



Toolkit

Building an Equitable Workplace at Local Health Departments

October 2023

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INTRODUCTION

If Local Health Departments (LHDs) are to promote equity, inclusion, and social justice across their work with communities, they must also prioritize those values internally. To do so, LHDs must turn inward and examine how they are building an equitable workplace through their culture, policies, practices, and norms.

An equitable workplace is one where every employee has fair treatment, access, support, and advancement and where the historical and present factors impacting those opportunities to thrive are actively addressed to meet the unique needs of each individual ([Harris, 2022](#); [Pendell, 2022](#)).

An equitable workplace, as this toolkit will describe, is also one that is inclusive, supports the wellbeing and morale of staff, and is able to both attract and retain a diverse, talented, and motivated workforce ([Gallup, 2018](#); [Long, 2023](#)). However, the journey to building such a workplace can feel daunting, even for LHDs that have or are engaging in equity efforts or have publicly committed to advancing equity in the communities they serve. The purpose of this toolkit, therefore, is to support the ability of LHDs to look inward, to consider how policy, practice, and culture are advancing equity and inclusion within their department and among their staff, and to take action toward positive change.

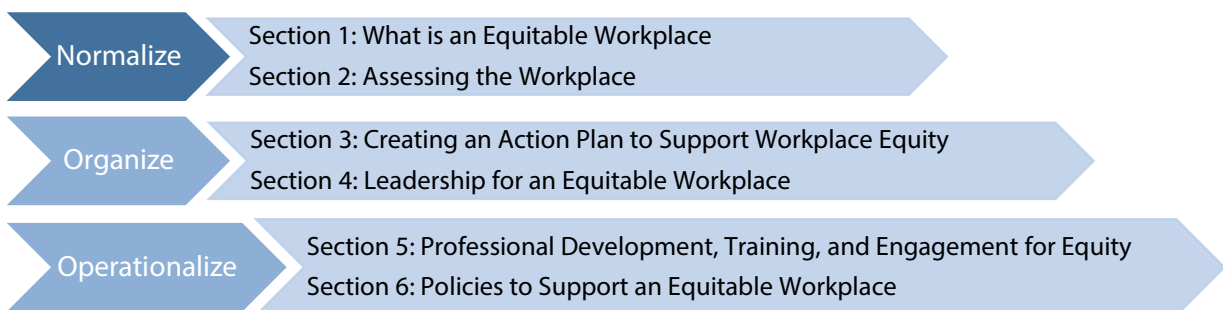
TOOLKIT GOALS

The goals of this toolkit are for LHDs to be able to:

- Define the principles of an equitable workplace.
- Describe the current state of equity in their own department to inform planning.
- Support leadership and staff in developing their capacity to advance equity.
- Promote internal infrastructure that aligns with the values and principles of an equitable workplace.

How is This Toolkit Designed?

The framework for building an equitable workplace is not unlike that which local and state governments have used to advance racial equity in the communities they serve ([Rudiger, 2022](#)). Workplaces must *normalize* through a shared analysis, language, and sense of urgency, *organize* by building structure and leadership, and *operationalize* by putting in place specific strategies to drive results. This toolkit is roughly laid out to address those stages across 6 sections.



Who Is This Toolkit Intended For?

This toolkit is intended for anyone working within or for a government agency. While some aspects will be geared more toward those in leadership or other decision-making or managerial positions, readers across all roles who are interested in advancing equity in their workplace will find the content of this toolkit beneficial to their efforts. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Those in leadership, managerial, and supervisory positions.
- Human Resource (HR) staff.
- Workgroup, committee, and taskforce members who want to focus on improving the workplace.
- Anyone who wants to promote equity within their organization.

What is Included in the Toolkit?

The content of this toolkit comes from extensive research by subject matter experts, lessons from real-world efforts and experiences, and focus groups and interviews conducted with LHD stakeholders across the country. Each section introduces the overarching concepts discussed and puts forward key components of and strategies for putting those concepts into practice.

Tools, Templates, and Stories from the Field

Throughout the toolkit, stories from the field, tools, and templates are provided to help guide readers from conceptual to practical application, with recognition that there are many ways to implement the concepts of this toolkit in the real-world. These are referenced throughout each section, with full tools and templates located in the [TOOLKIT APPENDIX](#).

Final Considerations for Readers

As you move through the toolkit, remember that all LHDs – and the people in them – are at different stages in their journey to becoming stewards of equity. What’s more, as government institutions, all LHDs have unique factors influencing the pace at which they progress and the actions they can take to move forward. In reflecting on factors that may influence your own equity efforts, consider the following:

Size	Funding
Size impacts approach, metrics, and speed of progress. For example, for small LHDs, some strategies to advance equity may not be relevant, and the number or bandwidth of staff to engage may be limited. On the flip side, large LHDs may have added layers of bureaucracy, slowing down or potentially inhibiting change.	Limitations in funding for internal initiatives may pose challenges for LHDs, but it should not stop them from making progress. It may make for a slower process and may require more creative strategies to invest in the work, including tying efforts to build an equitable workplace into existing funding and metrics.
Forces Outside of the LHD	Centralized or Decentralized
Topics like equity, racism, and LGBTQ+ rights are now embedded in political debate. For LHDs advancing equity, this may mean language they can use, trainings they can engage in, and support they receive from political or government authority to spend time or money on equity may be complicated (or resisted) by forces beyond the LHD’s direct control.	The governance structure of an LHD will determine where authority lies for certain decisions, from HR to finances, and may influence an LHD’s ability to impact certain policies. This will likely drive the direction of some of the processes they must go through to make changes in their workplace and may require a greater focus on advocacy efforts.

These factors were raised through discussions with individuals working in the field, and there likely are many more not included here. However, as you encounter tools, recommendations, and stories from the field, remember that these factors may influence how and what you implement and change. Take a moment prior to continuing on in this toolkit to think about the factors that may be influencing your own journey, and that may be serving as either as opportunities or potential barriers toward equity.

WHAT IS AN EQUITABLE WORKPLACE?

Recall that an equitable workplace is one in which all employees have fair treatment and access to the resources, supports, and opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace ([Harris, 2022](#)). Building such a workplace is a continuous journey that an increasing number of employers recognize is the direction organizations should be moving towards ([Center for American Progress, 2020](#)). The challenge is, building an equitable workplace is not just about checking boxes off a list of action items or following a series of defined steps that can be generalized across all LHDs. It requires ongoing commitment, reflection, discovery, re-learning, and re-forming. And importantly, such commitments and efforts toward equity at work must be understood by all staff as holistic, institutionalized, and prioritized ([Prabhakar et al, 2022](#)).

Principles for an Equitable Workplace

- Diversity
- Inclusion & Respect
- Accessibility
- Fairness & Anti-Discrimination
- Transparency
- Accountability

To establish a foundation from which LHDs may use this toolkit to build an equitable workplace, this section will:

- Build a common understanding of what it means to have an equitable workplace.
- Describe characteristics of equity at work.
- Connect equity and inclusion to workforce wellbeing and psychological safety.
- Provide guidance for creating a vision for equity.

What Does an Equitable, Inclusive Workplace Look Like?

One of the first hurdles LHDs may encounter in their journey is a lack of shared understanding across the department as to what an equitable workplace is and why equity is so critical to focus on at work in the first place. To help structure your initial thinking about an equitable workplace, ask whether your LHD is committed to and/or demonstrates the following:

- Diversity** – Does the workplace support a workforce with staff across all dimensions of diversity?
- Inclusion and Respect** – Is there a sense among staff that they belong, and an expectation that they can bring their full self to the workplace and be meaningfully included and respected?
- Accessibility** – Do the work conditions and environment enable everyone to participate fully?
- Fairness** – Is there favoritism or discrimination, such as in opportunities to learn, engage in decision-making, be promoted, or receive higher pay?
- Transparency** – Is there openness between leaders and staff, and is relevant information (such as goals, metrics, plans, and processes) shared in a way that builds trust and empowers staff?
- Accountability** – Are goals and objectives clearly communicated, and are all staff, particularly leaders, held responsible for their actions and progress towards them in meaningful ways?

While there is no singular way to be an equitable workplace, there are some characteristics that may demonstrate whether an organization is truly advancing equity and inclusion within its internal environment. Note that these characteristics are what we should be striving towards. So, just because one or more of these do not resonate with where your LHD is at this moment does not mean your efforts should stall, or you haven't made any progress; this is a continuous journey on which we are all at different places.

An Equitable, Inclusive Workplace...

	Does:	Does Not:
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize & celebrate differences across all dimensions of diversity. Invest in capacity building of staff, development of allies, & empowerment of marginalized groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assume that because there is diversity within the workplace, it is inclusive, equitable, or antiracist & remain unaware of or compliant in continuing patterns of oppression.
Psychological Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster trust, collaboration, & healthy conflict among staff to build bonds. Proactively discourage disrespectful & biased behavior & provide employees safe ways to report such behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid discussions of power, privilege, & oppression, emphasizing 'getting along' at the expense of naming & addressing inequity. See itself merely as "non-oppressive" or tolerate tokenism, microaggressions, or any other forms of bias.
Inclusion & Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a trauma-informed space for all employees to express themselves in personally meaningful ways. Encourage & incorporate, via formal & informal processes, ideas & input from all staff at all levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow people in power to assume their standards & ways of doing things are neutral, most desirable, & form the basis for what is deemed 'appropriate'. Enable the hoarding of power & decision-making at the top.
Transparency & Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement structures & policies with transparent decision-making & power-sharing at all levels. Make equity & inclusion everyone's responsibility, with meaningful metrics associated to success. Apply an equity lens to budget, resource, policy, process, & data decisions & regularly implement equity evaluation & accountability tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack transparency, accountability, & buy-in from the top. Place the burden of DEI efforts solely onto staff with marginalized identities & who are at the receiving end of bias & discrimination. Put forward a declaration or train staff around equity without taking additional actions.
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously assess & adjust to ensure the physical environment, technology, communication, & work arrangements enable all staff to participate & thrive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make accessibility an afterthought or only consider limited areas of concern for access without engaging those in the disability community in decision-making.
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly communicate & follow impartial policies around pay, promotion, & recognition. Have multiple means to report discrimination that results in meaningful follow through without fear of retaliation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fail to recognize or redress unfair pay, promotion, & recognition practices or other preferential treatment, conscious or not. Offer one method of reporting discrimination that allows employees to be identified or that lacks follow through.

Psychological Safety: A Prerequisite to an Equitable Workplace

To build a workplace that demonstrates the qualities listed above, we must highlight a key requirement of such an environment. That is, without first considering psychological safety and staff wellbeing, you may risk superficial engagement or, worse, causing additional harm to staff.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY: The belief that one can share their thoughts, experiences, opinions, and concerns without the fear of being shamed, judged, punished, or humiliated.

This is essential to a culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion; without it, staff cannot engage in open or honest dialogue around issues such as inequity, discrimination, bias, or exclusion. In fact, research shows the benefits of a diverse workforce are only achieved if there is psychological safety – without it, diverse teams actually show poorer performance than homogeneous teams ([Bresman & Edmondson, 2022](#)).



Reflect: Is Your Workplace Psychologically Safe? ([atwork, 2022](#))

- Do I feel safe bringing my ideas and inputs into team discussions?
- Is asking members of my team for help welcome?
- Are members of this team able to bring up problems and tough issues?
- Are my unique skills and talents valued and utilized by members of this team?

A WORD OF CAUTION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

To avoid misinterpretation or unintentionally using it in opposition to an equitable environment, it is helpful to clarify what psychological safety is NOT. That is, *it is NOT a shield from accountability*, nor a buffer for people to distance themselves from their place in inequitable or exclusionary systems.

Notably, it can be difficult for staff of dominant social groups to face how they benefit from [white supremacy culture](#). They may, in turn, misuse psychological safety as a means of avoiding a topic that makes them feel uncomfortable. But psychological safety does not mean you will always feel comfortable, and it is not a tool to avoid conflict or difficult subjects. In fact, in a psychologically safe workplace, staff should feel they can give and accept feedback and challenge the status quo without retaliation ([Diversity Factor, 2021](#)).

Also, 'safety' is a subjective experience. It may require different solutions to feel psychologically safe at interpersonal and organizational levels, especially for people of marginalized identities, requiring us to consider historical or social context ([Agbanobi & Asmelash, 2023](#)).

Psychological Safety...

IS	IS NOT
Freedom to share thoughts & concerns	Freedom to say anything you want
A space where people feel a sense of support	A space free of any inner discomfort
Having leaders who do not permit bad behavior	Leaders taking a hands-off approach
Taking measured risks & admitting mistakes	A space where everything is tolerated

Whether a workplace is psychologically safe rests, in large part, on leadership. So, ask yourself:

- Do leaders meaningfully seek the voices and opinions of others across all dimensions of diversity?
- Do they navigate conflict, manage resistance to change, and model behaviors they want to promote?

Additional Resources on Developing Psychological Safety

- [What is Psychological Safety at Work? How Leaders Can Build Psychologically Safe Workplaces](#), Center for Creative Leadership
- [Making AHS a Psychologically Safe Workplace: A Toolkit for Managers](#), Alberta Health Services
- [Three Ways to Create Psychological Safety in Health Care](#), Institute for Healthcare Improvement

USING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

An equitable workplace must be both a psychologically safe and trauma-informed space, particularly when broaching topics of inequity. When we bring up issues of inequity, discrimination, identity, and so on, we may open wounds of trauma for people. If a trauma-informed approach is not taken, you risk causing additional harm, resurfacing trauma, and opening wounds without healing. While discussions on trauma-informed approaches are not within the scope of this toolkit, leaders are encouraged to learn more about what trauma is, how it manifests, and strategies for trauma-informed policies and practices at the [Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice](#).

EQUITY AND STAFF WELLBEING

Each principle of an equitable workplace identified in this section influences staff wellbeing, and efforts to advance equity at work have the potential to reduce burnout and improve employee health. In fact, according to a Gallup study, employees are 43% to 57% less likely to report feeling burnt out when they feel they are treated fairly, respected, accepted, and valued ([Hedrick & Maese, 2022](#)).

However, not only does unfair treatment and experiences of bias or discrimination contribute to poor staff wellbeing and burnout ([Kearney et al, 2022](#); [Hedrick & Maese, 2022](#)), but efforts to address such inequity can actually worsen wellbeing if not done thoughtfully. For example, be aware of *'diversity fatigue'* or the "emotional exhaustion or burnout that can result from engaging in DEI efforts for an extended period of time" ([Bavarde Consulting & Management, 2023](#)). This can arise from increased workload required of DEI efforts, the emotional toll of addressing difficult topics like inequity, and a lack of perceived progress.

Establishing a Common Language

When it comes to equity at work, the importance of establishing a common language from the start cannot be emphasized enough. We often assume we are all talking about the same thing when using words like diversity, equity, and inclusion when, in reality, we may define such concepts much differently. Staff need a shared vocabulary and conceptual clarity "to establish a vision for equity and to begin to articulate priorities for moving forward with the implementation of equity" ([Benoy, 2020](#)). This lays a foundation for conversation and is the starting point for understanding the problem and path forward. While this toolkit offers suggestions on how concepts are used here, it is recommended that LHDs engage in meaningful conversations across staff to develop a shared understanding of what concepts mean to them and their department. You can find definitions for some of the terms critical to building equity at work in [APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS](#).

Understanding Race and Antiracist Organizations

Increasingly, organizations are emphasizing becoming antiracist and focusing efforts on racial equity. Antiracism refers to going beyond being "not racist." it is the process and conscious decision to take action to end racial inequities in our daily lives, actively challenging racism & working to change the policies, practices, and beliefs that perpetuate racism ([NMAAHC, n.d.](#)).

Why Start with Race?

LHDs focused on becoming antiracist do so not because other groups are not marginalized, but in recognition that “the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities has been baked into government, and that racial inequities across all indicators for success are deep and pervasive” ([GARE, n.d.](#)).

Leading with race is seen by some as a chance to bring a framework to action, along with tools and resources, that can be applied to other areas of marginalization. While some strategies aimed at racial equity differ from those aimed at equity in other areas, a racial equity framework that is clear in the levels of oppression and the current and historical realities of inequities has applications across other marginalized groups. And as LHDs grow in their ability to address racial inequity, they become better equipped to transform systems impacting other marginalized groups ([GARE, n.d.](#)).

While we reference antiracism in this toolkit, an equitable workplace extends beyond racism, so we will not focus exclusively on antiracism. However, leaders and staff are encouraged to learn, reflect on, and consciously work toward antiracism. To begin to support that, visit the resources below to help familiarize yourself with the concept and how it might be applied in your own efforts.

