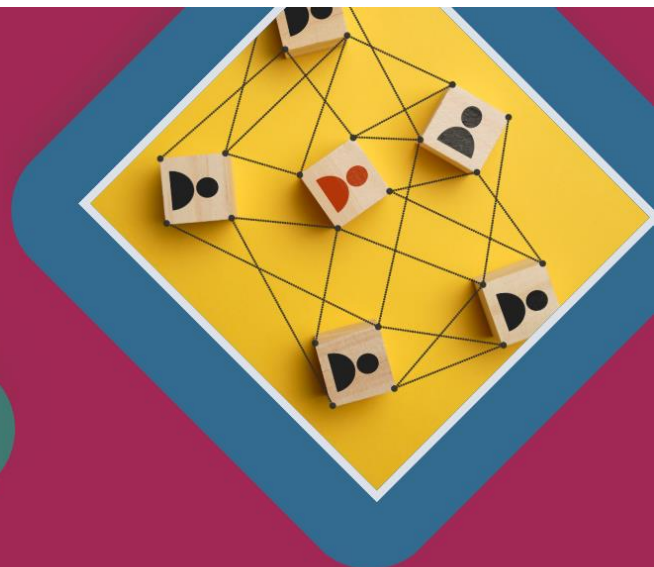# Equity

Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide

2023

CHILD CARE
State Capacity Building Center

Introduction

This chapter of the *Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide* (SBRG) introduces equity in early childhood systems. The chapter defines equity and examines it within the context of state and federal early childhood systems. Using the framework from the *Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide: Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool*, this chapter unpacks equity within the dimensions of capacity building and provides examples from across the country to illustrate each dimension. Finally, the chapter includes resources to delve deeper into this important topic and definitions of common terms.

Defining Equity

In early childhood, equity has become a widely used term to name the goal of work to create a fair start for children.[1] Equity is advanced by removing barriers and increasing access to high-quality early childhood education resources. Among the growing body of research, position statements, and resources to support advancing equity in early childhood systems, the term is not consistently defined. This leaves room to both interpret and misinterpret the ultimate vision and goal of an equitable early childhood system. This chapter of the SBRG begins with a federal definition of equity; contrasts the distinction between equality and equity; discusses definitions of the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and ends with a definition of systemic equity to ground the reader on the focus of this chapter.

Federal Definition of Equity

Over the past decades, several presidential administrations have advanced initiatives to promote the fair treatment of all individuals through executive orders.[2] Executive orders serve to communicate the intention and direction of the executive branch to the broader public and to specifically direct the work of the staff within the executive branch. In January 2021, President Joseph Biden released the *Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government*. The executive order (quoted in the box at right) defines equity for the purposes of the executive branch and states that "equal opportunity is the bedrock of American democracy, and our diversity is one of our country's greatest strengths."[3] At the same time, disparities in our laws and policies have denied that equal opportunity for many.

> **Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government**
>
> "The term 'equity' means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality."

Many members of underserved communities have fought hard for legal protections to give them basic rights such as voting, education, and marriage. However, many of these legal protections provide the appearance of equity while being inconsistently enforced in programming, policy, and practice.

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[1] Waterford.org. (2018, February 17). *Equity in education: The principle*. https://www.waterford.org/education/equity-early-education-principle/
[2] National Archives Federal Register. (n.d.). *Executive orders*. https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders
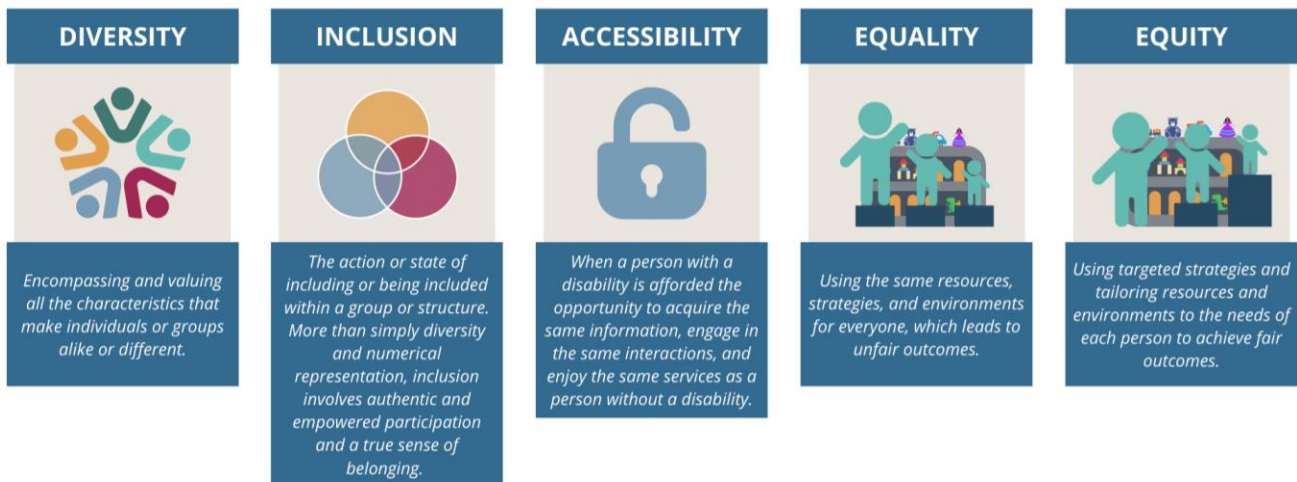[3] The White House. (2021, January 21). *Executive order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government*, para. 2. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/

Diversity, Inclusion, Equality, Equity, and Accessibility

It is important to distinguish between equality and equity when thinking about the implementation of a given program, policy, or practice. According to the Race Matters Institute, equality is when "people receive the same resource, with the expectation that the outcome will be the same." [4] But historically, underserved communities have not received the same starting point and resources as others. Equality can reinforce existing inequities in our system. To get to equity in our systems requires rethinking the supports and resources that are provided.

Other significant terms that are often used in discussions about equity include diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Together, these terms represent a conceptual framework that "promotes the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially the underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, etc." [5] Definitions for these are found in figure 1.

Figure 1: Definitions of Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Equality, and Equity

DIVERSITY	INCLUSION	ACCESSIBILITY	EQUALITY	EQUITY
Encompassing and valuing all the characteristics that make individuals or groups alike or different.	The action or state of including or being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.	When a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability.	Using the same resources, strategies, and environments for everyone, which leads to unfair outcomes.	Using targeted strategies and tailoring resources and environments to the needs of each person to achieve fair outcomes.

