured (e.g., there is an evaluation rubric or guide posts for the decision)?
- Does this policy/practice have the potential to perpetuate or help dismantle historical, or other barriers? How?

4. Data Collection and Reporting

- Who does the policy/practice impact? Who benefits and who does not?
- How is accountability measured? What data are collected to monitor policy/practice implementation and impact?
- Is data disaggregated in collection and reporting?
- What groups are disaggregated?
- Are there individuals and/or communities that are disproportionately affected by this policy?
Step Three: Addressing Inequities

- If the policy perpetuates unnecessary barriers or inequities, how can they be mitigated or eliminated?
- What actions will we take to redress the inequities in our formal and informal policies/practices?
If the future is to be bright for any of us, it must be prepared for all of us but it is only through a deep commitment by people in positions of power where practices can be reimagined, barriers within systems can be dismantled, resources can be fairly and equitably distributed, and dignity and compassion can be integrated as a standard practice of service delivery within our organizations.