Additional Resources on Antiracism

- [Talking About Race, National Museum of African American History and Culture:](#)
Examines the levels of racism that exist, what it means to be antiracist at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels, and questions to reflect on personally and among others.
- [Anti-Racism: Take Action to Confront and Reject Racism, Stanford:](#)
Defines antiracism, steps to help you move from your ‘growth zone’ to become an anti-racist, how to speak up and act against racism and discrimination at work, and what questions to reflect upon.
- [Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization, Crossroads:](#)
Outlines the phases organizations take in becoming anti-racist, from an exclusionary institution to a fully inclusive anti-racist multicultural organization in a transformed society.

Finally, beyond a shared language, staff must also clearly understand the “why” behind efforts to build equity in the workplace, how they and their role fit into those efforts, and the historical and contemporary underpinnings of inequity both broadly and locally. This will be covered more in [Section 5](#).

Create a Vision for Equity

As LHDs begin this work, it can be beneficial to first create a vision for equity from which subsequent goals and actions can be implemented, as such a vision provides the overarching motivation, or ‘north star’, for actions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Casting a vision specific to internal equity efforts defines, for all staff, what you aspire to achieve as well as a future in which everyone can envision themselves. Once understood and defined, visions should be documented in a statement that relates to the team or department and referred to regularly. For more on how a vision plays into an LHD’s overall equity action plan, visit [Section 3](#).

STEPS TO DEFINING YOUR VISION

1. Convene equity champions or teams and brainstorm on the following questions:
 - *What are our hopes and goals connected to our work to increase equity in our workplace?*
 - *What concrete actions would we like to take to achieve our hopes and goals?*

****These questions can also be run by affinity groups such as those discussed in [Section 5](#).**
2. Group answers into themes and select a core group of individuals to craft an initial vision statement based on those themes. Ensure the statement supports the LHD's overall mission, vision, and strategy. In doing so:
 - Keep it brief and straightforward.** It should be simple to understand and easy to recall.
 - Specify, but do not constrain.** It should capture your ultimate outcome but not define a single strategy for achieving it. Instead, it should allow for multiple routes to the desired outcome and promote stakeholder teamwork.
 - Make it motivating.** It should be about a goal the entire team is enthusiastic about achieving.
 - Avoid becoming too detailed.** Write it down with room for revisions. Since it is hard to predict what will occur in the future, keeping it broad ensures it will remain relevant.
 - Write about your identity.** The most effective vision statements discuss who you are as an organization or department and who you hope to become.
3. Test the vision with staff and solicit feedback. Ask them to paraphrase the vision in their own words and compare responses for discrepancies which indicate a lack of clarity and the need to revise.
4. Present the vision and test results to the group of equity champions and gain consensus on it.
5. If you haven't already, involve senior or executive leadership to secure commitment throughout.
6. Create a plan to communicate the vision to the rest of the organization or department.

EXAMPLE EQUITY-SPECIFIC VISION STATEMENTS

The examples below illustrate the different ways LHDs may approach creating vision statements:

"Clackamas County is a place where people thrive, have a sense of safety, connection, and belonging, so that everyone is honored and celebrated for the richness in diversity they bring." ([Clackamas County](#))

"To build and sustain a workforce reflective of the many unique cultures, voices, backgrounds, ideas, and talents of the residents and communities we serve." ([NY Department of Labor](#))

"Safety, trust, and belonging." ([Multnomah County](#))

"Dane County as a community with equal access to opportunity and a County organizational structure that is rooted in equity and inclusion, revealed through hiring, contracting, and service delivery." ([Dane County](#))

Conclusion

Building an equitable workplace requires widespread change – from culture and norms to policy and practice – and, in the sections that follow, you will learn strategies for how that may be done in your own LHD. As you move forward, remember that what this work looks like will differ across LHDs. But regardless of the setting, making progress toward the core principles of an equitable workplace will require patience and perseverance as well as a commitment to continued learning, growing, and change.

Key Resources

The following are resources LHDs can refer to for more on equity and an equitable workplace:

- [Advancing Health Equity: Guide to Language, Narrative and Concepts](#), American Medical Association
A toolkit that offers guidance on language for promoting equity, explores how narratives matter, and provides an additional glossary of key terms.
- [Government Alliance on Race & Equity \(GARE\)](#)
A national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Their site is full of resources for government entities to use in their own work to advance equity.
- [Governing for Equity: Implementing an Equity Lens in Local Government](#), ICMA
A report with lessons on practices for advancing equity, summarizing the results of the Governing Equity Project.

ASSESSING WORKPLACE EQUITY

A foundational step in building an equitable workplace is understanding where you are – *what is going well, where there is room for improvement to focus your efforts, and whether those efforts are working*. Assessments, therefore, are critical to gathering valuable information from those within the department to make informed decisions that can advance the principles of an equitable workplace.

To support Local Health Departments (LHDs) in that, this section will:

- Describe the importance of assessing the current state of a workplace and identify tools to engage in such assessments.
- Provide guidance on how to conduct an assessment.
- Explore considerations for analyzing results.

Reasons to Assess Equity

- Understand Your Starting Point
- Build Urgency & Buy-In
- Give Direction for Effective Efforts and Strategic Planning
- Track Progress
- Maintain Momentum
- Ensure Accountability & Transparency

Why Assess the Workplace?

LHDs do a great deal of work collecting, analyzing, and acting on both quantitative and qualitative data on disparities among communities, the inequities contributing to those disparities, and the inputs and outcomes of their work. But what about the inputs and outcomes of their work within the workplace – from fairness and accessibility in processes and policies to staff attitudes and experiences? We don't inform our external work or policies based on anecdotes or assumptions, possibly filtered through our own biases, so why would we with our internal work?

Assessing the state of your workplace can and should be used to guide the direction of equity, inclusion, and antiracist efforts, build urgency among staff, and garner support for institutional and interpersonal change. Without assessing, you may not know what efforts to take or if the efforts you do take have made meaningful change. And as we will discuss further in [Section 3](#), data from assessments can be important tools for holding people accountable, and for building equity into long-term and strategic plans.

Steps for Successful Workplace Equity Assessment

- Clarify the purpose of and objectives for the assessment and articulate these to staff.
- Depending on the purpose, decide what questions the assessment will answer and how.
- Determine where and how results from the assessment will be stored and who will have access and responsibility for analysis.
- Conduct the assessment(s) using multiple approaches or sources of data.
- Plan for action and accountability based on findings.
- Provide transparent follow-up of assessment results and next steps to staff in a timely manner.
- Regularly measure progress and engage leaders and staff to update actions as needed.

Developing a Workplace Assessment

When it comes to building an equitable workplace culture, data plays an important role in understanding current practices, experiences, and perceptions of the workforce, and across specific groups within the workforce. However, it is essential to consider the type of data collected and ensure vanity metrics aren't being used to paint a picture that doesn't adequately convey the reality. It's not enough to simply measure diversity; equity is much more elusive and harder to measure.

Ultimately, what you choose to assess should depend on the questions you want to answer. Clearly understanding the purpose of an assessment, whether based on department goals or specific equity-focused initiatives, should be the first step in developing an assessment, including before collecting any data. Therefore, careful planning and preparation are critical to success ([Toolkits for Equity in Scholarly Publishing Project, 2021](#)). However, examples of common metrics organizations may use to assess if the workplace is equitable include ([Jourdan, 2023](#); [Vulpen, n.d.](#); [Zheng, 2023](#)):

- Demographics across organizational levels
- Internal mobility (promotions, transfers)
- Employee experience measures or indexes
- Funding and/or resources dedicated to DEI
- Pay equity and compensation benchmarking
- Turnover and retention rates across groups
- Complaints and grievances reported
- Participation in DEI initiatives like trainings, employee resource groups, or committees

Not all organizations track all of these metrics, and this list is not exhaustive. While ideally organizations monitor many of them, limitations exist and prioritization may be needed. Perhaps you opt to begin with a few priority areas to measure based on what is already being collected by the department and expand the metrics you monitor over time. Remember, building an equitable workplace is a journey.

To support LHDs in preparing to conduct an assessment, **APPENDIX B: DEVELOPING A WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT** includes guidance in beginning to think through an assessment and ensure clarity on the purpose, objectives, and overarching questions you want to answer through it.

Types of Assessments in the Workplace

Type	What It Looks Like	When To Use It
Staff Surveys	<p>A systematic questionnaire tool used to gather self-reported feedback from staff to evaluate the overall workplace environment, staff satisfaction, areas for improvement, & so on.</p> <p>They can gather a wide breadth of information from many people, and result can be both quantitative & qualitative. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Survey • Employee Satisfaction Survey • Maslach Burnout inventory • Equity Competency Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get an organization-wide picture of attitudes, competencies, & structures that indicate workplace equity & capacity to advance equity (BARHII, 2010). • To build a baseline for further assessment or direction of efforts when just starting off. • To develop priorities for staff capacity & improving organizational functioning. • To hear from all staff, including those who may not typically have a voice in planning and decision-making.
Focus Groups	<p>A guided discussion led by a neutral facilitator focusing on gaining insight on a specific topic, issue, or initiatives that is better suited for conversation than for a survey.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contextualize survey or quantitative results by revealing perspectives underlying data. • To generate new solutions & actionable ideas to address identified issues.

Section 2: Assessing Workplace Equity

	Depending on the purpose, groups can be of the same team/position or be representative of teams/positions across the organization. Ideally, they should have no more than 12 employees at a time (Boatman, n.d.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a safe space for staff to have conversations with each other about specific topics or factors impacting their work (BARHIL, 2010).
Staff & Manager Interviews	<p>A structured conversation aimed at gathering the perspectives & experiences of employees. Often conducted by HR, senior staff, or even a 3rd party. The type of interview will depend on the goal, but some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay interviews and exit interviews. Assessment-specific & follow-up interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather context for findings of other assessments directly from staff or leaders. To develop an in-depth sense of organizational strengths & areas for improvement, typically in conjunction with other assessments. To gain insight into existing efforts & provide space for staff to reflect.
Internal Document Review	<p>Extracting & reviewing key internal documents & work products to identify areas of strength, existing capacity, areas to improve capacity, & benchmarks for future work. Examples of documents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic plans, proposals, HR policies, program materials, communications, training documents, budget documents, & performance plans (BARHIL, 2010). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To get a strategic & operational analysis of existing policies, practices, & efforts & assess whether an LHD's written materials and work products align with advancing equity. To address any biased or discriminatory language or practices that may exist. To answer questions about institutional commitment and capacity to address inequity.
HR Data Analysis	<p>A systematic collection & evaluation of relevant HR data typically conducted by HR leaders or external consultants. Examples of data that may be reviewed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographics, recruitment data, turnover & retention, absence & leave data, advancement, performance evaluations, & compensation records. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify areas of disparities such as workforce composition, hiring, promotions, & employee development. To conduct a pay equity analysis. To gain quantitative data points for case building & ongoing metrics.
Equity Audit	<p>A comprehensive, structured analysis - often by a 3rd party - of an organization's culture, policies, practices, & outcomes to gain insight into both assets & areas of inequity. It is more time & resource intense than other assessments & takes a holistic approach to examine the entire organization's ecosystem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify, across the organization, strengths & areas of improvement to implement strategies. To examine whether policies, practices, & culture align with the values of equity & promote or inhibit fairness.

Example Assessment: Workplace Climate Survey Questions

On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), respond to the following questions:

"My current supervisor or manager..."

- Treats everyone on the team fairly.
- Keeps me informed about things I should know.
- Takes prompt action to address inappropriate behavior that comes to their attention.
- Handles disagreements effectively.
- Is responsive to my ideas, requests, and suggestions.
- Is held accountable for ensuring all employees are treated fairly.

In my current department...

- Employees have equal access to learning and development opportunities.
- Promotions are based on fair and objective criteria.

In the past year...

- I have felt like I belong here.
- I have felt that my unique attributes and backgrounds are valued.
- I have hidden or downplayed certain aspects of my identity to avoid unfair treatment or harassment.
- I have felt free to express my opinions about work-related matters.
- I felt there were negative consequences for me if I reported unfair treatment at work.
- Co-workers typically listen respectfully to my views about work-related issues.

To see another example of how one LHD approached assessing workplace equity, visit [APPENDIX H: CLAY COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER CASE STUDY](#).

Combining Multiple Methods of Assessment

Additional Assessment Resources and Examples

Curious what other LHD assessments have looked like? Below are some examples:

- [Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Annual Organizational Assessment for Equity Infrastructure](#)
- [City of Asheville's Equity and Inclusion Assessment Report](#)
- [Snohomish County DEI Assessment](#)
- [LHD Organizational Self-Assessment Addressing Health Inequity, BARHII](#)

Below are additional resources on conducting specific types of assessments:

- [10 Tips for Staff Satisfaction Assessment Interviewing](#), NIH
- [Inclusive Demographic Data Questionnaire](#), The Diversity Movement
- [How to Conduct Stay Interviews](#), SHRM
- [Self-Assessment for DEI](#), Inclusive Dubuque
- [Pay Equity Analysis: The Essential Guide](#), AIHR
- [Racial Equity Competency Survey](#), Living Cities
- [Making Exit Interviews Work](#), SHRM
- [Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool](#), MP Associates
- [How to Conduct Employee Focus Group](#), AIHR

There are many ways to assess the workplace and whether it aligns with the goals and values of equity and inclusion. But to get the complete picture, consider using multiple methods and combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. For example, focus groups or interviews can provide important insights and context for responses gathered in a staff survey or HR data analysis.

Consider each of the principles of an equitable workplace, for instance. Below you can see how using multiple types of assessments can give you much greater clarity on the current state and areas for improvement. Depending on the focus, multi-method approaches may look something like this:

- ❑ **Diversity** – Gather HR data on the current demographics of staff (including by position, level of seniority, exemption) and examine the extent to which they represent the community. Conduct a review of hiring practices to identify potential areas of bias that may help or hinder diversity.
- ❑ **Inclusion and Respect** – Conduct a workplace culture survey to assess employee experience and sense of psychological safety. Follow up on results using focus groups or more targeted interviews. Conduct stay and exit interviews, ensuring representative participation in interviews.
- ❑ **Accessibility** – Conduct an internal document review using an equity lens (more on that in [Section 6](#)) to determine if policies and procedures are encompassing with regards to access. Ask staff in a survey if they have what they need to fully participate in the workplace. Conduct focus groups, asking about perceptions and experiences to gain context on your review and survey.
- ❑ **Fairness** – Gather and segment HR data on who has been given promotions or performance reviews. Conduct a pay equity analysis. Engage in policy review and/or interviews to assess how opportunities for advancement are determined. Track complaints and grievances over time.
- ❑ **Transparency** – Evaluate levels of trust, perceptions of communication, and clarity of decision-making among staff in an employee experience survey. Review existing communication channels and information access and engage in interviews to follow up on that review.

Evaluating Burnout as an Outcome and Balancing Measure for Equity Efforts

Recall from **Evaluating Burnout as an Outcome and Balancing Measure for Equity Efforts**

Recall from [Section 1](#) that burnout is an issue of inequity ([Gallup, 2022](#)). So, evaluating burnout can act as an important outcome and balancing measure for equity efforts – e.g., are your efforts or initiatives reducing burnout or are they inadvertently increasing burnout, specifically among staff with marginalized identities?

A leading measure of burnout is the **Maslach Burnout Inventory** (MBI). While helpful in capturing experiences of burnout, it does not capture contextual factors contributing to it, so it may be helpful to conduct this survey in conjunction with another type of assessment. Moreover, including demographic data can also help identify differences across groups.

A WORD OF CAUTION: MBI was initially developed and validated in Western cultural contexts, which may limit its cross-cultural applicability ([Squires et al., 2014](#)). Because of this, the MBI may not fully capture the unique cultural manifestations or experiences of burnout across diverse populations.

- **Accountability** – Include survey question(s) to assess staff perceptions of leadership with open-ended text boxes. Analyze the portion of director-level and above leaders who have DEI-related responsibilities embedded in their evaluation, promotion, or pay (Zheng, 2023).

Conducting a Workplace Assessment

Once you have an idea of the purpose and objectives of your assessment, identified your metrics, and developed a plan for collecting the data, there are several considerations for how to go about conducting the assessment.

Engaging Staff in Implementing Assessments

In addition to leadership buy-in, which is discussed further in [Section 4](#), engagement of staff and other key stakeholders is critical to success. However, one potential issue with assessments such as satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews is that, if not done with intentionality and staff engagement, they may fail to capture the experiences and feedback of all employees, including those from marginalized groups. Staff may not feel comfortable sharing their feedback, not believe it will be taken seriously, or worse, fear negative repercussions if answered honestly ([Zilinski, 2022](#)).

Promote the Purpose

Organizations sometimes fail to create a shared understanding of the purpose of assessments in the workplace. But spending time on the front end doing so through multiple, bi-directional communication streams and having a clear vision for the assessment can go a long way in enhancing staff engagement.