Historical Context

A look back at early care and education policy and financing illustrates the historical precedents around fair, just, and impartial treatment; corroborates that advancing equity has not been a primary driving force in the design and delivery of early childhood systems; and helps inform our contextual understanding of these issues within the broader early childhood system. While it is important to understand how the system became what it is today, this chapter focuses on action-oriented considerations for states, territories, and Tribal Nations. These resources provide a deeper perspective for those who want to explore further:

- *Past Caring: A History of U.S. Preschool Care and Education for the Poor, 1820-1965*: This document, published originally by the National Center for Children in Poverty in 1989, provides a historical review of the evolution of early care and education programs in the United States from the early 19th century through 1965.

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[4] Race Matters Institute. (2019). *Shared language: The power of shared language for advancing racial equity.* JustPartners, Inc. https://racemattersinstitute.org/resources/the-power-of-using-shared-language/

[5] American Psychological Association. (2022). *Equity, diversity, and inclusion framework.* https://www.apa.org/topics/equity-diversity-inclusion

- *A Brief History of Federal Financing for Child Care in the United States*: This publication from 1996 covers the federal government's investment in child care from the mid-1930s through the mid-1990s, which varied in funding level and purpose over the course of 60 years.

- *Mary Pauper: A Historical Exploration of Early Care and Education Compensation, Policy, and Solutions*: This in-depth piece, updated in April 2022, looks at early care and education compensation and policy over five periods of time, from the year 1400 through 2020. The authors conducted an extensive literature review and examined inequities in compensation in the early care and education system. The piece offers recommendations for centering equity in conversations about compensation.

- "TANF Policies Reflect Racist Legacy of Cash Assistance": This article, published in 2021 by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, documents the history of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as the primary source of cash assistance to families with limited incomes in the United States. Many states historically and currently use TANF to pay for child care subsidies and programming. This legacy of TANF policies affected the design and foundation of child care subsidy programs that are still operated today.

- Early Childhood History, Organizing, Ethos, and Strategy (ECHOES): This project was created to give access to historical and contemporary materials to allow users to learn about the history of the early care and education system through the stories of the people who were there.

A Systems Approach to Advancing Equity

A systems approach is an intentional effort to improve the context, components, connections, infrastructure, or scale of a given system (see the "Understanding Systems Building" chapter of the SBRG for a more thorough look into systems building). A systems approach aids states, territories, and Tribes in addressing equity by setting a framework in place that gives state, territory, and Tribal staff explicit guardrails and a framework for implementing programs and services offered to the public. This gives staff a guiding star when thinking about how programs are operated, from the high-level vision for a program down to the habits, norms, and processes of implementation. It connects policies with resource distribution in a way that supports underserved communities and, when implemented with an equity lens, reduces disparities.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) framework calls for equity through the ultimate goals laid out in the law and provides a path to achieve equity through the articulated "systems approach" to change. The CCDBG Act of 2014 articulates seven specific purposes for states, territories, and Tribes:
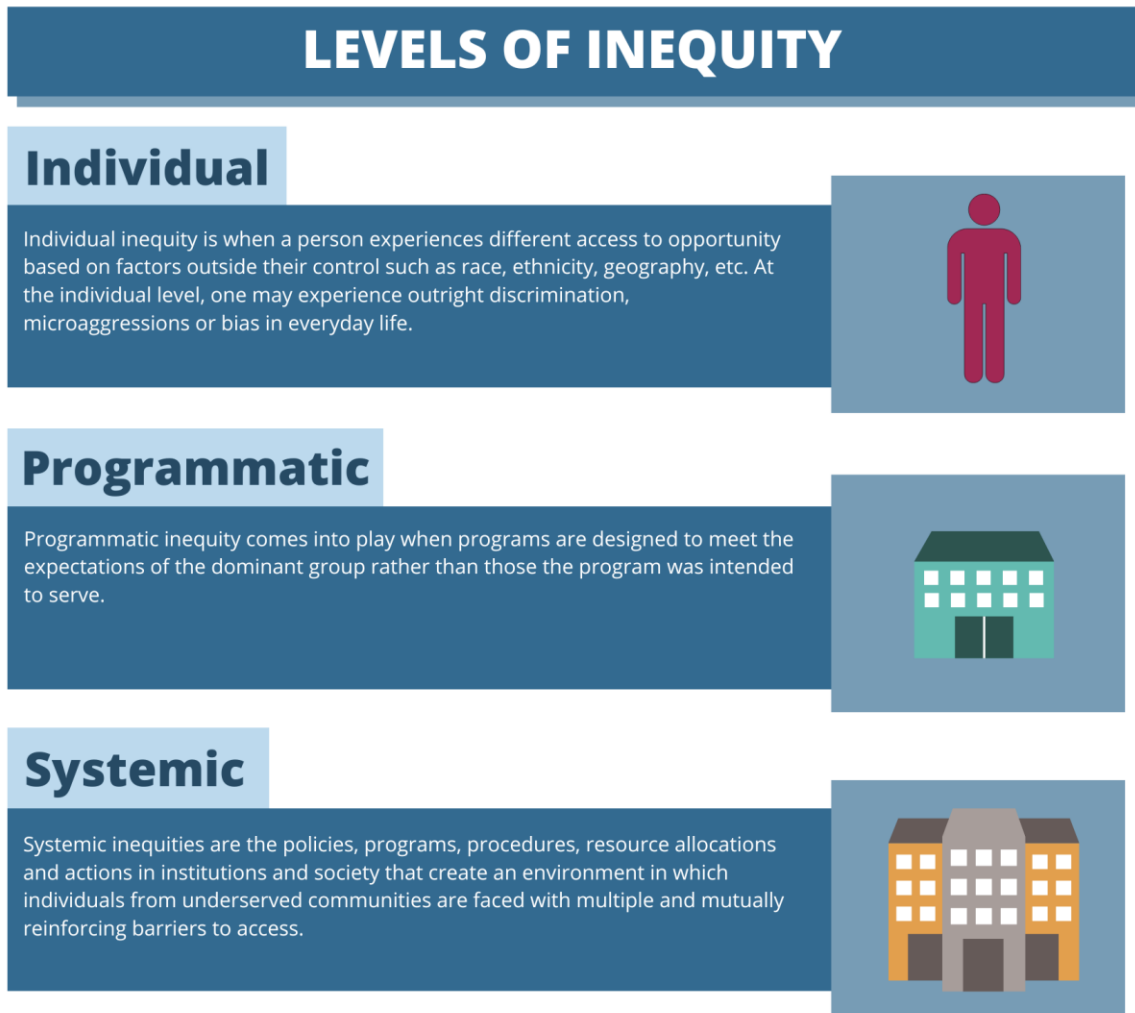
1. "To allow each state maximum flexibility in developing child care programs and policies that best suit the needs of children and parents within that state;