Combatting this requires trust, which is built on experience ([Wilkie, 2018](#)). Leaders must demonstrate to staff, through action, that they are not just being heard, but that their feedback is used in making decisions. So, for workplace assessments, engagement at the start can go a long way and

should continue throughout the process. That means engaging staff across the department in building the purpose of and process for assessment, promoting it to other staff, and identifying the next steps based on findings. And LHDs may have existing committees or workgroups that can be tapped into for engagement and feedback – but they should ensure members of those groups represent staff from across the department.

Snohomish County: Engaging Staff in the Assessment Process

Snohomish County's Executive formed its Equity and Inclusion Task Force in 2018, with staff representing departments across the county. Early work of the Task Force was to conduct and compile an assessment and recommendations to inform the county's executive of DEI measures that are currently working well and areas where gaps exist. The strengths-based assessment focused on the county as an employer and its internal operations. Through meetings with leaders and employee focus groups, the group presented findings on leadership, recruitment, training, and retention ([Snohomish County, 2019](#)).

Read the full report at [Snohomish County DEI Assessment](#).

Another approach LHDs, especially large ones, can take to ensure staff engagement is to create a team dedicated to implementing and supporting assessment. These teams may ([BARHII, 2010](#)):

- Review, adapt, and approve assessment tools.
- Communicate process and purpose department wide.
- Promote it among staff and address questions.
- Communicate to staff and partners on assessments.
- Ensure representation for interviews or focus groups.
- Manage any internal document review processes.
- Provide recommendations based on findings.

When engaging staff in implementation, be sure there are staff effective in motivating their peers, something that has been found to be even more important than having organizational power or being an equity 'expert' when it comes to engagement ([BARHII, 2010](#)). Representation of the department across the team supports trust among other staff in the assessment.

Additional ways to boost staff participation in assessments include ([Lyons & Sterns, 2022](#)):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate regularly. | <input type="checkbox"/> Make it as easy as possible for staff to participate. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasize and guarantee confidentiality if collecting personal information. | <input type="checkbox"/> Show staff their feedback is valued and meaningfully used in decision-making – showing action from past assessments. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be strategic about the timing and type of questions to avoid survey fatigue. | |

Analyzing Results of the Assessment

Analyze Respondents

Post-assessment (or even during implementation, if possible), evaluate participation rates by different groups to determine if they represent the department. If collecting demographic or other respondent information, ask:

- *Are there certain groups of employees who did not respond?*
- *If so, why might that be, and how can we better understand how to implement assessments differently moving forward to gain feedback from all staff?*

Analysis Using Employee Demographic Data

Segmenting data by gender, race, tenure, and so on can shed important light on how different employees experience the workplace and whether policies, practices, or norms have differential impacts on those employees. However, LHDs must ensure they are using data in a way that maintains confidentiality. So, when using demographic data to analyze and report findings, consider the following:

1. **Use thresholds and grouping when necessary:** Set thresholds for reporting disaggregated data across demographic subgroups to ensure data cannot be used to identify employees. For example, you may want to set a minimum of 10 respondents for any subgroup analysis ([Frederick, 2021](#); [Lyons & Sterns, 2022](#)). This threshold can be increased if confidentiality remains a concern.

2. **Group data into broader categories if needed:** While this may dilute the ability to report the unique experience of staff, this can help protect confidentiality while still offering some meaningful insights. For example, though not as granular, if you have 4 Black, 4 Asian, and 2 Alaska Native employees, consider a grouping of 'BIPOC' for protection when reporting out data.
3. **Consider intersectionality:** We all have multiple identities that intersect to impact our experiences at work. So, for instance, did you examine the experiences of staff of color in supervisory positions, or did you only examine race and seniority separately?

A note on qualitative data and ensuring confidentiality: Qualitative data can contain rich information about assessment participants that may be sensitive in nature. Emphasizing and guaranteeing confidentiality and protecting staff from negative repercussions is critical. Moreover, if the workplace lacks psychological safety, consider the use of a third-party consultant for gathering and analyzing qualitative data in particular. For instance, it can be beneficial to have a neutral facilitator conduct focus groups or interviews, analyze the information collected, and report their findings back to the LHD in a way that protects confidentiality of participants. This way, themes can be pulled across participants, with similar considerations given to the use of demographic or other identifying data listed above.

Recognize and Reconcile Limitations on Data

Data – quantitative or qualitative – is not perfect and there may be limitations to the kind of data you can collect and the analyses you can conduct. This is often the case when only quantitative data is collected and assessed, and you may not always identify numerically a problem that exists. As LHDs develop plans for, and analyze their assessments, work with HR and leadership to understand how data is being, or can be collected, and reflect on the following considerations for overcoming potential limitations in data:

- **Use a multi-assessment approach.** Numbers don't tell the whole story. Qualitative data, such as surveys and focus groups, can give context to numbers, show patterns quantitative data cannot, and even identify variables leaders or implementation teams weren't aware of when initiating the assessment ([Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.](#)).
- **Ask if your data is nuanced enough.** Perhaps there is no apparent difference in reported sense of belonging among Black staff or among female staff, but have you looked at Black female staff? Have you looked at tenure or supervisory status? Consider what you may not be looking at.
- **Consider whether your methods may have missed certain staff** and what approaches you might use to better reach them.
- **Consider whether you are asking the right questions** or if you need to take a step back and re-evaluate the problem. Again, work closely with leaders and HR to understand how data is being, or can be collected to help guide your strategy and reflect your questioning.

Story from the Field: County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Health

It may be the case that an LHD does not have all the data they need to fully make sense of HR numbers or employee experience. That is what happened at Los Angeles' Department of Public Health, where the workgroup conducting an internal equity assessment recognized the limitations of initial requested HR data in being able to give them a complete picture of the workplace and fully understand certain potential disparities that were showing up in data, specifically around hiring, promotions, and departures. So, instead of making recommendations based on incomplete results, one of their recommendations following their initial assessment was to request additional data they felt were key to examining equity in their workplace but had not previously been analyzed. Additionally, the group researched best practices in equitable hiring and retention to learn what could be implemented as the data analysis is being sorted out. From this research, the workgroup put forth a set of recommendations to look further into potential practices like blind reviews, stay interviews, and developing equitable hiring guides for supervisors.

Present Findings from Assessments

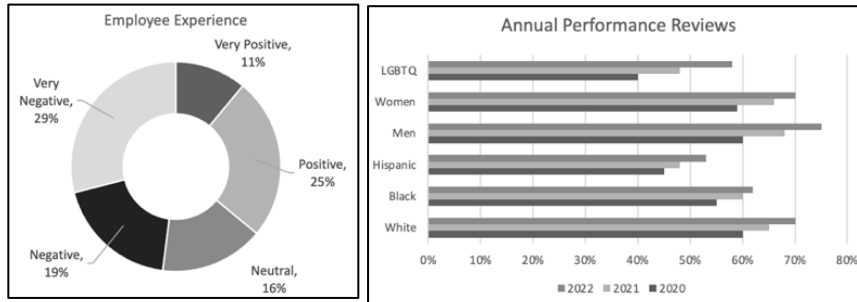
Transparency of findings is important, and results should be shared with staff in a timely manner. Staff want to know their feedback contributed to real change at work. In fact, progress on such actions is a key predictor of future engagement ([Efron, 2023](#)). To that end, leaders should create a strategy for communicating findings, next steps, and progress on those steps – for example, using use cases for how feedback led to specific improvement ([Zielinski, 2022](#)). When staff see the impact their feedback has had and that there is progress on actions that have come from it, they will be more likely to share in the future.

As you share findings, make sure any use of demographic data won't inadvertently identify staff members. Just like communicating population health with communities, how you present data matters. Employees see themselves in that data, and it should not be presented just as numbers on a slide or piece of paper. Consider the following when presenting data on equity in the workplace:

- Contextualize the data to help meaningfully interpret findings.
- Highlight intersectionality where data allows.
- Communicate disparate outcomes or findings with sensitivity to the experiences of staff.
- Always propose actionable recommendations to address areas of inequity.
- Consider hosting small group discussions to allow staff to react to the results and provide additional thoughts and feedback.

VISUALIZE RESULTS

Representing results visually can highlight patterns and trends and better convey your message to staff. It can also be highly motivating to visually track and present progress (or setbacks) over time. Given your LHD's capacity, consider developing a data dashboard that can be updated on a regular basis. Below are two examples of how results may be visually represented to convey findings to staff.



REFLECT ON RESULTS

Once you have the results of your assessment, how do you make meaning out of them? In their LHD self-assessment resource, [BARHII \(2010\)](#) includes a number of post-assessment reflection questions intended to help LHDs make meaning out of findings and move them into action. Some of those questions to consider include:

- What surprised you?
- What confirmed what you already suspected and what challenged your perceptions?
- What do you want to know more about?

- What is glaringly missing that you had expected to see?
- Given these findings, what do you see as your role in the process of making change?
- Based on these results, what opportunities exist to build upon for action?
- For non-management staff: Are there any questions or considerations you would like to direct to the executive or management team?

BENCHMARK RESULTS

Benchmarking means comparing your results – whether that is to other organizations or your own past performance. Regardless of how, benchmarking can help put results into context and further identify areas for improvement. It can also be highly motivating for leaders and staff to have tangible goals to strive toward. Consider benchmarking your results, whether that is on a national level, an industry level, or internal level (e.g., over time, by team, or across departments).

Tips for more meaningful assessment efforts:

- Don't just focus on lagging indicators – look at measuring actions that lead to your goals too.
- Gain context for results & get specific enough to capture some of the nuances of staff experiences.
- Have regular follow ups, engage staff in decision-making, & communicate how feedback is (or is not) being addressed or considered.
- Always plan on taking action and, in deciding what to assess, consider the purpose first.
- Take advantage of a workplace assessment's potential to spark dialogue.
- Be mindful of other department efforts such as other surveys in which staff are being asked to participate to avoid over-loading participants.

Prioritize Findings to Drive Action

Assessments of equity in the workplace can and should be used to understand the current state of equity, gaps that exist in the workplace, and opportunities to improve fair treatment in a diverse and inclusive environment. This will require careful analysis and prioritization of results to allow for them to be used in driving the direction of action moving forward.

To inform how to proceed, teams, such as those described in this section as well as in [Section 3](#), should gather results from assessments, along with additional information and leader and staff feedback on results. If not already done, these findings can then be grouped based on recurring themes to be prioritized. There are several techniques to prioritize, and LHDs are encouraged to visit NACCHO's [Guide to Prioritization Techniques](#) to learn more.

In prioritizing, focus on the impact something has (or will have) on building an equitable workplace or an LHD's capability to foster an equitable workplace. In considering this, recall the 6 principles of an equitable workplace identified in [Section 1](#): *Diversity, Inclusion and Respect, Accessibility, Fairness and Anti-Discrimination, Transparency, and Accountability*.

Conclusion

Committing to equity is one thing, but honestly examining if your LHD – from its processes and practices to staff experience and perceptions – is consistent with the principles and characteristics of an equitable workplace is another.

Do we know if or where inequities exist? Are policies or practices getting in the way of creating the environment we want? Do experiences in the workplace differ across employees? Are efforts to address those differences working? We cannot answer these questions without meaningful and regular workplace assessments. Such results can and should stimulate internal dialogue and inform forward movement, making it a critical and continuous step in building an equitable workplace. So, use this section as a foundation for moving forward to actionable steps and strategies explored throughout the rest of this toolkit.



Assessment Reflection

- Why now? What is the impetus for taking on the assessment now?
- Where does this assessment fit among other departmental priorities?
- How is the data gathered being woven into decision-making?
- Who is interpreting the data?
- How are we communicating our efforts and demonstrating results?
- Are we reaching all employees we want to reach with the assessment?
- How is confidentiality, safety, and authenticity being fostered?

*Adapted from [Toolkits for Equity in Scholarly Publishing Project \(2021\)](#)

Key Resources

- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Organizational Assessment Tools: A Resource Guide](#), Brandeis University
A snapshot of instruments used to assess an organization's status and progress toward DEI goals, including an overview of the benefits and limitations of each assessment.
- [Baseline Organizational Assessment for Equity Infrastructure](#), CA Department of Public Health
A streamlined tool created by CDPH's Office of Health Equity to collect data on current equity infrastructure and use it to inform future planning for equity.

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN TO SUPPORT WORKPLACE EQUITY

To build an equitable workplace, Local Health Departments (LHDs) must place equity at the center of their core goals and infrastructure to achieve substantive and sustainable change – without that, equity and inclusion efforts risk ending up being purely performative or put to the side. This often comes in the form of an equity-focused action plan (sometimes also referred to as an implementation roadmap). Creating such a structure to operationalize equity in the workplace includes defining a vision and measures of success, crafting long-term strategies, collaboratively developing those into an action plan that yields the desired outcomes, and fostering accountability throughout.

To support LHDs in developing a foundation for workplace equity efforts, this section will cover steps to:

- Use findings from workplace assessments to determine next steps or actions.
- Develop an action plan that aligns with assessment findings and advances workplace equity.
- Include mechanisms of accountability designed to prioritize workplace equity and inclusion.

Key Structures to Support an Equitable Workplace

- Individuals leading and accountable to developing structures for equity efforts.
- A clear vision for workplace equity efforts
- Relevant SMARTIE objectives and strategies for equity efforts.
- Metrics or indicators to measure progress towards equity goals.

Championing the Work Through an Equity Workgroup, Team, or Committee

The first step to planning and taking action in support of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace is to identify who will take the lead in catalyzing, communicating, and championing the work.

In [Section 2](#), an assessment implementation team was discussed as important to the success of a workplace assessment. However, a workgroup, team, or committee dedicated to moving from assessment to action may be made up of different stakeholders aligned with the different responsibilities and needs of the work. Similarly, as is outlined in [Section 6](#), policy-specific review teams may also be made up of specific stakeholders with certain strengths, interests, and positions more suited to review and recommend policy change. In some cases, these may be subcommittees of an overarching equity workgroup, each dedicated to specific focus areas of the work.

GARE provides guidance on developing and using a Racial Equity Core Team as the leaders for coordinating, designing, and organizing racial equity plans and activities. While focused on racial equity, the overall function, strategy, and expectations in their guide can be applied broadly across equity teams.

Find the resource at GARE: [Racial Equity Core Team](#)

Developing structures for change requires stakeholders willing to champion broader action planning and implementation across a department or jurisdiction. Key functions of such an equity group may include: Coordinating the design and implementation of an action plan; Cultivating new leadership and employee engagement; Capacity-building by disseminating skills, tools, and education; Communicating equity across the LHD; Collecting and analyzing data, and; Championing efforts and celebrating success ([Keleher, 2018](#)).

Story from the Field: Equity Change Teams at Washington County, MN

At Washington County, each department has an Equity Change Team. Members work together to:

- Support the DEI Strategic Implementation Plan.
- Create department Equity Work Plans that catalyze equitable systems change in policy, procedures, and decision-making in government.
- Cultivate and develop new equity leaders.
- Build capacity to disseminate learning, skills, and tools for operationalizing equity.
- Champion equity projects and celebrate and sustain success.
- Communicate about equity across the department and management levels.
- Solicit input and feedback from the community.

All teams then come together as the Unified Equity Change Team ([Washington County, n.d.](#)).

There are multiple approaches to forming such teams ([Keleher, 2018](#)). In a top-down approach, executive management may designate a team (often of others in management-level positions) to coordinate the efforts. In another approach, unit directors or leaders may select representatives to be part of the team. And finally, an invitation may be put out to all employees to nominate themselves or others to be part of the equity team, workgroup, or committee. Regardless of the approach, consider including the following:

- Any staff whose role may be dedicated to equity efforts or employee engagement.
- Employees with a commitment to equity, subject matter expertise, and strengths in motivating or energizing others around equity efforts.
- Leaders who can sponsor and be vocal champions of the work.
- Representation across the department, City, or County.

APPENDIX H: CLAY COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER CASE STUDY also provides an example of how one LHD used a charter and logic model to create the structure for their own internal equity team.

An important note: *those who benefit from the status quo may be less likely to engage in efforts to change it.* At the same time, the responsibility of championing equity should not fall only on the shoulders of staff who already bear the brunt of inequity and exclusion. Efforts should be made to balance the burden and meaningfully engage across the LHD. This work is often an addition to the regular responsibilities of staff, so leaders must consider how to integrate it into expected duties and work hours. For instance, LHDs may resource it (in time and cost) as professional development, write the work into grant opportunities and other proposals, or advocate to align internal equity efforts and engagement with the overall department-level budget.

Developing an Equitable Workplace Action Plan

Section 2 describe how to translate assessment findings into priorities for action. Once findings are prioritized, groups should work to create a plan of action that outlines in depth the ultimate vision and goals for an equitable workplace, how they will be achieved, and how progress will be measured. By specifying these, an action plan helps to operationalize and build commitment and clear accountability to the work. Such action plans specific to equity are typically separate, though related, to an LHD's overall strategic plan, and often captures the following:

Vision

At the beginning of the action plan, outline the ultimate motivation, or 'north star', you aspire to achieve by engaging in your equity efforts.

Goal

Include the overarching goals that the plan will advance, document, and measure progress towards. For example, "Enhance impactful learning and professional development for all staff".

Objective

Describe specified and measurable steps set forth to help achieve the identified goal and operationalize the action plan. Each goal will have its own set of objectives.

Key Strategies

List the specific actions that will be or are being taken to support the accomplishment of the objective identified above. Each objective will have its own set of key strategies and, as a living document, new strategies can be identified as the plan is reviewed. Consider including who the owner or single point of accountability will be for each strategy and when it will take place.

NACCHO's Developing a Local Health Department Strategic Plan: A How-To Guide

While equity action plans are often separate from overall department strategic plans, there are many overlapping components and processes. This guide to strategic planning offers suggestions, strategies, and accompanying samples and worksheets, all of which can also support action planning.

Story from the Field: City of Philadelphia – Individual Department DEI Plans

At the City of Philadelphia, departments develop individualized DEI plans to document, measure, and communicate progress on Citywide DEI goals, and to create infrastructure that supports greater transparency, accountability, and impact. Plans are expected to be updated each fiscal year, and are reviewed by the City's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ([City of Philadelphia, 2023](#)).

All plans outline each Citywide DEI goal and objective as well as the key strategies (or actions) within the department to support objectives along with specific performance indicators to measure progress towards each of the DEI goals. Plans are then released to the public for transparency and feedback.

Below are just two examples of DEI plans from different departments in the City established for 2023:

- Department of Human Services Plan: [City of Philadelphia's DHS DEI Plan 2023](#)
- Department of Public Health Plan: [City of Philadelphia's DPH DEI Plan 2023](#)

Performance Measures/Metrics

Define how you will know objectives have been achieved or progress has been made toward them. Include any relevant data in conjunction with the plan. This can include numerical indicators (e.g., how many employees were promoted to mid-management positions) and non-numerical indicators (e.g., whether a mid-management strategy was developed to promote career pathways or not).

Create a Vision for Equity

As described above, equity action plans typically start off with a vision statement, which provides the overarching motivation, or ‘north star’, for actions related to equity. Casting a vision specific to internal equity efforts defines what you aspire to achieve and a future in which all staff can perceive themselves. Once defined, visions should be documented in a statement that relates to the team or department, shared widely, and referred to regularly. Find more on creating a vision statement in [Section 1](#).

Develop Goals and SMARTIE Objectives

Goals for an action plan should outline the *outcomes* you want to achieve to move in the direction of an overarching vision. Objectives, on the other hand, are more *specified and measurable steps* that need to be taken to achieve a goal.

With any goal and objective, but particularly those related to building an equitable workplace, incorporating equity and inclusion into the definition helps address disparities and ensure fair impacts across an LHD ([The Management Center, 2021](#)). And doing so allows LHDs to better operationalize their commitment to equity and ensure it is anchored by tangible and actionable steps and strategies.

But, goals and objectives do not inherently consider equity and inclusion, meaning the group or team putting together an action plan should ask the following questions to ensure the objectives they collaborate to define are structured to address both equity and inclusion ([TMC, 2021](#)):

- Will achieving this objective lead to greater inclusion and increased equity?
- What potentially unexpected repercussions or disparate impacts might this objective have (especially along lines of power and identity)? For whom?
- How might this objective be changed to either mitigate unexpected or disparate impacts and/or make equity and inclusion more explicit?

So, LHDs should strive to move from SMART objectives to SMARTIE objectives:



- Specific – specify what is to be achieved, by how much, and by when.
- Measurable – make sure the objective can be measured.
- Attainable – set objectives that are feasible.
- Relevant – align objectives with the mission and vision of the agency.

- ❑ Time-bound – establish a timeframe for achieving the objective.
- ❑ Inclusive – bring the full workforce, but especially marginalized groups, into the process or decision-making (while avoiding tokenism).
- ❑ Equitable – address systemic inequity and oppression.

For guidance on developing more equitable and inclusive objectives, see [APPENDIX C: DEVELOPING EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE OBJECTIVES](#).

Additional Resources on Goals and Objectives

- [Guidance for Writing Effective Objectives and Supporting Activities: Make it SMARTIE](#), CDC
- [SMARTIE Goal Template with Step-by-Step Instructions](#), The Management Center

Identify Equitable Workplace Strategies

Once you know what you want to do to advance equity (i.e., your objectives), you must define how you will do it. This is captured in the strategies outlined in an action plan, and they are critical to accountability and commitment to the plan. While they can range from extremely broad to very particular, to build commitment to action, the more precise the strategy the better ([GARE, 2017](#)).

To identify possible strategies, teams can consider researching promising practices in the field, engaging subject matter experts (internally or externally), using findings from assessments and stakeholder engagement, and examining some of the strategies described in this toolkit, to name a few approaches. Strategies may then be prioritized and weighed by their *values* (what is its impact on equity), *leverage* (how likely is it to result in change), *reach* (is it feasible), and *specificity* (does it have a timeline and specific deliverables) ([GARE, 2017](#)).

Types of strategies for promoting an equitable workplace may include:

- ❑ Providing training and developing skills (e.g., offer skills training in cultural humility).
- ❑ Enhancing certain services and support (e.g., start a mentoring program to drive equitable succession planning).
- ❑ Modifying access, barriers, and opportunities (e.g., offer tuition support for pursuing advanced education or certifications).
- ❑ Altering the outcomes for specified actions (e.g., provide incentives or bonuses for achieving stated goals).
- ❑ Changing or refining policies (e.g., change business policies regarding performance evaluation).

Story from the Field: The City of Philadelphia – Department DEI Plans

The City of Philadelphia identified one of the Citywide objectives for department DEI plans as “Require and sustain a workplace culture of inclusion that values and promotes respect, belonging, and opportunity for all.” Some of the key strategies outlined to achieve that objective included ([City of Philadelphia, 2023](#)):

- Ensure executive leadership and managers receive training on supporting a diverse, inclusive work environment.
- Identify barriers to inclusive culture through employee assessment or engagement surveys and develop specific strategies to promote inclusiveness.
- Track the number of formal complaints or informal concerns related to Equal Employment Opportunity or DEI matters, including contacts with the Employee Relations Unit.
- Promote participation in Citywide and internal/departmental Resource Groups or affinity groups.

Define Clear Performance Indicators

Objectives should also have clear performance indicators to monitor progress and promote accountability toward their achievement. [Section 2](#) also discusses common measures for workplace equity efforts, but it is important to know here that there are several types of measures that can be used as performance indicators in an action plan, and the use of multiple types for a single objective can ensure LHDs are not only achieving outcomes in the long-term but are on track for achievement in real-time.

Types of Measure	What They Are	Why Use Them	Examples
Process Measures	Measures that reflect the way a system and its processes work to deliver the outcome you want.	They can encourage certain behaviors that help to facilitate changes in culture. They are usually directly measurable and immediately available, making them trackable and easily targeted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of managers who have participated in training in the last year. • The percentage of employee handbook policies reviewed and revised for equity impact. • Number of employees engaging in an Employee Resource Group.
Outcome Measures	Measures that reflect the results of a process.	Ultimately, they can tell you whether your efforts achieved its stated goals. They can tell you whether your processes have a positive impact and help to build a case for sustaining or scaling your efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of grievances or complaints received regarding discriminatory behavior in the workplace. • Retention rates disaggregated by demographic data. • Percentage of employees who report feeling safe in the workplace.
Balance Measures	Measures that are tracked to ensure change or improvement in one area does not unknowingly impact another.	They recognize that in a system, changes to one part of the system can impact or cause problems in other parts of the system. They enable you to monitor any unintended consequences of your efforts (good or bad).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of positive or negative staff experience and trust following equity training to ensure no additional harm. • The impact of engaging in equity committees on staff workload and experiences of burnout.

Promote Accountability, Ownership, and Responsibility

Accountability is one of the core principles of an equitable workplace identified in this toolkit. It refers to “creating processes and systems that are designed to help individuals and groups to be held in check for their decisions and actions” ([Racial Equity Tools, n.d.](#)), turning commitments to equity into tangible change.

While all employees hold responsibility for their contributions to an equitable workplace, accountability for a foundation and structure that supports equity falls first on leadership. Accountable leaders take full responsibility for and ownership of their decisions, communicate and share valuable information, and champion for resources to successfully advance equity. Further discussion on leadership for equitable workplaces is discussed in [Section 4](#), but it is highlighted here to illustrate the importance of building accountability among leaders directly into the structures of equity work.

Strategies to build accountability into equity action planning and implementation include:

- Communicate objectives & strategies with staff early & often.
- Make commitments measurable through performance indicators.
- Establish regular check-ins & transparent report-outs.
- Tie performance evaluations to achievement of or progress toward equity objectives.
- Use an equity dashboard that is visible to all staff and stakeholders.
- Engage employees and feedback in the process.
- Keep equity priorities a regular agenda item.

An important piece is also holding leaders accountable to making efforts and dialogue free from any fear of retaliation. If staff fear retaliation for giving honest assessments of and recommendations for workplace equity (which often involve pointing out what may not be going well), they may be less likely to engage. And creating this environment requires a commitment to psychological safety, as discussed in [Section 1](#). Moreover, in putting the foundation for an equitable workplace in place, leaders must be held to the task of recognizing their own biases, how they may be benefiting from inequitable systems, and what they bring (especially in terms of power and bias) to the work and their engagements. To read more on this, visit the toolkit’s [APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICIT BIAS AT WORK](#).

Conclusion

Clear and documented vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators are the internal structures that enable LHDs to operationalize their commitment to an equitable workplace and move ideas to actions. Developing such structures in the form of an action plan should be based on what is known about the workplace through assessments, engagement of leaders, staff, and other stakeholders, as well as research on promising practices in the field. And, as this section

Additional tips for a successful workplace equity action plan:

- Act with and create a sense of urgency.
- Celebrate successes, big or small.
- Start with some quick wins.
- Build in accountability mechanisms.
- Update plans at least annually.

described, delegating responsibility for an action plan to a dedicated workgroup, team, or committee can ensure the work is prioritized.

The components of an equity action plan are the foundation for effective efforts toward building an equitable workplace, and the sections that follow will discuss how to implement some of the strategies that may be outlined in an action plan – from professional development to policy change.

Key Resources

- [A Leadership Guide for Promoting Race Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace](#), WholeSpire
Includes Toolkits and Assessment Resources to start a Race Equity and Inclusion Journey along with Reports and Academic resources that give concrete data on why this work is needed in the workplace.
- [Racial Equity Core Teams: The Engines of Institutional Change](#), GARE
Describes what a racial equity core team is, how they are formed, and how they can drive change. Though focused on racial equity, the components are applicable across equity work.
- [Developing a Local Health Department Strategic Plan: A How-to Guide](#), NACCHO
A guide providing a basic framework for developing a strategic plan, including the most commonly found elements in various strategic planning models.

LEADERSHIP FOR AN EQUITABLE WORKPLACE

The foundation for an equitable workplace is active leadership participation, buy-in, and commitment. Without it, Local Health Departments (LHDs) may find their efforts to advance equity ineffective and potentially contribute to greater frustration and burnout among staff. This means the expectations for leadership engagement must go beyond declarations and public statements against inequity. There must be a visible and aligned commitment across executives, boards of health, directors, managers, and supervisors, all working towards sustainable systems-level change and a future where equity is embedded in day-to-day action and decision-making.

Leaders – whether their roles are directly related to equity or not – are key to communicating vision and goals, connecting them to the work and mission of the organization, and managing change. They should each be champions for equity, modeling fair and inclusive behaviors, creating space for authentic relationships, amplifying diverse experiences and perspectives, and leaning into conversations on inequity. Ultimately, transforming LHDs from exclusionary to equitable requires leaders who prioritize and actively support re-envisioning the workplace, re-examining internal operations, re-defining norms, and advocating for change where ultimate authority lies. Know that, while it is certainly beneficial to the work, LHDs do not need a dedicated equity-specific position to move this work forward. And even for LHDs who have dedicated staff, all leaders should prioritize and engage in the work.

To support LHDs in building up the capacity of leadership to advance equity, this section will:

- Define adaptive leadership for an equitable workplace.
- Discuss what it means to champion equity to other leaders and move toward action.
- Describe strategies to manage change and hold space for courageous conversations.

Leadership for an Equitable Workplace

- Continuously reflect, build awareness, and act to mitigate bias – including their own.
- Model behaviors that demonstrate the core principles of an equitable workplace.
- Invest in people, actively coaching, building capacity, and identifying opportunities for growth.
- Foster a learning organization, empowering others and bringing their authentic self to work.
- Encourage, recognize, and reward people for their contributions.
- Communicate effectively, maintain transparency, and solicit feedback from those they lead.
- Lead, navigate, and manage change, including helping others overcome resistance.
- Readily engage in conversations around issues of inequity and exclusion.

Deepening Self-Awareness as a Leader

One of the first steps toward being a leader for equity is to deepen your understanding of your own social identities, power, privilege, and biases. This act is necessary for authentic engagement of oneself and others in building an environment that embodies the core principles of an equitable workplace. So, before continuing

on in this section, leaders (at all levels) are encouraged to engage in self-reflection of their own identities, power, privilege, and biases as well as ask for feedback to further build their own self-awareness.



Self-Reflection Questions for Equitable Leadership

What aspects of your identity afford more power and privilege in society? How might that shape your experience in your current position and your approach to leadership?

Can you identify an implicit bias you've observed in yourself? If not, consider taking an [Implicit Association Test](#). What life experiences may have influenced that bias?

Consider how and with whom you allocate your time at work. Are there particular individuals you tend to assign tasks, invite to meetings, or have casual conversations?

Who might you seek feedback and/or mentorship from to support recognizing and countering your biases?

All LHDs are encouraged to support leaders in engaging in structured training and education focused on equity, bias, power, privilege, and oppression. For more on leadership and bias, visit [APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICIT BIAS AT WORK](#).

Using an Adaptive Leadership Approach to Equity

Leading for an equitable workplace means ensuring everyone has fair access to opportunities, supports, and advancement and believes they are respected, valued, and belong. What makes this challenging, and what leaders may fail to consider, is that issues of equity and inclusion are *adaptive, rather than technical, challenges* that cannot be solved by a single action or initiative, such as a public declaration, policy update, or equity training. It requires often cross-cutting and cultural changes and actions.

Building Equitable Workplaces: An Adaptive Challenge

While the nature of most organizational problems is a blend of both [technical and adaptive](#), each tends to lean further in one direction than the other. And knowing where on that continuum a challenge lies will help leaders champion, catalyze, and advocate for more effective solutions. So, understanding issues of inequity as adaptive widens the depth and breadth with which leaders must approach challenges and support others through change.

That is because the root causes of adaptive challenges tend to be more value-laden, complex, and ambiguous, making them easier to deny and more likely to stir up people's emotions ([CCSI, 2021](#)). Their solutions often come from the collective, expand across places and people, challenge attitudes and norms, take longer to impact, and be more likely to face resistance in the process.

Being an Adaptive Leader

If equity work is adaptive work, then it requires an *adaptive leadership approach*. Given the nature of such challenges, tackling them requires leaders to remain curious, mobilize and motivate others, manage change and resistance, and organize and orient people to a mindset and environment that fosters learning, growth, and discovery. In doing so, the table below illustrates some of the key behaviors of such a leadership approach ([Adaptive Leadership Foundation, n.d.](#)).

Getting on the balcony	Step back from the daily grind to gain a broader perspective & objectively assess the big picture. This process of "getting on the balcony" (Northouse, 2019) allows leaders to understand a situation better, communicate it to others, & take more informed actions.
Identify Adaptive Challenges	Distinguish if the challenge(s) is technical or adaptive. Then put the issues on the table, recognizing competing priorities & uncomfortable changes that may be required in how people act & interact, the practices & processes they adhere to, & what values we espouse.
Regulate Distress	Create a safe atmosphere to talk about challenges. Offer direction & protection, & manage conflict productively. Provide direction & support staff to recognize the need for change but not be overwhelmed, to manage distress effectively, & to feel empowered through change.
Maintaining disciplined attention	Equity challenges demand ongoing attention & feedback. Prioritize the human aspect of work, like checking in with one other, building relationships, & learning from lived experience. Cultivate a new culture by incorporating vulnerability & transparency.
Give the work back to the people	Empower others to lead change & gather a coalition of capable & motivated allies. Grant autonomy & space to staff to allow them to determine how to tackle tasks at hand. Listen to marginalized voices & allow them to work toward a solution.
Protect voices of leadership from below	Protect those who raise hard questions or expose things that cause distress, particularly when they may be speaking beyond their authority. Listen to & be open to those who may be marginalized or disagree with the dominant group or formal authority, even when it is difficult & time-consuming.