2. To promote parental choice to empower working parents to make their own decisions regarding the child care services that best suit their family's needs;

3. To encourage states to provide consumer education information to help parents make informed choices about child care services and to promote involvement by parents and family members in the development of their children in child care settings;

4. To assist states in delivering high-quality, coordinated early childhood care and education services to maximize parents' options and support parents trying to achieve independence from public assistance;

5. To assist states in improving the overall quality of child care services and programs by implementing the health, safety, licensing, training, and oversight standards established in this subchapter [Subchapter II-B - Child Care and Development Block Grant (Sections 9857 - 9858r)] and in state law (including state regulations);

6. To improve child care and development of participating children; and

7. To increase the number and percentage of low-income children in high-quality child care settings."[6]

Addressing Inequity at Multiple Levels of the System

Inequity often affects members of underserved communities at the individual, programmatic, and systemic levels. Each of these levels is distinct but cannot be separated from one another. See figure 2 for a definition and examples of each level of inequity.

Figure 2: Definitions of the Levels of Inequity

LEVELS OF INEQUITY

Individual

Individual inequity is when a person experiences different access to opportunity based on factors outside their control such as race, ethnicity, geography, etc. At the individual level, one may experience outright discrimination, microaggressions or bias in everyday life.

Programmatic

Programmatic inequity comes into play when programs are designed to meet the expectations of the dominant group rather than those the program was intended to serve.

Systemic

Systemic inequities are the policies, programs, procedures, resource allocations and actions in institutions and society that create an environment in which individuals from underserved communities are faced with multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to access.

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[6] Office of Child Care. (n.d.). History and purposes of CCDBG and CCDF, para. 5. In *Fundamentals of CCDF Administration* [Online tool]. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ccdf-fundamentals/history-and-purposes-ccdbg-and-ccdf

In many cases, inequity at one level reinforces inequity at the other two levels. The combined impact of inequity at all levels causes individuals from underserved communities to face barrier after barrier (emotional, financial, educational, professional, and so on) that are often not present for individuals in communities that are not marginalized.

Professionals in various roles within early childhood have unique opportunities to address inequity at multiple levels, whether it is as teachers in classrooms, program owners and directors supporting community-based early childhood programs, or early childhood leaders working across state, territory, and Tribal early childhood systems.

> "True systems change efforts do not merely change inequitable structures, but strive to transform the underlying power dynamics, narratives, and histories that built these structures and enable them to thrive. An equity lens is essential to systems change efforts to avoid change efforts that reinstitute the status quo, or replace one set of systemic inequities with another." – (Change Elemental)

This chapter of the SBRG is designed to equip state, territory, and Tribal leaders with examples, ideas, and resources for addressing inequity at multiple levels using a systems approach. While singular steps can be taken to address inequity at one level or another, shifting to systemic-level improvement addresses inequity more completely. Table 1 provides examples of inequity at each level and strategies to address inequity within early childhood systems.

Table 1: Addressing Levels of Inequity

Examples of Inequity	Examples of Systems Strategies to Address Inequity
Individual	
• All materials to find and enroll in programs are provided in English only, reducing access due to language barriers. • Individuals experience outright discrimination, microaggressions, or bias by intake staff when seeking services and support, resulting in fear and avoidance. • Children of color are disproportionately expelled due to behavior challenges.	• Create policy at the state, territory, or Tribal level to require all applications, supporting materials, and services to be provided in the language used by the families served. • Create financing mechanisms to support local programs to provide access points through trusted organizations and in the manner families desire to access (verbal vs. written, in person vs. via phone, and so on). • Create professional development standards that require or reward training and coaching to reduce program and teacher bias and support culturally responsive behavior management.
Programmatic	
• In-person meetings during the work day are required to access financial assistance or enroll in programs, reducing participation for people who cannot leave work or find transportation. • Eligibility policies do not support parents seeking employment, reducing opportunities for their children to participate in early learning opportunities. • Policies do not allow the use of child care assistance in all types of care settings, including family child care or family, friend, and neighbor care.	• Design mechanisms to solicit feedback from parents or create parent advisory groups to understand families' needs and preferences related to application materials, rules, services, and access points in languages and manners suited to those served. Support stipends for participants. Change policy and provide resources and incentives for implementation of new approaches. • Establish a more expansive eligibility policy that allows for a broader variety of qualifying activities and care settings.

| Examples of Inequity	Examples of Systems Strategies to Address Inequity
Programmatic (continued)	
• When programs (for example, professional development systems, quality rating and improvement systems, and scholarship programs) are created or revised, limited or no input is obtained from individuals who have participated in similar programs. • High-quality early care and education are not available during the parents' working hours.	• Develop recruitment strategies and provide support to local programs to hire program staff that reflect the individuals served. • Support a state-level business advisory network to engage local businesses with nontraditional working hours in identifying solutions for after-hours or weekend care, or both.
Systemic	
• Families accessing subsidies in housing, child care, and food assistance who receive a small pay increase experience a loss of or decrease in benefits for all three programs. • Policies and programs do not reflect the culture and beliefs of families. • Eligibility policies vary locally and across public assistance programs, resulting in families needing to submit multiple applications to receive services. • Data on child and family outcomes at the systems level is not monitored or used in a continuous quality improvement process.	• Create a structure to engage and support families to serve in leadership positions to inform policy, program, and funding decisions at the state, territory, or Tribal level. • Promote and provide leadership opportunities for Lead Agency and partner staff who represent the diversity of race, ethnicity, and lived experience of the families served. • Build continuous educational opportunities for Lead Agency or partner staff on integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into policy and funding. • Create organizational structures and protocols that infuse consideration of inequity into policy, program design, and procedures. • Distribute funding through a focused approach with programs and services aligned with the cultural values of diverse populations. • Use a continuous quality improvement process to analyze disaggregated data from programs across the early childhood system. Examine the impact and outcomes for children within the system and adjust as needed.

Building Capacity to Address Inequity

The SBRG Capacity Building Self-Assessment (CBSA) offers a method for states, territories, and Tribal Nations to assess their capacity to improve their early childhood systems. This tool allows any group or organization to identify strengths and challenges in planning and achieving specified goals. The CBSA uses five dimensions of capacity, illustrated in figure 3.