For more on adaptive leadership, visit the [Adaptive Leadership Foundation's Resource Page](#). NACCHO also offers robust offerings of adaptive leadership training, which can be viewed on our website – [NACCHO Adaptive Leadership](#).

Managing Change in Equity Efforts

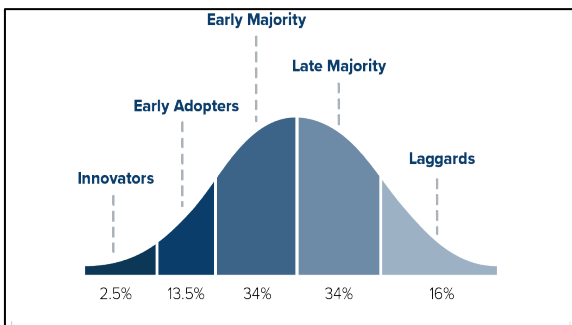
Implementing strategies to build a more equitable workplace that result in changes to the organizational culture may be difficult for some staff to fully adopt or accept – in many cases, these efforts will go against the status quo, whether in behaviors, policies, practices, or norms. So, when approaching equity efforts, leaders should equip themselves with knowledge and skills to manage change in their LHD or team. Some of the major models of change that are helpful to be familiar with include:

- [Lewin's Change Management Model](#) and its "unfreeze-change-refreeze" stages of change.
- [Kotter's 8-Step Change Model](#) and its comprehensive approach to organizational change.

While there are many models of change and change management, across all of them is the need for *systems thinking*, recognizing change never occurs in isolation, particularly with adaptive challenges. One change often has ripple effects across an organization and the people in it, but strategic change management approaches can help facilitate adoption and acceptance of new ways of being and working.

Overcoming Resistance to Change

While having a structured approach to change is crucial, everyone reacts differently to change, as the Diffusion of Innovation model in the image below illustrates. There will naturally be earlier adopters of change (such as those eager to join equity workgroups) and those who are later adopters of change ([Recchia, 2022](#)). This does not imply one speed of adoption is right or wrong, but rather illustrates the fact that, with any change, there will be resistance, and leaders wanting to make change toward an equitable workplace must be prepared to manage that and understand where to focus their attention.



*Image Source: [Recchia \(2022\)](#)

Resistance from later adopters of change may come from people's comfort in the status quo, a lack of training or knowledge to feel they can be successful in the change, poor communication of what the change is, mistrust in leaders implementing the change, or a history of poor outcomes with previous change efforts. So, understanding what is behind resistance can be one of the first steps in overcoming it, along with ensuring staff feel their concerns are considered and any past transgressions in equity efforts will not be repeated. When people feel their voices are heard, they are often more likely to engage in change.

Create Awareness of the Need for Change

Explain the why for change, issues in the current state, & why it is no longer effective or sustainable, using evidence to support the need for change.

Reduce Resistance

Acknowledge concerns & create a safe environment to express opinions without consequences.
Have conversations, listen, & validate people's feelings.

Establish a Sense of Urgency

Communicate the risks of not changing & benefits or positive outcomes of change.
Create a sense of urgency using different communication methods based on audience.

Provide Support for Change

Offer support staff may need to adapt to change.
Inform & engage staff via ongoing communication & feedback channels.
Mentor & coach staff to navigate change.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO OVERCOME RESISTANCE

Recognizing there will be some degree of resistance in efforts to build a more equitable workplace, there are practical steps leaders can take to “unfreeze” people from the status quo to become open and ready for such change. The diagram below illustrates these steps, adapted from Kurt Lewin’s model of organizational change ([Connelly, 2023](#)).

When ‘unfreezing’ from the status quo to make change toward equity, also consider the following to break down resistance and make positive impacts in the workplace:

- **All staff must see their role in the bigger picture.** Highlight how every position is connected to and contributes to an equitable workplace – from operational to programmatic to administrative.
- **Include equity as a regular agenda item at leadership, staff, or team meetings.** Consistently report on actions taken, lessons learned, progress made, and ways to get involved.
- **Make allyship a key component of your approach** and involve passionate and motivating staff at all levels to advocate on its behalf. Use meetings and events as opportunities to educate and inform everyone, encouraging them to be part of solution planning and delivery.
- **Share success stories.** Storytelling of positive, relevant, and real-world impacts due to changes that have happened can inspire others to engage in change efforts.
- **Provide or advocate for coaching for other leaders** who may not be on board or who may only be exhibiting performative commitments to equity.

Finally, to maintain momentum for change, celebrate the small wins, build the behaviors you want to see into rewards and recognition, align efforts with existing strategic priorities, and remain agile and willing to correct course as needed.

Additional NACCHO Resource on Change Management

For more, visit NACCHO’s extensive eLearning module series and guidebook on change management with tools, resources, and real public health examples that health departments can use to adapt to their needs – [Change Management for Public Health](#)

Moving from Acceptance to Action

Working through resistance to gain buy-in from leaders and staff is one thing. But moving from acceptance of change to active willingness and engagement in the actions needed for change to occur is another. It is not enough to sign off on an equity initiative or make a public statement of support. Concrete action is needed to move leaders and LHDs from ‘talking the talk’ to ‘walking the walk.’

To move people toward action, those championing change for an equitable workplace can:

- ❑ **Lead by example**, demonstrating strong leadership commitment and exemplifying desired behaviors. All staff should clearly see leaders prioritizing the work.
- ❑ **Empower staff and other leaders**, making sure they have the necessary supports, resources, and coaching or mentoring to feel confident in what is being asked of them.
- ❑ **Create a culture of continuous learning**, providing opportunities to share experiences in taking action, learn from each other, troubleshoot issues, and emphasize psychological safety in trying new things.
- ❑ **Create a sense of ownership**, including those being asked to act in decision-making, conveying trust in their capacity to act, and building in mechanisms of accountability.

Thinking Strategically to Build Buy-In

Tackling adaptive equity challenges and building an equitable workplace cannot be accomplished by a single leader, or even a small group of leaders. While that is often where momentum is born, according to John Kotter, an expert in leadership and change, the majority of an organization’s management must be bought into a change to support success in the long-term ([Mind Tools, n.d.](#)). Moreover, those championing change for an equitable workplace may not always be the ones with ultimate decision-making authority. But rather than letting efforts stall if certain decisions are not within your direct locus of control, equity champions must consider how to use interpersonal and advocacy skills for change, building the case and communicating effectively across the organization, but particularly to those in positions to affect change. This includes, at the start, championing requests and brainstorming strategies to ensure there is time for staff – from managerial to frontline – to truly engage in the work.

So, to push for an equitable workplace – whether policy, practices, or norms – Ronald Heifetz, founder of the Center for Public Leadership, believes adaptive leaders must have *political thinking skills*. This includes strategies in identifying and engaging stakeholders and asking the following ([Odongo, 2020](#)):

Create and maintain personal relationships	"Who needs to come on board with this change and what do they need to know?" This includes developing alliances and keeping opposition close.
Recognize and honor loss	"Should things change, what do they risk losing?" Perhaps it's familiar behaviors, safe ways of being, or their sense of competency.
Understand their values	"What do they care deeply about? What are their values?"

While 'political savviness' tends to elicit negative connotations, such as behaving in inauthentic or self-serving ways, this is a misconception when it comes to championing and leading for equity. When used properly, it is about genuinely maintaining and maximizing relationships (not just when you need something), following through on commitments, communicating openly and sincerely, managing up when appropriate, and meeting challenges head on – all to create positive change for the organization as a whole, rather than for the individual ([Braddy & Campbell, 2020](#)).

Holding Courageous Conversations

As key players in building buy-in and momentum for change toward an equitable workplace, leaders are also critical role models in fostering dialogue that is necessary for an environment free from discrimination, exclusion, and injustice. Consider, as a leader, the following scenarios:

- How will you navigate dialogue around privilege in the face of white supremacy culture?
- How might you create space for staff to bring up tough issues during one-on-ones?
- What might you say to initiate conversations when you witness others (including those senior to you) engaging in biased or discriminatory behaviors, such as bias on a hiring committee?
- How might you respond when traumatic events happen in the community that go against equity?

All of these are scenarios related to inequity that leaders in the workplace may face, and all are opportunities to create a brave space to engage in courageous conversations that move the needle in the direction of equity. Leaders have a responsibility to establish an environment and model behaviors that support such conversations and foster both social awareness and trusting connections.

Initiating Conversations in the Face of Inequity

When topics such as identity, interpersonal and institutional bias, discrimination, power, and oppression come up in conversation – whether in large team meetings or one-on-one supervision – it may feel uncomfortable and challenging, particularly in the moment and especially in the workplace. There may be fears of offending or even retaliation for speaking up. However, in the face of these, leaders can use several strategies to better model behaviors and engage in uncomfortable conversations that create a safer and more inclusive environment for everyone.

SPEAKING UP AGAINST BIAS OR DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

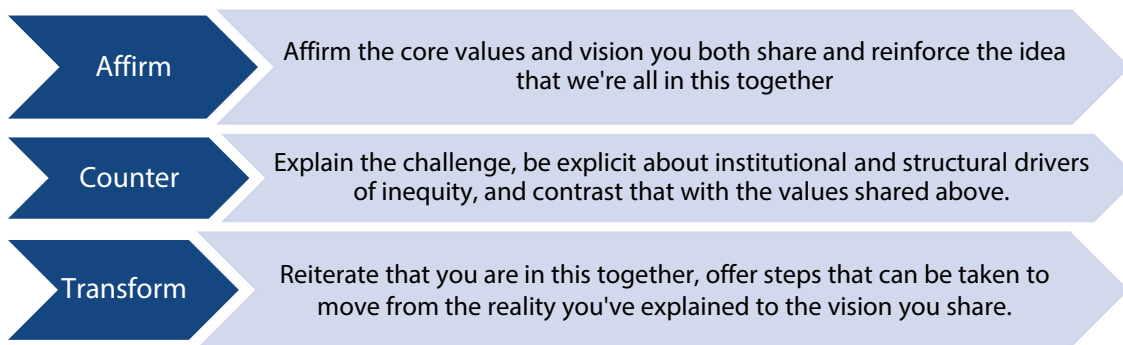
Microaggressions and other implicit or explicit shows of bias and discrimination are not uncommon in many settings, including at work, and regardless of intent, the impact is harmful for targeted individuals or groups. These are instances in which leaders have a role in not only addressing potential harm but opening up discussion for learning and growth. To support that, leaders can become familiar with *calling in and calling out* harmful words and behaviors by exploring [APPENDIX E: CALLING IN AND CALLING OUT](#) to learn more about what these strategies are and when to use them.

Regardless of approach, initiating conversations in the face of bias or discrimination requires courage and vulnerability, and, when power dynamics are at play, may be most effective in an environment where work has been done to build *psychological safety*, as is described in [Section 1](#).

USING THE AFFIRM-COUNTER-TRANSFORM FRAMEWORK

Again, when someone says something that is not aligned with the principles of an equitable workplace, holding space for courageous conversations can be daunting, yet should be anticipated in a workplace that seeks to embody equity. But with a structured framework, leaders can more easily initiate such conversations that actively build awareness, understanding, growth, and movement.

One framework for holding such conversations is the **ACT framework** ([GARE, 2018](#)). This research-informed 3-step framework promotes communication that moves people toward advancing equity.



EXAMPLE 1: Using the ACT Framework

MYTH: If we don't see color or race, we see people as the same.

STATEMENT: "I don't see color."

1. **Affirm:** I know it's tempting for us to think that if we believe in equality for all people and racial justice, we'll become blind to people's race.
2. **Counter:** But while we're working toward a future where race doesn't predict outcomes, trying to ignore it can do more harm than good, ignoring ongoing racial inequities. And it's not possible for any of us to be colorblind – race and racism are powerful factors in shaping each of our identities and experiences.
3. **Transform:** We all, moving forward, should try to be more explicit about race rather than ignoring it to help us in advancing racial equity, which I know is something we are all striving for in our work.

*Adapted from [GARE \(2018\)](#)

Regardless of the framework or approach, to have courageous conversations around equity:

- Reflect on the biases, power, and privilege you bring to the situation.
- Stay informed and educated on equity and inclusion topics and have a shared language.
- Be clear about creating a brave space, emphasizing respect and confidentiality.
- Listen to understand, not to speak.
- Validate the experiences, feelings, and points of view of others.
- Embrace curiosity and non-judgment through active listening, asking questions, and suspending your own assumptions.
- Acknowledge discomfort, highlighting the conversation as a means for growth.
- Be receptive to feedback and show a willingness to learn.
- With permission, offer or recommend ongoing support or resources.
- As appropriate, and with permission, follow up and check in.

3 Common Errors in Difficult Conversations

- Assuming you know all you need to know.
- Hiding your feelings.
- Ignoring your own identities and how they relate to an issue.

Source: (CCL, 2023)

Leading With Vulnerability

Leaders championing an equitable workplace should be comfortable with not having all the answers, acknowledging imperfections, and being willing to take risks that might lead to failure or create positive change. However, leaders may worry showing such vulnerability will hurt their credibility. Yet failure to do so can actually contribute to distrust and disconnect among staff.

When leading with vulnerability, leaders may display some of the following behaviors:

- Admitting when they make a mistake and taking responsibility for it.
- Sharing personal stories in a way that is not self-serving but rather shows common humanity, models norms, and lets others know it is okay to open up.
- Asking for help in a way that shows they trust staff and fosters a sense of collective responsibility.
- Expressing concerns and uncertainties, admitting they do not have all the answers, and encouraging collaboration and other's experiences or expertise.
- Seeking and acting on feedback and demonstrating a willingness to learn and adapt.

Reducing the Risk of Retaliation

While leaders can create opportunities for dialogue, for staff to courageously engage and bring up tough issues or instances of inequity, it must be clear that retaliation will not be tolerated. All equitable workplaces should have transparent policies and procedures that explicitly prohibit retaliation and hold those who do retaliate accountable. Providing training to leaders on these policies as well as strategies to engage in courageous conversations can help reduce defensiveness and retaliation. When bias or discrimination is brought to leaders' attention, there should be prompt investigation with transparency for employees as well as feedback channels for staff to report on their experience and provide input for improvement. Finally, leaders can lead by example, modeling norms and demonstrating confidentiality.

Additional Resource on Communicating and Having Difficult Conversations

- ⇒ [5 Steps for Tackling Difficult Conversations](#), Center for Creative Leadership
- ⇒ [Talking About Race Toolkit](#), Center for Social Inclusion
- ⇒ [Guidance for Leaders – Engaging in Race Discussions](#), Colorado State EAP

Conclusion

Organizational culture often begins and ends with leadership ([Corley, 2020](#)), meaning dedicated and adaptive leaders committed to equity in the workplace ultimately influence the engagement of others and overall success of efforts – from the level of staff motivation and momentum to the degree to which equity is operationalized in policies, practices, and norms.

As this section outlined, leaders who champion the core principles of an equitable workplace anticipate and overcome resistance, build support among leaders and staff both above and below them, and model the behaviors to hold courageous conversations needed for an environment that is equitable, inclusive, and psychologically safe. Without leaders championing this work, LHDs will likely run into significant barriers to change.

Principles of an Equitable Workplace

- Diversity
- Inclusion & Respect
- Accessibility
- Fairness & Anti-Discrimination
- Transparency
- Accountability

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, AND ENGAGEMENT FOR EQUITY

Section 4 discussed the importance of leadership in increasing equity at work, but to succeed in their efforts, Local Health Departments (LHDs) must examine whether and how they are implementing professional development, training, and engagement for staff at all levels in a way that promotes the core principles of an equitable workplace. Doing so builds the bedrock on which all staff are supported to thrive and develop their critical capacity to affect positive change in the workplace.

As part of this, LHDs may use assessments from **Section 2** to understand current gaps and inequities in growth, advancement, and engagement as well as equity-focused training needs. They can then develop actionable goals from **Section 3** with specific strategies to address those gaps and needs, and operationalize those strategies into policies and practices, as described in **Section 6**.

To support LHDs in considering professional development, training, and engagement strategies to promote an equitable workplace, this section will:

- Describe professional development that promotes fair advancement for a diverse workforce.
- Discuss training and education that fosters awareness, understanding, and action toward equity.
- Highlight meaningful staff engagement by prioritizing time and offering safe spaces.

Keys to Equitable Growth, Advancement, and Engagement

- Ensure fair access to opportunities for internal mobility.
- Utilize professional development to encourage a sense of belonging.
- Provide staff with equity-specific education or training that is relevant and trauma-informed.
- Offer different opportunities for staff to engage within psychologically safe spaces and meet them where they are in their own equity journey.
- Think strategically about maintaining engagement in equity efforts as a priority.

Equitable Professional Development and Advancement

PHAB Measure 8.2.2 A:

Provide professional & career development opportunities for all staff.

Providing professional development opportunities is a requirement for public health accreditation that should guide LHDs, with activities ranging from education assistance (e.g., tuition reimbursement), continuing education and certification, mentoring, professional coaching, and engagement in professional associations (e.g., serving on committees) (PHAB, 2022). While these activities are important to staff growth and success both within and beyond their positions, across all of them are opportunities for inequity and exclusion to arise. In fact, without careful examination, professional development can perpetuate unfair and biased advancement in an organization,

resulting in disparities in both internal mobility and turnover ([Mercer, 2020](#)). On the other hand, when implemented with equity in mind, professional development opportunities can contribute to fair, inclusive, and accessible workplaces. Therefore, to build equity at work, LHDs must implement systematic strategies to ensure their professional development promotes the core principles of an equitable workplace.

Fairness in the Performance Evaluation Process

Often at the core of professional development and advancement is the use of performance reviews, evaluations, or appraisals, which hold several potential benefits. They can engage employees in career development, clarify expectations, establish two-way communication, and assist in determining promotions and gaps in skills and knowledge. However, many studies have revealed how bias and inequity are frequent factors in such reviews. For example, staff from marginalized racial groups are more likely than White staff to have inaccuracies as well as their personality noted in performance reviews ([Williams et al. 2021](#)), and women are more likely than their male coworkers to receive reviews that are briefer, contain vague language, less praise, and less useful advice ([Campbell, 2022](#)). However, there are strategies LHDs can take for conducting fair and transparent performance evaluations that are consistent, objective, and inclusive, reducing the likelihood of bias and discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EQUITABLE PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

- ❑ Avoid open-ended or vague criteria for evaluation, instead using structured or standard performance evaluation questions in an approved form or tool that specifies the competencies the LHD values and requires evidence to justify ratings ([Mackenzie et al. 2019](#)). For example:

Higher Potential for Bias	Lower Potential for Bias
"Describe how the employee's performance met your expectations."	"Identify three specific outcomes that are evidence of the employee meeting the identified performance criteria."

- ❑ Since open text boxes in performance review forms can invite bias, guide responses using a checklist of questions to help reviewers consistently reference specific and predetermined information ([Mackenzie et al. 2019](#)). For example:

Guiding Questions	YES	NO
Did you collect the following evidence or data for this employee over the past 6 months?		
While writing your evaluations did you consider the following (previously agreed criteria)?		

- ❑ Train managers on how to use any performance review or appraisal forms or tools, including implicit bias trainings as well as discussions on how different types of biases may present themselves in reviews ([Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2022](#)).

- ❑ Consider including a self-assessment for staff to complete in conjunction with their evaluation, having employees review their job descriptions and how they met the stated expectations. Self-assessment serves as a way to work against any self-imposed biases, which are more common in underrepresented or marginalized groups ([Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2022](#)).
- ❑ In reviewing the process, ask if definitions of success are too narrow or drawn from attributes of dominant groups currently in positions of power, which amplifies bias and inequity ([Correll, 2017](#)).

Access to Professional Development and Advancement Opportunities

When employees feel they have equitable opportunity to advance and believe the system for advancement is fair, they report being happier with their career, plan to stay at their organization longer, and are more likely to recommend it as a great place to work ([Lean In, 2019](#)). However, inequity in access to advancement and professional development opportunities often exists, and organizations must make intentional efforts to ensure such access is fair, unbiased, and transparent.

A fair and unbiased review of an employee's performance is just one step in equitable professional development and advancement. The bulk of the work involves ensuring subsequent access to support and growth opportunities is fair and aligns with the needs and goals of each employee.

When considering whether access to opportunities is equitable, reflect on the following:

- Are there eligibility criteria for certain professional development opportunities and, if so, is that criteria clear and based on objective, rather than subjective, factors?
- Do opportunities accommodate different abilities, learning styles, work arrangements, and scheduling?
- Is information about available opportunities consistently and effectively communicated to all employees, regardless of role, department, network, or background?
- Do we understand the individual experience and barriers for certain groups in advancing?

MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

One area where access often unfairly differs across groups is in access to support and mentorship from experienced employees and leaders. For example, studies indicate that women are 24% less likely than men to get advice from senior leaders, and 62% of women of color say the lack of an influential mentor holds them back ([Lean In, 2019](#); [Bagati, 2009](#)). This lack of mentorship can lead to inequities in the advancement into leadership roles and overall satisfaction of staff in an organization. But there are intentional efforts, such as formal programs, that can be implemented to address these inequities and ensure mentors are a source of equity and inclusion.

Workplace mentorship programs are initiatives that pair experienced employees with less experienced or junior employees to facilitate personal and professional growth,

In 2021, the Louisiana Department of Health launched their own mentorship program. A year into implementation, they shared the following lessons learned and things they would do differently ([Baddour & Scalco, 2022](#)):

- Don't overlook promotion of the program.
- Utilize senior leadership to identify mentors.
- Consider one mentor for multiple mentees.
- Link the program to other LHD initiatives.
- Let employees help shape the program and gather and respond to feedback.
- Get leadership buy-in to support funding and promotion.
- Find champions to promote and recruit who can use personal touches with staff.

skill development, and knowledge sharing. What differentiates these programs from simply having a mentor (in or out of the organization) is that there is often a structured framework, intentional pairing, organizational support, clear objectives, and focused learning. Such programs can be integral components of workplace equity efforts as they can help develop a sense of belonging among staff, increase diversity in management and leadership, and support employees, including those from marginalized groups, advance in their careers ([Kantor, 2021](#)).

Without structure or intentional pairing such as in these programs, research shows 71% of executives choose to mentor employees who are of their same gender or race ([Gross, 2023](#)), which can serve to perpetuate inequities given that executives are most frequently white males. Some organizations have addressed this through “[bridge mentorships](#)” that intentionally connect individuals with different social or cultural identities. However, mentees, particularly those from marginalized groups, may prefer mentors of the same gender, race, ethnicity, or other identity. So, needs and preferences of mentees (and mentors) should be taken into consideration when determining how to best pair individuals in a mentorship program. Moreover, LHDs should consider how an intersectional lens may be applied to pairing as well. For more on starting a mentorship program, visit [Together’s 5-step guide to start a mentoring program](#).

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Succession planning is another area of advancement that must be considered for its equity impacts. The potential for bias and inequity in this process is significant and can contribute to the disparities seen across industries in who holds leadership positions in an organization ([Ratanjee & Green, 2018](#)). For example, [Gartner, Inc \(2019\)](#) identified the following issues as preventing diverse, equitable, and inclusive succession planning:

- Presence of implicit biases, including the tendency to prefer staff with similar identities as oneself.
- Unconsciously changing or emphasizing the weight of criteria to be more favorable toward a preferred individual and giving attention to just one achievement or attribute.
- A lack of ownership or accountability among leaders for broadening the talent pool or pipeline.
- Assumptions among leaders that they are already aware of all potential successors.
- Not considering the skills and qualifications necessary for the role prior to entering into succession conversations or discussing succession candidates.

Being aware of these potential pitfalls can help LHDs avoid perpetuating disparities in who has access to leadership roles. In doing so, succession planning should be transparent and inspire trust in the process, rather than allowing it to exist in a “black box” ([DiLorenzo et al, 2022](#)). When done with equity at the forefront, succession planning can be key to building a diverse leadership pipeline, which can have ripple effects on the diversity and inclusion of a workplace.

Those engaging in succession planning discussions should ask the following questions:

- Do we value different perspectives, lived experiences, and types of communication and creativity, and is that reflected in how we evaluate potential successors?
- Who has been overlooked as ‘high-potential’ and why weren’t these employees seen as high-potential? Are certain types of employees more or less likely to be identified as high potential?
- Do we intentionally engage diverse talent through all phases of the employee life cycle?

For more on bias, visit [APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICIT BIAS AT WORK](#).

Equity-Related Training

Building an environment that is equitable, inclusive, and supportive of a diverse workforce requires all staff to attend to and have a shared understanding of topics such as equity, inclusion, power, oppression, and bias (to name a few). And if staff are to be responsible for their contributions to such a workplace, they must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and tools. However, recall from [Section 4](#) that new ways of thinking and being often face resistance. And since equity-focused trainings encourage new ways of thinking and being, LHDs should prepare for pushback, especially if training is required. For guidance on overcoming resistance and holding space for conversations on tough equity issues, refer to [Section 4](#).

Additionally, leaders should be intentional prior to, during, and after training to build the psychological safety of the workplace, as discussed in [Section 1](#). Training spaces should be trauma-informed while also providing appropriate opportunities to face issues head on.

Identify Training Topics

The topics covered by trainings should reflect the vision and objectives of the LHD, as outlined in [Section 3](#), as well as the needs and interests identified through staff assessments. For instance, these could include competency and workplace assessments, surveys specific to gauging topics of interest, or even post-training evaluations. However, examples of overarching topics commonly covered include:

- Introduction to and making the case for DEI
- Implicit bias and microaggressions
- Power, privilege, and oppression
- Anti-racism and social justice
- Workplace harassment and discrimination
- Understanding identity and identity-specific topics
- Cultural humility and/or cultural reverence
- Belonging and allyship
- Courageous conversations

When possible, offering different types and levels of training can be helpful in acknowledging that staff across an LHD will be at different points in their journey to learning about and championing equity. Concepts may be entirely new to some, and foundational education is needed, while other staff may be ready to apply knowledge to action. Finally, it may benefit LHDs to include training that is position-specific. For example, equity trainings specific to supervisory staff may include: Formal and informal sources of power; Creating and promoting an inclusive work environment; Critical qualities of trust and accountability; Understanding workplace discrimination; Equitable management practices; and Understanding ADA and reasonable accommodation ([University of Oregon, n.d.](#)).

Mandatory or Voluntary Training?

An increasing number of organizations are making at least foundational training on DEI mandatory for staff, often with additional voluntary training as desired. However, employee engagement in equity efforts should never come down to ‘check the box’ activities, and any training should have clear intentions and relevance to the workplace for all staff and be backed up by further action. Without that, requiring training may lead to defensiveness, frustration, and distrust. If an LHD opts to make training mandatory, they may consider a phased approach such as a Phase I focusing on top-level administrators and directors, Phase II expanding to all managers and supervisors, and Phase III opening it to all employees ([Burrell & Necochea, 2020](#)). Moreover, equity champions or leaders should be open and prepared to answer questions, respond to concerns, and continuously communicate the purpose of trainings.

City of Albuquerque: Culture Change Training Initiative

Funded by a grant from W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the City of Albuquerque kicked off a training initiative in 2020, starting with a few departments before opening it up to all City employees. Partnering with community organizations and members who are leaders in the field, the training curriculum included ([City of Albuquerque, n.d.](#)):

- Introduction to Racial Equity
- Implicit Bias & Creating Change
- Introduction to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Working with Diverse Populations Inclusion Series
- Anti-Racism & Social Justice Reading Circle
- Community Conversations
- Language Access
- Lunch Dialogue Series (History, Racial Equity Vocab, & Key Racial Equity Concepts)
- People's Institute for Survival & Beyond-Undoing Racism Workshop
- Reading Data from an Equity Lens
- Cultural Competence 101
- Planning & Implementing Culture Change Strategies
- SAFE ZONE Training
- LGBTQ & Senior Citizens
- Civil Rights
- Fair Housing

In thinking of resourcing and leading trainings, departments should be encouraged to budget for training opportunities and resources, including the use of external facilitators as appropriate. Using reputable third-party organizations in the community to provide training can be beneficial, though building capacity among internal staff to provide training to all employees using scalable approaches such as train-the-trainer models of dissemination have also been successful within organizations, including LHDs. Additionally, consider bringing in local subject matter experts and nationally recognized speakers to address employees regarding specific topics.

Story from the Field: DuPage County Health Department's Cultural Humility to Cultural Reverence Program and Train-the-Trainer Approach

As part of their efforts to advance DEI, 15% of DuPage County Health Department staff completed a half-day equity session facilitated through a third-party organization and focused on creating a safe space for complex, sometimes difficult, conversations. Sessions were based on the [Cultural Humility to Cultural Reverence \(CH2CR\) framework](#), and covered core topics related to building the foundations for advancing equity in a reflective, introspective, and organic way. Following the sessions, 15 staff participants were identified, asked, and agreed to become 'stewards' for equity. These stewards engaged in 6 additional train-the-trainer sessions where they developed skills in facilitating the equity sessions themselves to other staff throughout the department, with the aim of building a more scalable, sustainable approach to internal education and advancement in equity.

Of the 15 stewards, several also worked in conjunction with the department's Quality Improvement (QI) Team to develop an implementation and sustainability plan for the CH2CR program. QI tools such as brainstorming, affinity diagrams, and focus groups were used to gain input and insight from as many stakeholders as possible.

Throughout, the department also contracted with a third party to conduct surveys of participants at different stages of the program and will use that data to measure effectiveness, uptake, and sustainability in the future.

Ensuring Meaningful Staff Engagement

Prioritize Employee Engagement

The reality is that LHDs must ensure programmatic and other responsibilities are met with the limited resources they have – both in terms of funding and staff time. Unfortunately, this can lead to both equity efforts and professional development being placed aside, especially in the face of heavy workloads. However, while it may seem like a “nice to have”, LHDs must prioritize engagement in equity efforts in the workplace, including training and growth opportunities, across all roles or positions.

In their actions for building internal infrastructure to advance equity in LHDs, [Human Impact Partners \(2017\)](#) identified the following strategies to support engagement of staff:

- Create a 90/10 or 80/20 policy whereby if staff finish their work tasks in 80-90% of time, the other 10-20% can be used on equity projects.
- Build equity requirements or expectations into staff job descriptions.
- Identify organizational inefficiencies and re-appropriate staff time and positions for equity.
- Engage staff in identifying opportunities for efficiency and equity.

Putting resources toward professional development and engagement that drive equity may require small or incremental steps along with proactive advocacy by champions to leadership. Whether the above actions are practical or not, LHDs should consider how the strategies discussed in this section fit into broader equity-focused action plans, departmental strategic plans, or agency-wide goals and metrics as a starting point for developing their own actions and creative investments in the work. Further, in building the case, champions of equity can make connections between these strategies and the needs or problems of the LHD, such as high turnover, and develop strong messages to communicate why and how development, training, and engagement are effective means of addressing such issues.

Support Engagement in Employee Affinity Groups

Another meaningful engagement strategy to promote equity is the use of affinity groups. While all employees need to come together to create an equitable and inclusive workplace, different groups must undertake different work to eliminate inequity. Only working in integrated groups can put an undue burden on employees with marginalized identities and obscure the responsibility of employees from dominant groups to do their own work. Therefore, the use of different types of affinity groups that allow intentional time and space to focus on each groups’ respective work to dismantle inequity can be a valuable part of authentic and empowering staff engagement in equity efforts ([Western States Center, 2003](#)).

While employee resource groups (ERGs) and identity caucuses are both types of affinity groups, are often used interchangeably, and can both be important to building a sense of belonging and meaningful engagement, there are some nuances as it relates to structure and purpose:

	Identity Caucusing	Employee Resource Groups
Leadership	Typically led by a skilled facilitator.	Typically employee-led and executive sponsored.
Structure	They may be formed to have counter groups across identities (e.g., a BIPOC staff group & a White staff group). In such cases, participants across identities may first gather as one to develop shared understanding around a focus area or topic, then break into respective caucuses based on identity to talk openly & honestly amongst one another about the topic, its impact, what it means to them, & how it relates to the broader organization.	They are “internal communities of workers with shared identities & interests” (Catalino et al, 2022). They can be formed around most any social identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, & veteran status as well as interests such as environmentalism. They may have volunteer or nominated leader and/or manager roles to maintain accountability to their purpose and organizing structure
Some of Their Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a safe space for honest dialogue. • Identify organization structures or processes as solutions that should address the issues discussed by the caucus. • Drive larger organizational strategy & development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a sense of belonging & community, offer opportunities to network, mentor, & talk about shared experiences & challenges. • Establish space for support & guidance they might not otherwise have in the workplace. • Collaborate or advise on equity efforts.

*Note that, though they can and should support and work in conjunction with one another, affinity groups as described in the table above are typically separate entities from the workgroups, teams, or committees dedicated to action planning, policy review, or workplace assessment described elsewhere in this toolkit.

Finally, the following components may enhance the implementation of affinity groups ([Denver PTC, n.d.](#)):

- A consistent time and space and a minimum of monthly meetings.
- Visible leadership endorsement or executive sponsorship.
- Facilitators or leaders who reflect the identities and lived experiences of participants.
- A realistic budget and clear goals and objectives.
- Ongoing counseling referrals, professional support, and opportunities for healing and action.
- Staff and manager input in determining scheduling, location, interpretation, ability, accessibility, trauma sensitivity, and power differentials prior to group activities.
- A conduit by which appropriate information is shared after meetings, particularly for caucuses.