Using the dimensions in the CBSA as a frame, this section covers the following:

• Examples of where inequity can show up within each dimension in an early childhood system

• Strategies to address inequities within the dimensions

• Examples of how inequity has been addressed in cities, counties, and states

Figure 3: Five Dimensions of Capacity Building
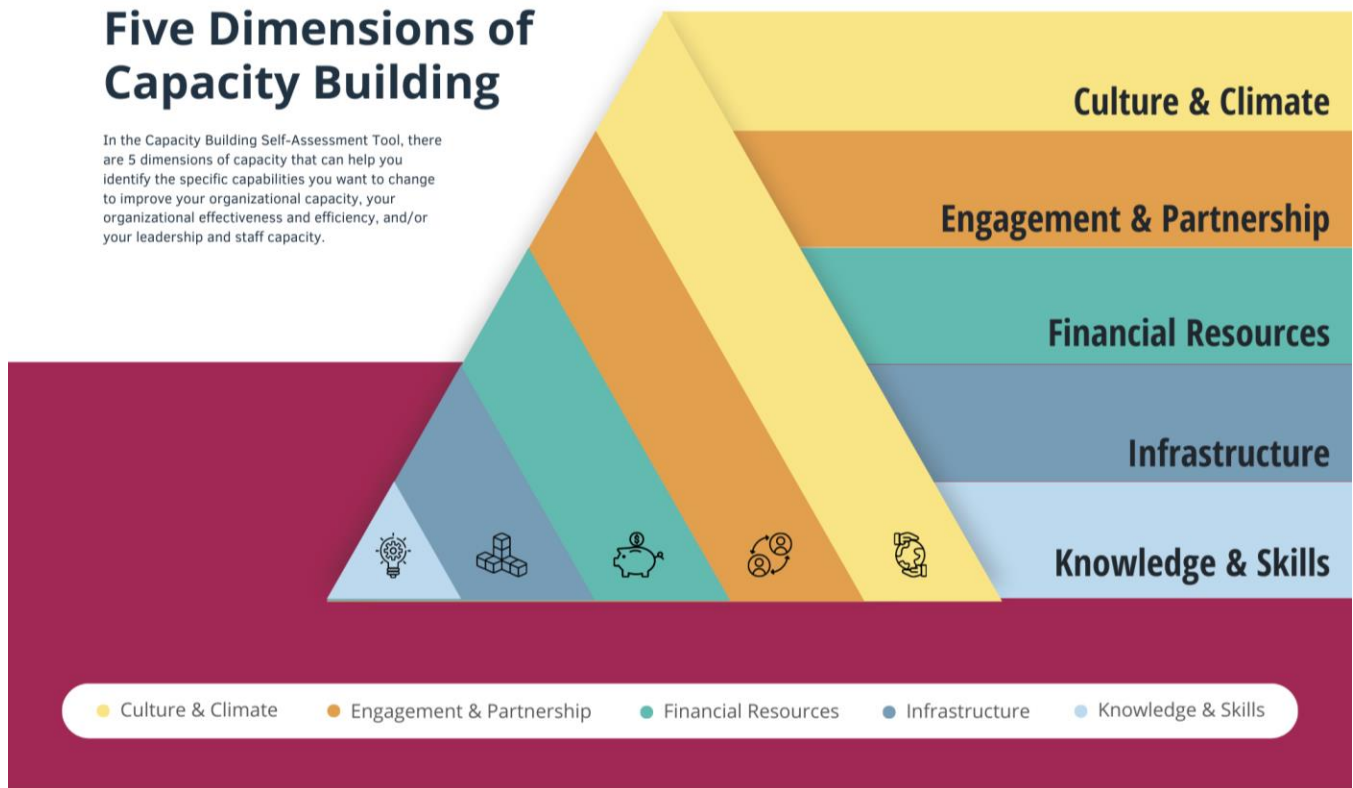
Culture and Climate

An organization's culture (norms and shared behavioral expectations) and climate (the impact of the work environment on staff) deeply affect individuals working within and served by the organization. If staff feel they are treated unfairly or differently from another similarly situated individual or group, this can affect their confidence or motivation to do their job well. Alternatively, if the culture and climate in the organization foster and encourage equitable and fair treatment of all individuals and groups of people, this can cultivate acceptance and belonging and can empower staff to carryover that culture into how they serve the public.

Examples of Where Inequity Can Show Up

- Only dominant culture holidays are acknowledged or celebrated by the organization.
- There is an understanding of inequity by some in the organization, but no vision for addressing it is put forth by leaders.
- Teams are siloed and do not have opportunities to learn across the organization or meet a diverse array of staff.

Strategies to Address Inequity

Set the tone at the leadership level.

When leaders of states, territories, Tribal Nations, or Lead Agencies create executive orders, resolutions, or policy directives, it sets the tone for equity to be taken seriously by all executive branch staff. This alone is insufficient, but it can serve as a powerful message to the staff of the organization.

Recognize and elevate a multitude of perspectives from within in shaping how the organization feels.

Intentionally including a multitude of cultural perspectives in shaping the company climate, such as planning events or social celebrations, can make the work culture more welcoming to those from nondominant cultures and may enhance a sense of belonging.

Provide opportunities for community.

Organizations can create internal staff communities (sometimes called affinity groups) to provide safe spaces for members of groups that have been historically marginalized, such as communities for women, people of color, those identifying as LGBTQIA+, and so on. These spaces allow members of such communities to connect with others across their organization and can foster a sense of belonging. They can also "help employers attract more diverse candidates, reduce turnover and increase employee morale."[7]

Examples

- In 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine created the Eliminating Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality Task Force aimed at addressing Ohio's racial disparities in infant mortality. Governor DeWine has also released *Ohio's Executive Response: A Plan of Action to Advance Equity* (August 2020), which serves to advance equity in Ohio's systems; promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in state workplaces; embed equity in the state's programs and policy; and provide tools for statewide partners to advance equity in public service.

- In 2017, Minnesota launched its Early Childhood Systems Reform project to create an effective state system of early childhood programs and services that ensures pregnant and parenting families of prenatal to 3-year-old children are receiving the supports they need in a manner that encourages their optimal growth and development and eliminates racial disparities in program access and outcomes.

- Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers signed Executive Order 136 (October 2021), which relayed a formal apology for Wisconsin's historical role in Indigenous boarding schools and renewed the state's commitment to promoting and protecting Indigenous communities that share boundaries with Wisconsin.

- Kansas Governor Laura Kelley signed Executive Order 20-48, which established the Governor's Commission on Racial Equity and Justice (June 2020). The commission has worked since then to make recommendations around issues such as social determinants of health, focusing on economic, education, and health care systems.