Story from the Field: Identity Caucusing at Public Health Institute at Denver Health

The Public Health Institute at Denver Health (PHI) is a local public health agency and direct partner with Denver Department of Public Health and Environment, providing clinical care and educational opportunities to Denver residents. In an effort to create spaces in their department for more open, honest dialogue around issues of race and inequity, PHI has been using racial identity caucusing to drive organizational strategy.

Following work by equity champions to build leadership buy-in and engagement by all staff in racial equity training, champions in the department began recruiting staff from each public health clinic to engage in a monthly caucus from 3:00-5:00PM. Each begins with a large group gathering where all participants learn about a single topic together. They then separate into 1 of 2 caucuses – a staff of color caucus and a white staff caucus – both of which are led by third party facilitators. In their caucuses, participants talk with one another on what the topic means to them and what PHI can or should do differently to reduce structural racism as it relates to that topic. Appropriate information is then shared after meetings that can help influence strategy for the organization.

Story from the Field: Employee Resource Groups at the City of Philadelphia

The City of Philadelphia's City Resource Groups are driven by employees and focus on networking, talent development, and creating at least one program or initiative a year that promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace ([City of Philadelphia, n.d.](#)).

The City's Resource Groups include Asian American and Pacific Islander, Latinidad, LGBTQ+, New and Expecting Parents, Women of Color, and Young Employees. Each has an identified executive sponsor, a set recurring monthly or bi-monthly meeting date, and a clearly stated mission for the group.

Additional Resources on Affinity Groups

- [Caucus and Affinity Groups](#), Racial Equity Tools
- [Becoming an Anti-Racist Organization: Racial Identity Caucusing as a Tool in the Journey](#), Denver Prevention Training Center
- [Being Mindful of Race: Guidelines for Forming Racial Affinity Groups](#), RuthKing.net
- [A Guide to ERGs and Best Practices](#), Hummingbird Humanity

Conclusion

The strategies discussed in this section may challenge current ways of being and doing for some LHDs. But to build an equitable workplace, there must be a shift in how things are done and how resources and time are prioritized. Without that, large-scale, tangible, and sustainable change may be less likely to occur. Through such a shift, LHDs can better enable the conditions necessary for all employees to thrive, from trainings that build equity-related knowledge and capacity to processes that support a fair and diverse leadership pipeline.

Overall, LHDs should prioritize equitable participation of all staff in development and training opportunities and ensure engagement that promotes a sense of belonging and empowerment, with leadership and staff recognized and rewarded for creating such opportunities and environments. When these strategies are a key part of efforts to build an equitable workplace, measurable improvements in the workplace – from representation in leadership positions to employee satisfaction and retention – may come to fruition.

POLICIES TO SUPPORT AN EQUITABLE WORKPLACE

“Workforce policies shape how an agency interacts with its workforce and the communities it serves. While policies are only a fragment of a much larger framework, what an agency commits to in writing can have a meaningful impact on the work environment experienced by its employees” [Nicholson \(2020\)](#)

Creating and sustaining an equitable workplace requires policies and processes that align with an organization’s vision and values for equity. These policies should promote inclusion, fairness, transparency, and accountability. This is critical for two reasons: 1) Even when equity is not explicitly referenced in a policy, a policy can unintentionally and implicitly perpetuate disparities, and 2) When equity is explicitly considered in the development and implementation of a policy, it can actively promote the core principles of an equitable workplace.

Examining and implementing policies that promote fairness, inclusion, transparency, and accountability are necessary steps to creating a workplace where everyone has equitable access to opportunities and an environment that supports them to thrive rather than one with an “illusion of inclusion” ([Melaku & Winkler, 2022](#)).

To support Local Health Departments (LHDs) in using policy to build such a workplace, this section will:

- Discuss why and how policy is critical to building an equitable workplace.
- Define the steps LHDs can take to assess the equity impact of policies in the workplace.

Steps for Applying Equity to Policy

- Ensure all leaders and staff understand policy’s place in an equitable workplace.
- Develop a policy review team with a clear plan, purpose, and representation across the organization or department.
- Apply a structured equity lens when reviewing and developing workplace policies, including formal equity-focused guiding questions.
- Formalize and operationalize the equity review process into workplace operations.

This section will focus on internal-facing policies, recognizing that these policies establish the boundaries, expectations, guidelines, and conduct that can advance equitable practices in the workplace.

Issues of inequity can show up in all internal workplace policy decisions, for example:

- Work-from-home policies that allow some staff, often those people in higher-wage and more senior roles, to work remotely while others in lower-wage and frontline positions cannot.
- Limited family leave and flexible work options that go in contrast to an LHD’s stated support for parents, families, and caregivers.
- Policies for reporting misconduct that fail to protect staff from retaliation, negatively impacting marginalized groups who may then be discouraged from reporting discrimination or harassment.

- Changes in dress code policies that may require employees to purchase new work attire, which differentially impact staff based on their financial capacity to do so.

By placing equity at the forefront when developing and implementing internal policies, LHDs can move towards eliminating the barriers to and upholding the vision and values of equity and inclusion at work.

Using Equity-Focused Policies in the Workplace

When thinking of how policy can promote equity, there are several specific policies that should be carefully developed and transparently implemented. Some of those include, but are not limited to:

- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Non-Discrimination Policy
- Whistleblower and Reporting Policies
- Equal Employment Opportunity Policy
- Parental and Caregiver Leave Policies
- Disability and Reasonable Accommodations Policies
- Language Accommodations
- Codes of Conduct

Story from the Field: Developing a Policy to Support a Just Culture in LA County

To uphold principles of a just culture, promote fairness and accountability, ensure problems are reported without retaliation, and recognize the systemic factors resulting in problems, errors, and issues, the County of Los Angeles’ Department of Health Services worked with their Labor Union partners to develop a **Just Culture Policy**.

This departmental policy was developed to be used when assessing the behavior or performance of the workforce, and in conjunction with existing County and Department policies. It explicitly outlines how to apply Just Culture principles and determine the appropriate course of action when there is an error, unexpected outcome, or other issue of unmet obligations.

See the full Policy No. 311.4: [DHS Just Culture Policy](#)

These policies are typically included in every organization’s employee handbook. So, as LHDs begin the work of examining their policies, one place to start may be to systematically examine their employee handbook, assessing such issues as whether it uses inclusive language, is accessible to all staff, excludes or does not consider certain groups, and is regularly reviewed with input from staff. Specific equity lens guidance for reviewing policies is discussed in greater depth later in this section.

Further, as LHDs initiate equity-focused efforts – making changes in practices, procedures, norms, and expectations – it is important to put those changes into written equity-centered policies. Without such policies in place, equity efforts are vulnerable to being lost when there are leadership transitions, staff turnover, or shifts in resources and priorities.

Additional Examples of Equity-Focused Policies by State and Local Governments

- [Model Policies and Considerations for a Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive and Respectful Work Environment](#), from the State of Washington
- [Workplace Equity Policy](#), City of Los Angeles

Applying an Equity Lens to All Workplace Policies

Even if equity is not explicitly referenced in a policy, it still has the potential for significant impacts on whether a workplace is truly equitable. This means organizations should be evaluating equity impacts and intentionally promoting equity across all internal policies. They can do so by implementing a strategic process for developing and evaluating policies with equity at the forefront.

Such a process requires consistent application of what is referred to as an equity lens. *But what does it mean to apply an equity lens?* It means using a process that involves asking critical questions to analyze and diagnose the impact of both the design and implementation of policies on marginalized groups and to identify and eliminate barriers to equity ([Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion, n.d.](#)). Moreover, according to [Lane County \(2023\)](#), applying an equity lens “creates a collective pause...to consciously reflect on including other perspectives in the decision-making process.”

While using an equity lens is more of an evolving framework for operating rather than a rote, ‘one-size fits all’ process, there are key components involved in applying it to workplace policy. These include:

Impact	Outcome	Engagement
Does this workplace policy differentially impact groups of employees within the department?	Does this policy contribute to reducing disparities (e.g., in rates of promotions or sense of belonging) & to promoting inclusivity in the workplace?	Were staff representing diverse backgrounds & perspectives of the department meaningfully involved in developing or analyzing this policy?

The remainder of this section will describe the steps and in-depth assessment departments can take to apply an equity lens as they develop, review, or implement their own workplace policies.

Form a Policy Review Team

To start, forming a review team when developing or examining a workplace policy can provide structure, commitment, and perspective that is foundational for consistently ensuring the policy advances equity. Often, a policy review team may act as an advisory body to the leadership team on policy decisions. In doing so, this team may seek out information to determine a timeline and policy focus for a review, initiate a review using a structured equity lens, and provide input to leaders on recommended policy changes after the review has been completed ([Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion, n.d.](#)).

Such teams are typically composed of HR staff, executives, directors, managers, and even supervisors who oversee related policy procedures. It is important to have a team that encompasses a variety of viewpoints, including those who may be directly affected by the policy as well as staff from marginalized groups. So, in addition to standing team members, consider including representation from possible 'subject matter experts' on particular policies that are up for review early on in the process. And, notably, consider the perspectives of those who have historically been excluded from decision-making and how their input will be meaningfully incorporated into decisions and changes while avoiding tokenism. At the same time, it can be beneficial to also include someone who is not closely aligned with the topic to minimize potential of other blind spots ([Big City Health Coalition & Human Impact Partners, 2021](#)).

Finally, leaders and other staff engaging in developing or reviewing policies must reflect on their own identities, biases, power, and privilege they may bring to the team and work. Trainings, such as those discussed in [Section 5](#)

and in [APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP AND IMPLICIT BIAS](#), can be used to support them in developing self-awareness around these issues and proactively working to mitigate their impact. Moreover, all members should have a shared language and understanding around equity and why it is important in the workplace. Refer to [APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS](#) and [Section 1](#) for more on building that shared understanding.

Develop a Team Charter

Once it has been determined who will engage in this work, developing a charter for the team can help establish a shared understanding of their purpose and process. This typically involves outlining factors that will contribute to the team's success, such as goals, deliverables, milestones, key values or principles, expected behaviors, and decision-making approach.

As such, the team charter functions as a guide, enabling members to identify their focus and reason for existing as well as a reference point for decision-making and appropriate conduct. For a template to help teams get started, refer to [APPENDIX F: TEAM CHARTER TEMPLATE](#), and to see an example of a real-world team charter created by one LHD, see [APPENDIX H: CLAY COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER CASE STUDY](#).

A Note on Resourcing Concerns

Staff time and bandwidth to join additional teams can be a challenge. But that should not stall efforts. Consider whether your LHD already has an equity task force, a policy workgroup, or a workforce development committee. Could any of the members of these groups temporarily use their time allocated to that workgroup or committee participation to support the initiation of an equity review process? Ultimately, the goal is for the review to have a core team and engage different staff members based on the policy or decision at hand, but starting by engaging staff who are already dedicated to supporting the department's equity efforts in other capacities could be a place to build from.

[Policy Team Charter: Example from the Field](#)
[Charter for Washington State's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\) Committee on Policy](#)

Determine What Policies to Assess for Equity Impacts

When LHDs first begin to assess the equity impact of internal policies, the resources and capacity to engage in the process may be limited. While the long-term goal should be to apply an equity lens to all workplace policies, teams may need to prioritize which policies to begin with. Therefore, two common questions are often, *"Which policy should we begin with?"* and *"How can we determine the priority of policies to be reviewed?"* So, in deciding what workplace policies you may want to prioritize, consider the following as potential areas of focus:

- Policies that have a significant impact on employees' professional growth, opportunities, and experiences, such as hiring, promotion, remote work, compensation and benefits, performance evaluations, and workplace culture.
- Policies related to feedback or complaints by staff. This could include feedback received through surveys, focus groups, and stay or exit interviews as well as collected grievances and complaints.
- Policies that will likely result in large organizational changes such as mergers and restructuring.
- Policies that may disproportionately impact marginalized groups, such as those related to accommodations for disabilities, parental leave, employee resource groups, and harassment or discrimination, to name a few.

Another approach when just starting off is to have a couple of 'quick wins' for the team, focusing early efforts where the LHD may be more willing and prepared to take action. This approach can help build momentum and buy-in if using an equity lens on internal policies is new to an LHD, and it can support success in applying it to policies that may be more challenging to assess or make change on. After demonstrating some 'wins' in the equity lens review process, there may be more support and confidence in applying it to policies where the equity impacts are less clear or the solutions are more complex.

For additional prioritization questions to support identification of policies for review, see **[APPENDIX G: ASSESSING EQUITY IMPACTS IN POLICY REVIEW.](#)**

Story from the Field: Updating Remote Work Policy at the City of Portland, Maine

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work had become common at the City of Portland's Department of Health and Human Services. However, as staff began to return to the office, the department recognized the tension and potential inequities that can arise when some staff are allowed to work remotely while others are not. As a result, they began looking for creative ways to accommodate staff needs while maintaining the ability for remote work to take place, where possible. Some of those strategies implemented, as possible, included:

- Increasing flexibility of hours for staff who cannot work remotely. For example, working four 10-hour days or starting their days at 9:00am instead of 8:00am and ending at 6:00pm.
- Opening their General Assistance Office 7 days a week to both serve the community better and offer more flexible schedules to their staff.
- For staff who can work remotely, the policy allows them to work remotely only 2 days a week and work the other 3 days a week in-office.

To learn more about their approach, view the [City of Portland's full flexible work policy here.](#)

Assess the Equity Impact of a Workplace Policy

Once the team has identified the policy they intend to assess, using a structured set of equity-focused questions supports the consistent review of a policy's impact on equity in the workplace. For example, the equity-focused questions in [APPENDIX G: ASSESSING EQUITY IMPACTS IN POLICY REVIEW](#) can be used to guide teams in reflecting on:

- *What is the workplace policy being considered or reviewed?*
- *Who is at the table helping develop or review the policy?*
- *What is the likely impact of the policy?*
- *What are the next steps?*

Establishing a schedule for engaging in this review process can help ensure accountability, as can planning for evaluation at regular follow up intervals to assess whether policies have had any effect.

USING DATA ANALYSIS

Data – both quantitative (e.g., rates of internal promotions) and qualitative (e.g., staff perceptions of fairness in the promotion process) – can play a role in developing, evaluating, and monitoring workplace policies. In assessing equity impacts, review teams should consider the type of data the department currently collects or whether additional data should be collected to better understand the current state of the workplace and the potential impact the policy might have. This can also help build the case for any policy recommendations as well. Consider existing HR data, information from previous employee surveys, focus groups or interviews, inviting staff from across the department to provide additional input, and even researching promising practices from other LHDs or organizations in the field. This information is useful in understanding both the current state as well as gaps and opportunities that can be addressed through the policy review process.

DEFINING UNDERREPRESENTED AND MARGINALIZED

Reviewing potential equity impacts also requires teams to understand and identify groups that may be underrepresented, marginalized, or face additional barriers under a workplace policy and/or its intended objectives. Consider the following categories as employee groups that may be underrepresented or marginalized within the workplace ([Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion, n.d.](#)):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) | <input type="checkbox"/> Low socioeconomic status |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Members of the LGBTQIA+ community | <input type="checkbox"/> Persons with disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culturally/Linguistically diverse | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women and non-binary | <input type="checkbox"/> Neurodivergent individuals |

***Tip:** All policies should be grounded in inclusive language. This involves carefully reviewing and editing how policies are written to avoid inadvertently discriminating against or excluding certain groups. Below illustrates inclusive, gender-neutral language as an example:

Gendered	Gender Neutral
He/She Pronouns	They/Them Pronouns
Father/Mother/Brother/Sister	Parent/Sibling
Grandmother/Grandfather	Grandparent
Husband/Wife	Spouse/Partner

****Additional considerations for inclusive language can be found in the [AMA's Advancing Health Equity: A Guide to Language, Narrative, and Concepts](#) and [APA's Inclusive Language Guide](#).**

EXAMPLE: PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

Consider an example scenario of what it might look like to apply an equity lens to a workplace policy. After several filed complaints and negative feedback received in exit interviews, one LHD's review team decided to prioritize examining the department's parental leave policy, as shown below.

Policy Example: Parental Leave *(from Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion, n.d.)*

BEFORE an Equity Lens:

- Must be employed for at least 9 months.
- 50% appointment or greater required.
- Female employees – up to 6 weeks paid leave upon birth (7 weeks for c-section).
- Female employees – up to 2 weeks paid leave for adoption or gestational surrogacy.
- Male employees – up to 2 weeks paid leave.

Pause: Before moving on, consider what potential equity implications may exist in this policy.

In their review, the team identified several biases and potential equity implications of the policy:

- Requiring employees be employed for 9 months before leave benefits kick in negatively impacts potential candidates who may be pregnant from applying for or accepting a job offer in the department, weakening the diversity of their department's candidate pool.
- The policy ignores the fact that individuals who do not identify as female can be pregnant, become parents, and require parental leave.
- Giving different amounts of time for those who give birth via c-section implies parental leave is only about physical health, ignoring other important aspects of post-partum health such as parental psychological wellbeing.