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[7] Parreno Taylor, M. (2019, October 11). *Today's affinity groups: Risks and rewards*, para. 15. Society for Human Resource Management. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/affinity-groups-risks-rewards.aspx

Engagement and Partnerships

Many early efforts to address inequity were focused on the programmatic or individual level in what Jen Neitzel of the Educational Equity Institute calls "first-generation equity work."[8] An example of this would be offering parent education programs in underserved communities without recognizing the specific cultural and economic circumstances that families experience. True engagement and participation in decisionmaking by a community can create culturally responsive programming and policies that more effectively serve those who are intended to be served. While the state, territory or Tribe may not yet have the trust of one community or another, partnering with members of that community can provide valuable insights into their strengths and needs as well as introduce the state, territory or Tribe to a community where they do not yet have deep connections.

Examples of Where Inequity Can Show Up

- A small, tight-knit group of individuals or organizations are always called upon to speak on behalf of a community. For example, a rural health association is always called upon to get the "rural" perspective.
- There are no individuals who will be served by a program involved in the design, oversight, or continuous quality improvement of the program.
- There are no opportunities for ongoing involvement and leadership among families served by a program.

Strategies to Address Inequity

Include voices of persons with lived experience.

To account for differences in perception and experience, states, territories, and Tribal Nations can meaningfully involve a diverse set of persons from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and geographic groups who are affected by or receiving services when creating or revising early childhood programs and policy. Additionally, service providers who work more directly with families in different roles (case manager, supervisor of direct services, and so on) can provide valuable insight into how families access and navigate a program.

Provide ongoing professional development for partner agencies.

Extend opportunities for professional development in equity initiatives to community members and contracted partners in addition to Lead Agency staff. These trainings could enhance the ability of the partners to serve the community in an equitable manner.

Share data and strategies with broad coalitions that can advocate for equal access.

The impact of advocates in public policy cannot be understated. However, Lead Agencies often may not be directly involved in advocacy efforts. They can, however, provide information and coordination with partner agencies that are engaged in advocacy to echo messages and broaden the reach of communications. Additionally, states, territories, and Tribal Nations can share de-identified program data with partners and the public. This transparency allows the public and advocates to have a more accurate basis for determining whether

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[8] Neitzel, J. (2021). The work: Promoting equity and justice in early childhood, p. 100. In I. Alanis, I. U. Iruka, & S. Friedman (Eds.), *Advancing equity and embracing diversity in early childhood education.* National Association for the Education of Young Children. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/books/advancing-equity-embracing-diversity

a program is working as intended for all members of the community. It also provides advocates with more accurate information upon which to base discussion and advocacy efforts.

Examples

- The Early Childhood Investment Corporation and Michigan Home Visiting Initiative transformed the way they listen to and act upon the voices of families. They created a guide called *Stepping Up and Speaking Out: The Evolution of Parent Leadership in Michigan* to detail their work and provide guidance for other communities that want to meaningfully include and empower families to be engaged in the programs, policies, and decisions that affect their lives.

- Geaux Far Louisiana is a coalition of individuals and organizations from across Louisiana who are advocating for "an equitable, unified, child- and family-centered early childhood system that centers racial equity and ensures families have access to seamless, high-quality early childhood development, health, and educational services."[9] The Geaux Far Steering Committee, which is made up of 55% parents or early childhood education and health providers, created the Geaux Far Louisiana 2023–2028 Strategic Plan to lay out a vision for more equitable access to services for children and families in Louisiana.

- The city of Madison, Wisconsin, required Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI) training for all current and future employees. The training provides a base level of understanding of racial equity for staff and teaches them how to use the city's RESJI tools to determine disparate impacts of policy decisions on underserved communities. The initiative also provides ongoing opportunities for learning in a variety of formats. Community partners and contracted organizations are often invited to the training and events.

- In 2019, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) began meeting with 10 parent leaders across the state to form the Parent Cabinet Design Committee. The committee met twice per month from 2019 through early 2021 to create the structure, mission, roles, responsibilities, and governance structure for what became the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Parent Cabinet. Applications for membership in the cabinet were accepted in 2021, and efforts were made to ensure representation reflecting parents from across Connecticut. The current cabinet is made up of 15 parents who serve at least 2-year terms and are compensated for their service. Cabinet members participate in a wide range of activities, such as providing input on the design and assisting in response analysis of the OEC parent survey; serving on other OEC committees, such as the State Advisory Council, OEC strategic planning efforts, and a blue-ribbon panel; and acting as a bridge to connect and communicate about issues to and from their regions. OEC has used Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants and Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five to fund the work so far and is working with the Governor's Office to include the parent cabinet in statute with sustainable funding in the next state budget.

Financial Resources

A state, territory, or Tribal Nation holds power in the fiscal realm in multiple ways, both as a direct payer and as an arbiter of how contractual and subsidy resources can be distributed. While being good stewards of public resources is key, the policies and procedures used to distribute those resources can be created or modified in an equitable way.

Examples of Where Inequity Can Show Up

- Policies around attaining and maintaining eligibility for resources such as child care assistance are made without input from the community served and without the family at the center of the design.

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[9] Geaux Far Louisiana. (n.d.). Our collective vision and goals, para. 2. https://www.geauxfarla.org/

- Contracts are given to the same partner organizations over and over due to the "lack of capacity" of smaller or less experienced organizations that may be more diverse and closer to the communities being served.

- Program or project funding decisions do not include considerations for equity or differences in impact due to characteristics such as geography, access to transportation, race, language, type of provider, and so on.

Strategies to Address Inequity

Use human-centered design.

Putting the person or family at the center of the process of designing programs with financial eligibility requirements may result in a higher uptake of services and easier access to vital programming for children. States, territories, and Tribal Nations can design systems so that families go through one process to provide information and determine eligibility for multiple programs rather than having to provide similar information to multiple programs.

Blend and braid funding to enhance flexibility.

Some funding, such as local tax revenue, is more flexible and can be layered on top of more rigid funding. States, territories, and Tribal Nations can take on the administrative burden of analyzing all available funding sources to determine which can be blended or braided so that families that are already overburdened do not have to research and apply for multiple funding sources or programs.

Use contracts to meet the needs of families.

When allowable, states, territories, and Tribal Nations can use creative solutions, such as contracts for child care slots or community-based intermediaries, to deliver services to families in the places and spaces where they are most comfortable. In some cases, this requires a loosening of direct oversight of funding to allow flexibility to meet the needs of the families in creative and culturally appropriate ways. When creating requests for proposals, considerations may be made for applications from community-based organizations with deep experience with the populations being served. Some community-based organizations may lack the capacity to apply directly for contracts and could benefit from training and technical assistance in navigating the state, territory, or Tribal Nation's procurement system.

Examples

- Georgia's Early Head Start (EHS)-Child Care Partnership is housed within the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning and, as such, allows for close alignment with the state's subsidy policy and infrastructure. For example, Georgia's subsidy program software identifies children as potentially eligible for EHS at the time of eligibility determination and allows caseworkers to make referrals to EHS programs. Additionally, Georgia's child care subsidy eligibility allows EHS families to count the hours they volunteered in partnership classrooms toward the subsidy work hour requirements.[10]

- As part of its Whole Family approach, the Whole Family Systems Grant (WFSG) in Minnesota blends TANF, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and Child Safety and Permanence Grant funding to award contracts to community-based organizations that are inherently best poised to understand and address pressing issues facing their communities. The WFSG request for proposals (RFP) was issued in 2019 and asked grantees to demonstrate an understanding of the challenges in their community (as defined by the

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[10] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Early Head Start child care partnership state grantee profile: Georgia.* http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ecd/ga_ehsccp_grantee_profile_final.pdf

grantee) relating to early childhood; education; health and well-being; economic stability; and safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. Grantees were asked to enter into a 5-year collaborative learning relationship with the State of Minnesota and come to the table not with a solution, but with a coalition of interested parties that could work on the development of solutions to challenges faced by that community. Seven grants ranging from $300,000 to $500,000 per year for 5 years were awarded. The RFP encouraged applications from organizations that had not previously received funds from the state and provided technical assistance to each grantee to plan and implement their solutions. The state is evaluating the success of the grants using site- and cohort-level measures of process and program-level improvements.

- New York City has used several funding streams—including federal Head Start and CCDF, city tax revenue, and state prekindergarten funding—to create a blended way of covering the cost of early learning for some of the city's youngest residents. Through Infant and Toddler (serving children 6 weeks to 3-year-olds who are not yet eligible for 3-K), 3-K (serving 3-year-olds), and Pre-K (serving 4-year-olds), children can be eligible for low- or no-cost early care and education. The city determines which funding streams the family may be eligible for and uses the appropriate funding source to cover the cost of care or offer a slot at specific programs to families. The coverage is not universal, but it was designed to put the onus of figuring out the funding onto the city rather than the families.

Infrastructure

To make equity a part of the organization's core, it needs to be baked into the infrastructure. The infrastructure is the core systems, protocols, and processes of an organization—such as training, supervision, hiring, communication, performance measurement, and evaluation. Equity should not feel like an "add-on," but rather a part of the way the organization does its work. This requires thoughtful and meaningful strategies woven into the work over time.

Examples of Where Inequity Can Show Up

- Promotion of individuals who have relationships with leaders in the organization without open competition for positions is common.

- Individuals with similar backgrounds or education are given different starting pay or wage increases.

- There is little or no consideration of equity within the design or revision of programs, policies, or procedures.

- There is no system in place for monitoring progress on metrics known to affect access to services.

Strategies to Address Inequity

Create positions or teams dedicated to equity efforts.

When staff have a dedicated focus to advancing equity, they can create the tools, training, and ideas needed to help program staff in serving the community more equitably. This could be a person or office dedicated to equity, or it could be a team of people from the organization who have time as part of their normal duties to dedicate to equity efforts—or it could be both.

Implement hiring practices to create a diverse workforce.

Begin with a review of position descriptions to determine whether certain qualifications, such as a bachelor's degree, are necessary for the position or whether the position description should be revised to allow for equivalent knowledge and skills to be obtained through a combination of experience and training. Next, to attract a broad

array of candidates, revise the outreach strategies for hiring so that jobs are posted in nontraditional forums, such as community listservs or associations, rather than just on a state, territory, or Tribal Nation's job posting website. Then, ensure the candidate screening process is culturally competent and reflects the type of work a person would be asked to do. For example, do not require lengthy essays for a position that has little or no written communication requirements, and provide an interviewing atmosphere that is relational. Finally, conduct a review of each hiring process to allow selected and nonselected candidates to provide input and feedback on the process. Review that information for each job posting but also in aggregate for all hiring during a given timeframe to determine if the hiring process feels different for candidates from different backgrounds.

Explicitly include metrics to address identified areas of inequity.

Disaggregating data to determine whether certain decisions, policies, or procedures have a disparate impact on certain populations allows Lead Agencies to make informed decisions about where to direct resources or adjust programming. For example, disaggregate by age (such as infants and toddlers vs. preschoolers); race or ethnicity (such as Hispanic or Latino children); language (such as families speaking Somali or Hmong); areas of the state, territory, or Tribal Nations (urban vs. rural); or types of providers (family, center, informal family, or friend and neighbor care). Publishing the data using a dashboard or regular report provides an additional level of transparency.

Explicitly include equity within the program design or revision.

When programs are designed by individuals who do not have a lived experience similar to the end users of the program, the underlying assumptions in the design may create a program that does not meet the needs of the population you want to reach. Tools such as guiding questions and checkpoints for assessing disparity impacts can be incorporated into program design or revision to ensure efforts are made to minimize unintended outcomes.

Guiding Questions to Check for Disparity Impact

1. Who is benefitting from the change?
2. Who is burdened by the change?
   a. How are they burdened (for example, more work to access the program, increased cost or time)?
   b. Can anything be done to alleviate that burden?
3. Will materials that are developed be understood by those with limited English proficiency?
4. How might this program affect the following?
   a. People who have a primary language other than English
   b. Someone who lives in a rural part of the state, territory, or Tribal Nation
   c. A woman, man, or nonbinary individual
   d. A person of color
   e. Different types of providers (family, friend, and neighbor care; family child care; group; center; prekindergarten; Head Start; home visiting)?
5. How have you involved those most affected by the change in the creation of this solution? Will they be involved in the ongoing monitoring of the solution?
6. What could make this more equitable?

Examples

- In 2018, the Mayor of Saint Paul, Minnesota, created a Chief Equity Officer position to oversee equity change teams within the city, which were formed to address structural barriers to city services, resources, and supports.

- In 2023, Governor Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania signed Executive Order 2023-03 to direct state agencies to emphasize experience needed for positions instead of requiring a college degree. The executive order also directs the Secretary of Administration to review job descriptions that currently require a degree to determine whether equivalent experience could be accepted in place of a 4-year degree for future postings.

- In 2020, after receiving the validation study of Steps to Quality (STQ), Idaho's quality rating and improvement system, the IdahoSTARS team undertook an extensive process to restructure STQ that highlighted the importance of elevating the voice of beneficiaries within the work. First, the state gathered feedback on what questions should be asked in the development of a provider survey on restructuring STQ from home-based child care providers. The survey was drafted and reviewed by the providers who gave input to confirm the IdahoSTARS team had appropriately interpreted the input. Next, the survey was sent to 295 providers, with a 17% return rate. The surveyed providers were identified as being interested in STQ from a previous survey that was sent to all child care providers in Idaho. The results were analyzed and brought back to the original group of home-based providers to give input on the next steps. Internal staff used that input, along with other measures, to inform the restructured STQ, which is planned to launch in July 2024.

- As part of the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families' Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion efforts, a Racial Equity and Social Justice Administrator was hired to support the agency's efforts. Additionally, Washington State's Quality Rating and Improvement System Early Achievers developed a Quality Improvement Plan for Racial Equity in Early Achievers and has consistently reported on progress using the Equity in Early Achievers web page.

- In addition to its voluntary afterschool standards, the Indiana Afterschool Network created a suite of specialty standards, including Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Standards, to allow afterschool programs to earn digital badges as they self-assess their programming in relation to best practices and recommendations for diverse, equitable, and inclusive programming.

- In 2022, the licensing team in the Early Learning Division of the Oregon Department of Education met weekly for 3 months to review their licensing practices using the *Equity Considerations for the Child Care Licensing System*. The team worked through the tool and considered each question as it related to their licensing system. Then, they created and are in the process of implementing goals and strategies to ensure their equity foundation is strong. The goals are as follows:

  - Collect data and develop meaningful key performance measures

  - Enhance supportive regulatory tools and technical assistance

  - Sure up onboarding, supervisory, and professional development practices for licensing staff to ensure consistency and alignment with vision

  - Strengthen trust and relationships with partner agencies, providers, families, and advocates

Example: Quality Counts California

In 2022, as part of a comprehensive process to support the re-envisioning of a more equitable Quality Counts California (QCC) system, California conducted the QCC Equity Project in partnership with several organizations throughout the state. QCC is California's statewide system of locally implemented quality rating and improvement systems. The QCC Equity Project defined equity as a time when all interest holders, regardless of racial, cultural, economic, or any other social factor, can equally access and benefit from QCC support and resources.

The project used focus groups and survey data to generate recommendations from deep and culturally responsive engagement methods that address foundational policies and practices of state quality rating and improvement systems. Six unique surveys translated into the most widely spoken languages in the state were disseminated to diverse types of interest holders including families; center administrators; center teaching staff; family, friend, and neighbor care providers; family child care providers; and other quality partners. The surveys collected information about systemic inequities present in the current design of QCC and asked for input on solutions to eradicate these discrepancies.

A diverse cohort of facilitators were recruited from California communities to enable racial and cultural matches between focus groups and the facilitators. The focus groups gathered in-depth information about the experiences of providers and program staff, both participating and not participating in QCC, and also about the experiences of families of young children.

The project team developed the following four lines of inquiry to define what the QCC Equity Project aimed to learn through its efforts to engage interest holders:

- To what extent does the current QCC system measure and promote early childhood education quality across the state?
- To what extent does the current QCC system allow all early childhood education providers to access resources and supports to improve their program quality?
- To what extent does the current QCC system align with families' needs and preferences?
- What steps could the state take to improve the QCC system? What factors or enabling conditions need to be in place for the changes to be made?

The project aimed to enhance equity for those already within the QCC system as well as those who might potentially benefit from QCC quality supports and resources. Incentives were provided to 68% of survey respondents and 100% of focus group participants. Local community partners were also invited to share outreach materials with individuals in their networks as part of recruitment efforts designed to engage individuals who have been typically underrepresented in past research. Ultimately, 72% of those who participated reported it was their first time offering feedback on the early childhood system.

Knowledge and Skills

Staff within an organization need to have both a common understanding of what equity means to the organization and knowledge of the basic history and culture of the populations served. This can provide a strong basis for understanding and better serving the community.

Examples of Where Inequity Can Show Up

- Staff are given little or no training on what equity means for the organization and their program.

- Staff are not encouraged to include and rely on the perspective of the people they serve when creating or revising policies or programs.

- Lead Agencies are limited by traditional and, at times, outdated methods of doing the work and can't meet the needs of all populations due to these constraints.

Strategies to Address Inequity

Provide ongoing education for staff.

Embed learning on equity in onboarding for state and territory staff and provide ongoing opportunities for the engagement and education of existing staff. This support could come from outside the Lead Agency in a community-based organization that has more in-depth knowledge of this subject.

Allow nontraditional methods for doing the work.

Find ways to vary the approach to the work that may go outside the norm, such as the following:

- Use social media to engage participants in feedback on programs and services.

- Ensure staff and contractors get out of the office to meet families and providers where they are in community centers, cultural events, and so on to learn more about how programs and services are working or not working and how to best meet their needs.

- Gather data from sources or systems that are outside the control of the state, territory, or Tribal Nation, such as from search engines, social networks, or advocacy organizations.

Examples

- As part of long-term, intensive technical assistance called the Impact Project (provided by the Child Care State Capacity Building Center), the New York State Office of Child and Family Services Division of Child Care Services created a training in 2022 that is provided to all new child care licensing regulators at its Regulator's Institute, which provides information and considerations for staff working with Tribal Nations. Further, to ensure equitable quality of services, the Office of Child and Family Services surveys new and renewed licensed or registered programs and conducts random phone interviews with licensees after onsite inspections to evaluate the experience of child care programs.

- Aligned with the validation study performed by Quality Rated, Georgia's quality rating and improvement system, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning asked researchers from Child Trends to analyze more than 8,700 reviews of child care programs that were publicly available on social networking sites to determine what the general public valued in child care quality as compared with Georgia's indicators of quality. The research found that the public reviews were significantly related to the Quality Rated star level of the provider.

Conclusion

As state, territory, and Tribal leaders move to advance systemic equity within their communities, they will encounter challenges because systemic equity requires movement from shared understanding to action. Shifting to action means building individual and organizational capacity to assess and reveal what exactly is holding these inequities in place and generate insight for new, just pathways forward. Cross-sector efforts create a path to systematic change and equity through collaboration with all the programs and organizations that affect children's growth and development, such as Head Start, public prekindergarten, child care, early childhood mental health, and more.[11] This is system-level work that can help to transform deeply rooted injustices in our system.

Resources

In the resource list below, icons are used to represent key resources that correspond to one or more of the five dimensions of the _Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool_. For example, if a resource is relevant to the Financial Resources dimension, a green piggybank icon will appear next to it.

Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy: _A Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Throughout Data Integration_ (2020) looks at positive and problematic practices when centering racial equity in data integration's six-stage life cycle.

**Advancing Equity and Embracing Diversity in Early Childhood Education** **(2021):** In chapter 17 of this book, "The Work: Promoting Equity and Justice in Early Childhood," author Jen Neitzel defines the concept of second-generation equity work and discusses specific strategies and recommendations for policymakers and state leaders to advance equity in the early childhood education system.

Annie E. Casey Foundation: The Annie E. Casey Foundation's work in equity and inclusion equips leaders in the philanthropic and policy sectors with tools and resources to advance equitable opportunities for children regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geography.

Change Elemental: Change Elemental partners across sectors to disrupt and transform systems of inequity and create powerful vehicles for justice.

Children's Equity Project (CEP): CEP at Arizona State University focuses on closing opportunity gaps and dismantling systemic racism in learning settings to ensure that children reach their full potential through the translation of research into policy and practice recommendations. Specifically, its _Early Childhood Equity Strategic Plan Template_ is an implementation tool that can help states and Tribes plan for systems change.

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[11] Scheetz, M., & Senge, P. (n.d.). _Systemic change and equity_. Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network. https://capacitybuildingnetwork.org/article3/

Children's Funding Project: The Children's Funding Project publishes many resources to help states and localities think about and implement funding mechanisms to meet the needs of the families they serve. While some are not directly linked to equity, they often highlight examples from cities and states that have found creative ways to blend and braid funding to best serve the families.

Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network (ECCBN): ECCBN unites the efforts of and shares resources and strategies among equity- and excellence-centered capacity builders to increase the visibility and impact of capacity-building approaches that promote deep and sustainable school and systems change.

Equity Considerations for the Child Care Licensing System (2021): This resource, developed by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, helps Lead Agencies consider inequities that may be present within regulatory systems through guiding questions for all areas of the regulatory system.

Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy (December 2017): This brief, authored by Christine Johnson-Staub for the Center for Law and Social Policy, provides an overview of child care and early education policies linking the history of systemic and structural racism. The brief also includes current barriers that create inequities in our child care and early education system and federal and state recommendations to advance racial equity.

Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE): GARE is a national network of government bodies (states, counties, cities, and so on) working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all.

National League of Cities (NLC): NLC wrote a brief on *Embedding Equity into How Your City Does Business for Early Childhood Success*, which provides policy and practice levers to consider as leaders move their early childhood agenda forward so that all young children, their families, and those who care for them can thrive.

Office of Child Care Spanish Language Glossary (2023): The glossary provides states and territories with consistent terminology for translating child care materials from English into Spanish.

Opportunity Atlas: The Opportunity Atlas is the first dataset that provides social mobility longitudinal information at a detailed neighborhood level.

Race at Work **Podcast, Episode 12 (January 27, 2021):** In this episode, "Delta's CEO Ed Bastian: Taking a Stand on Racial Equity," host Porter Braswell interviews Ed Bastian about his leadership as a white male in taking a stand for racial equity in Delta's strategy and culture.

Race Matters Institute (RMI): RMI supports government agencies, nonprofits, community-based organizations, regional organizations, philanthropies, and state and national networks to become race-informed and equity-focused. As part of its work, RMI has developed resources and tools.

Systems Change & Deep Equity: Pathways Toward Sustainable Impact, Beyond "Eureka!," Unawareness & Unwitting Harm (July 2020): This monograph, published by Change Elemental, explores the connection between systems change and equity when both are explored at an in-depth level.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS): The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation created equity tools to inform the work of federal staff at HHS. The tools subsequently were shared more widely as they may be of interest to a broader audience that works in health and human services. Additionally, the Administration for Children and Families within HHS issued an informational memorandum to state its support for advancing racial equity that includes definitions for terms used in equity work.

The Water of Systems Change **(2018):** The Water of Systems Change, by John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge, clarifies the conditions necessary for systems change and provides resources to put systems thinking into action. The resources are geared toward foundations, particularly those working to advance equity.

Common Terms

This glossary features a list of common terms used when discussing equity.[12]

Term	Definition
Accessibility	When a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally integrated and equally effective manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.[13]
Bias	A tendency, inclination, or preconceived notion about an individual or group of people that causes a person to be classified according to a characteristic such as their skin color, gender, or language.
Diversity	Encompassing and valuing all the characteristics that make individuals or groups alike or different. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender, but also age, national origin, religion, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance.[14]
Equality	When people receive the same resources with the expectation that the outcome will be the same, including those from underserved communities.
Equity	Consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including those from underserved communities.
Disparity	Unequal outcomes for one group compared with outcomes for another group.
Gender	A set of socially constructed characteristics, which include behaviors, norms, appearance, and roles typically associated with a person's biological sex.[15]
Implicit bias	A set of automatic and uncontrollable cognitive processes that affect our attitudes toward and beliefs about other individuals or groups of people.
Inclusion	The action or state of including or being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.

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[12] Several definitions in this glossary were adapted or taken directly from the following source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021). *Equity vs. equality and other racial justice definitions.* https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions
[13] American Consortium for Equity in Education. *Understanding the definition of accessibility.* (n.d.) https://www.ace-ed.org/understanding-the-definition-of-accessibility/
[14] Adapted from Fresno City College. (n.d.). *Office of Student Equity & Success.* https://www.fresnocitycollege.edu/faculty-and-staff/resource-guide/student-equity.html
[15] Adapted from World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Gender and health.* https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1

Term	Definition
Individual inequity	When a person experiences different access to opportunity based on factors outside their control, such as race, ethnicity, geography, gender, and so on. At the individual level, one may experience outright discrimination, microaggressions, or bias.
Inequity	Not equal, typically referring to outcomes or distribution of or access to resources.
Microaggressions	The constant and continuing slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities upon marginalized groups.[16]
Privilege	Unearned advantage granted or available to a particular group or person.
Programmatic inequity	When programs are designed to meet the expectations of the dominant group rather than those the program was intended to serve. Rules that may be considered the norm for a middle-income white person may have a different impact on someone in an underserved community.
Race	A socially constructed system of categorizing humans largely based on observable physical features (phenotypes) such as skin color, and on ancestry. There is no scientific basis for or discernible distinction between racial categories.
Racism	A complex system of interconnected factors at the individual, programmatic, and systemic levels that reinforce the false notion that one race is inherently superior to another.
Structural racism	Racial bias across institutions and society that cumulatively and systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.
Systemic equity	A complex combination of interrelated elements consciously designed to create, support, and sustain social justice.
Systemic inequity	An environment in which individuals from underserved communities are faced with multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to access. These show up in the policies, programs, procedures, resource allocations, and actions in institutions and society.
Underserved community	Communities that have been denied equal access to opportunities, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

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