- Similarly, offering only 2 weeks for adoption and surrogacy or to those who identify as male ignores the needs of those who become parents in other ways and discriminates against those who cannot or decide not to become pregnant but are still becoming parents.

Additional Resources on Applying an Equity Lens

- [Advancing Health Equity: Key Questions for Assessing Policy, Processes, and Assumption](#), Minnesota Department of Health
- [Equity Lens for Decision Making](#), Harvard School of Public Health

Develop Recommendations

The use of an equity lens in policy review should shed light not only on potential equity issues or opportunities, but also possible solutions or next steps for developing or implementing the policy at hand. Based on their findings, review teams may recommend:

- Do nothing and keep the policy as-is.
- Adjust the policy in language or action.
- Add provision(s) to the policy or remove stipulations.
- Incorporate targeted measures to ensure equitable outcomes.
- Consider entirely new policy alternative(s).
- Develop a policy where there currently is not one.

The list above is not exhaustive, and teams should consider both the feasibility of their recommendations as well as possible unintended consequences of making, or not making, change. Clearly present these to those making decisions regarding a specific policy, building the case and demonstrating the process taken to come to such recommendations.

EXAMPLE: PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

Returning to the scenario examining one LHD's parental leave policy, the review team examined existing information from employee interviews, invited staff to provide feedback, and examined practices other employers in the field have found success with to develop a recommendation for their department's HR to adjust their existing policy. The team recommended adjustments to the policy's language and removal of

Policy Example: Parental Leave *(from Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion, n.d.)*

BEFORE an Equity Lens:

- Must be employed for at least 9 months.
- 50% appointment or greater required.
- Female employees – up to 6 weeks paid leave upon birth (7 weeks for c-section).
- Female employees – up to 2 weeks paid leave for adoption or gestational surrogacy.
- Male employees – up to 2 weeks paid leave.

AFTER an Equity Lens:

- Benefit becomes available upon hire.
- 50% appointment or greater required.
- Up to 6 weeks paid leave for birth, adoption, or gestational surrogacy for any employee.

certain provisions that go against the departments values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In doing so, they also provided leaders with clear reasoning behind their recommendations (or the ‘why’), using data and citing the equity implications identified in their review.

Serving as an Advocate, Champion, and Ally

Before concluding this section, it is important to recognize that there are different governing structures across LHDs, meaning decision-making authority regarding internal policy lies at different places and even department directors may not have the ultimate say in what and how workplace policy is developed and implemented. In settings where departments have less influence on changing policy, equity efforts discussed in this section may be a space where the role of department leaders is to engage as advocates, champions, and allies. As discussed in [Section 4](#) – leaders have a responsibility to advocate for changes to the policy review process, working with HR or other departmental or higher-level leaders as necessary.

So, even if department leaders do not hold direct decision-making authority over certain policies or procedures, they can still have an impact and drive change. For those who find themselves advocating up for policy change, consider engaging in the following:



Identify who you should direct your advocacy efforts toward.



Outline the problem, proposal, and desired outcomes.



Build the case for a specific policy or policy development process and show alignment with agency goals, values, and objectives.



Provide data, where possible, supporting policy or policy change.



Gather and document any stakeholder comments and feedback on policy.



Be specific in your efforts yet remain flexible, understanding there may still be regulatory or other requirements beyond the authority of the person or department you are advocating to.

Conclusion

Assessing and implementing internal policies that support the workplace environment and go beyond state and federal law is something all LHDs can be engaging in, in order to build and support a workforce that can effectively deliver the 10 Essential Services ([PHAB, 2022](#)). When it comes to building an equitable work environment specifically, LHDs must move beyond simply stating commitments or educating staff. Instead, LHDs should make efforts to examine internal structures and operations that are either advancing or impeding the core principles of equity at work. Research shows that effectively implementing equitable

PHAB Measure 8.2.3 A, Required Documentation 1:

A comprehensive policy or set of policies that demonstrate a supportive work environment, which must address, at minimum, one provision of each of the following: Employee wellness; Work-life balance; Employee recognition; Inclusive culture ([PHAB, 2022](#)).

internal systems requires integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into organizational policies and practices ([Winters, 2020](#)).

LHDs should have documented processes for reviewing policies in a way that keeps equity at the forefront. While this may look different across LHDs, leaders can work toward and advocate for policy change and implementation including the meaningful engagement of staff in the process, as advancing equity through internal policy will ultimately have ripple effects across the workplace.

CONCLUSION

As this toolkit has illustrated, building an equitable workplace can require widespread change that is unique to each LHD. While the thought of such broad action may seem overwhelming at first, every action counts – whether that is initiating courageous conversations around equity, developing an equity action plan, or examining equity impacts of internal policies.

That means LHDs do not need to complete every strategy discussed in this toolkit to make progress and positive change. Every department – and the people in them – are at different places in their journey to becoming stewards of equity and developing a workplace where all employees can thrive. *So, what are some things LHD can do to move the needle in the direction of equity?*

- 1) If you haven't already, begin by identifying your 'north star' – or your vision for equity in the workplace – and building a common understanding and language around that. Communicate the importance of an equitable workplace across your LHD and emphasize building psychological safety. Without this, equity efforts may stall or even backfire.
- 2) Listen to the voices of all employees to better understand their experience of the workplace, paying special attention to how this might differ across employees. Use structured assessments to establish your baseline from which progress can be made. Ask of your LHD such questions as: Are processes and policies fair and unbiased and perceived to be so by staff? Do employees feel valued and respected? Are they given equitable opportunities to thrive? Do they represent the communities you serve? If not, why?
- 3) Put what you know and where you want to go into writing. Involve staff representative of the diversity of your department in this, put in place mechanisms of accountability for following through, and regularly communicate your plans and progress to all staff and stakeholders.
- 4) Be a champion for equity efforts – and advocate for others to be champions for change as well. Expect some resistance and approach it as a normal part of the change process. Take steps to support others through change and to serve as a conduit through which courageous conversations can take place that build awareness and action against inequity.
- 5) Ensure engagement, advancement, and training of staff is fair and prioritized. Consider your current professional development practices and ask whether they are aligned with the core principles of an equitable workplace. Advocate for resources necessary for all staff to engage in advancement efforts broadly and equity efforts specifically.
- 6) Take a close look at the foundation of your internal environment – that is, your policies. Examine whether they may be potentially perpetuating inequities and how they can instead be used to advance efforts toward your vision of equity.

This is far from exhaustive, but it goes a long way in demonstrating that there is so much LHDs can do to create an equitable workplace – one where all employees have fair and just access to the opportunities, resources, and supports needed to thrive at work. Use this toolkit as a resource from which you can build up your own strategies in a way that addresses your unique needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Remember that it is critical to start somewhere and maintain commitment long-term. If LHDs are to promote equity, inclusion, and social justice across their work with communities, they must also prioritize those values internally, turning inward and examining how they are building an equitable workplace through their own culture, policies, practices, and norms.

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APPENDIX A: Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

This tool offers definitions to some of the terms to become familiar with in building an equitable workplace. Know that this list is not exhaustive and that definitions may evolve over time. For more on language, unbiased, inclusive communication and examining dominant narratives to advance equity, visit [Advancing Health Equity: Guide to Language, Narrative and Concepts, American Medical Association](#).

ABLEISM

A set of beliefs or practices at the individual, community, or systemic level that discriminate against and devalue people who have disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY

The extent to which physical spaces, technology, products, services, policies, and systems are intentionally designed or redesigned so they are readily approachable and usable to the greatest extent possible by all people. It refers to equitable access for everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience.

ALLYSHIP

Actionable and lifelong practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which those in positions of power and privilege seek to work in solidarity with a marginalized group ([The Anti-Oppression Network](#)). It includes understanding internal biases, calling out bad behavior, building relationships based on trust and accountability with marginalized individuals, and staying involved in equity-related tasks to end oppressive systems.

ANTIRACISM

Actively going beyond being “not racist”. It is the process and conscious decision to take action to end racial inequities in our daily lives, actively challenging racism & working to change the policies, practices, and beliefs that perpetuate racism. See more on this at the [Smithsonian’s Being Antiracist](#).

BELONGING

The sense that all of one’s identities are wholly included & accepted. It is highly personal, meaning what is needed for belonging looks different for everyone. In many ways it is the sum of both diversity and inclusion.

BIAS

The often unreasoned or unfair tendency to prefer a person, group, characteristic, or thing over another, and to favor them as a result. Bias can be both explicit and implicit and happen at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic level.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

A lifelong process of co-learning and self-reflection whereby you not only learn about other’s cultures but examine your own beliefs and cultural identities as well. It requires an acceptance that you will not know everything about another’s culture as well as an ongoing reflection on one’s own culture and how that impacts the way you interact with the world.

DISCRIMINATION

The prejudicial and unfair treatment of people based on certain characteristics or their membership in certain social or cultural groups, such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, physical or mental ability, religion, or citizenship status.

DIVERSITY

The differences, characteristics, and experiences that make us unique and distinct. “Diverse” is not an adjective to describe a person (e.g., “a diverse hire”) and using it as such can perpetuate the notion that diversity is about “those people”—whoever is in the ‘out’ or marginalized group.

- *Examples of dimensions of diversity include: Race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, physical ability, neurodiversity, mental health, age, religion or spirituality, education, geography, work experience, parental and marital status, thought style, language, national origin, ideology, income, lived experiences, union affiliation, seniority, or management status.*

DOMINANT GROUP

The group in a particular society that holds more power, privilege, and social status than other, non-dominant groups (that are frequently the target of oppression). They hold power to define resources, systems, and norms. While it is often the majority group in terms of size, that is not always the case.

EQUALITY

Treating everyone the same and providing everyone with the same resources regardless of historical and contemporary factors or needs. Equality assumes everyone is starting from the same place and fails to account for the fact that people aren’t always on equal footing.

EQUITY

The just and fair distribution of resources, power, and opportunities for everyone, providing resources according to need and eliminating barriers that prevent some from reaching their full potential. Equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved, underrepresented populations, and fairness is needed to provide everyone with the opportunity to participate and prosper.

FAIRNESS

The state or quality of being free from self-interest, discrimination, injustice, prejudice, or favoritism. In fairness, all people are treated in a way that is just and equitable.

IMPLICIT BIAS

A form of bias that is automatic, unconscious, and unintentional, but, nevertheless, impacts one’s behaviors, decisions, and judgements. Everyone has implicit biases and, if gone unnoticed and unaddressed, they can lead people to act on the basis of stereotypes and prejudice, even if those actions go against their self-stated values.

INCLUSION

When we act with the intention to ensure all people can be their full and best versions of themselves, feel valued and that they belong, and believe they can thrive. Given that, an inclusive workplace is safe and

accessible, affirms and celebrates individuals' identities, appreciates different approaches, styles, experiences, and perspectives, and continuously adapts and fosters ongoing learning and empathy.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, it is the notion that everyone has multiple, overlapping, and interconnected social identities that intersect to contribute to their experiences of power, privilege, and oppression. It is a way to understand how multiple forms of oppression or inequity can compound themselves to create unique obstacles not understood by looking just at one form of oppression or inequity. For example, the experience of inequity faced by a Black woman is much different than the that of a Black man or a White woman.

JUSTICE

The practice of treating and ensuring fair and equitable access to resources, opportunities, and responsibilities. Justice seeks a proactive enforcement of policies, practices and attitudes that produce equitable access, treatment, and outcomes for all regardless of identity, challenging the roots of oppression and injustice.

However, what is believed to be 'just' is complex and differs across individuals, shaped by their social identities, context, and what they have been exposed to over time (our biases).

MARGINALIZATION

The process in which a dominant group in society relegates another, non-dominant, group to a less powerful, or disadvantaged, position, discriminating against, excluding, and denying them from access or opportunities to fully participate and thrive in that society.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Subtle actions or words – including verbal or non-verbal slights, snubs, insults, or put-downs - that communicate offensive, demeaning, or negative messages to those who are members of a marginalized or disadvantaged social group. Most (but not all) perpetrators are unaware that they are engaging in an offensive or demeaning form of behavior, and most don't realize that it arises from their own implicit bias.

OPPRESSION

The state of being subject to unjust treatment or control, whether implicitly or explicitly. It is the combination of bias, discrimination, and institutional power which creates systems that operate against some groups while benefiting others. Anti-oppression, therefore, is the shifting of power to those who have been marginalized by actively recognizing, mitigating, and eliminating the oppressive effects of the dominant culture.

POWER

The ability to act in a particular way, make decisions, or direct the course of events or the behaviors and outcomes of oneself and others. Power is not distributed equally in society – with some people and groups holding greater power than others.

"Power is the ability to achieve a purpose. Whether or not it is good or bad depends upon the purpose." -- Dr. Martin Luther King

PRIVILEGE

An unearned advantage or access to resources that is extended only to certain people as a result of their membership in a dominant or advantaged social group. Often, it is automatic and many in a privileged group are unaware of them.

RACISM

The systematic prejudice and discrimination by a person or group toward other people or groups based on their race. It assumes superiority, perpetuates inequity, and is supported and maintained, both implicitly and explicitly, by institutional structures, policies, norms, values, and behaviors.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

One's sense of who they are based on their membership(s) in certain social groups.

SYSTEMIC BIAS

Bias among institutions and across society. It is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional, ideological, and interpersonal – that routinely advantage some groups while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for other groups.

TOKENISM

Doing something or making a perfunctory effort to give the appearance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, inviting a person of color to a meeting to create the impression of inclusion but not meaningfully engaging that person in the meeting.

WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

The ideology that the beliefs, values, norms, and practices of white people are superior and what is valued. It has been normalized over time and now considered standard in the United States, privileging white people while devaluing and oppressing non-white people and their cultural norms and beliefs. It is pervasive, reflected in our workplaces, systems, and everyday actions and interactions, and manifests in both subtle and obvious ways. These attitudes and behaviors can show up in anyone – white or not.

For more on the characteristics of white supremacy culture in organizations and their antidotes, visit [dRworks' White Supremacy Culture](#).

APPENDIX B: Guidance for Developing a Workplace Assessment

To conduct an effective workplace equity assessment, you must have clarity on what, why, and how you are going to assess. This tool is intended to provide guidance in clearly outlining that what, why, and how. It will guide you through key questions to help develop the purpose, objective, approach, and overarching questions to be answered by the assessment so departments can conduct them effectively.

STEP 1: CLARIFY THE PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, AND APPROACH

Gather your equity workgroup, implementation team, or other relevant stakeholders and respond to the following questions before you embark on a workplace assessment:

1. What is the purpose for implementing a workplace assessment? What decisions will the results of this assessment help inform?

2. What are 2-3 objectives for the assessment? Refer to [APPENDIX C: DEVELOPING EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE OBJECTIVES](#) for more on how to develop objectives.

3. What type of assessment will meet your identified objectives? Refer to the 'Types of Assessments' table in [Section 2](#). Have you considered using a mixed-methods approach?

4. Based on the objectives and approach, who are key stakeholders (individual or groups) involved in the assessment? How will they be engaged early and often?

5. Do we understand the current processes for data collection (quantitative or qualitative) in the department and does this present any opportunities and/or challenges to achieving our objectives?

6. What demographic or other respondent data will we collect or utilized? How will we collect and correlate that data to their responses? How will we ensure confidentiality in how it is gathered, analyzed, and stored?

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

Before you begin gathering data or even developing the approach to gather that data (e.g., what questions to ask in a survey, who to include in a focus group, what data to ask HR for, etc.), it is critical to outline the overarching questions you want answered through the assessment.

These questions should be:

- Clear, specific, and well-defined.
- Measurable by the assessment.
- Aligned with the purpose and objectives of the assessment.

Examples:

- What recommendations do staff at our public health clinics offer for improving staff retention?
- To what extent are staff receiving the training and supervision required to accomplish their work?
- Did our department-wide training have an impact on staff knowledge as it relates to DEI?
- Is the process for promoting staff to higher-level positions perceived as fair, and is there a difference in such internal mobility across gender, race, or physical (dis)ability?
- To what degree does our department's staff represent the community we serve?

What overarching questions do you want to be able to answer by engaging in this assessment?

Now put it all together:

PURPOSE: <i>Why are we doing this?</i>	
OBJECTIVES: <i>What will come about by doing this?</i>	
APPROACH: <i>How will we do this?</i>	
QUESTIONS: <i>What will be answered by doing this?</i>	

As an example:

PURPOSE: <i>Why are we doing this?</i>	To gain a clearer understanding of what the employee experience is within the workplace in order to identify areas of improvement and provide recommendations for actions in response to high employee turnover.
OBJECTIVES: <i>What will come about by doing this?</i>	<p>By August 31, 2023, meet with HR to examine rates of turnover within the department by demographics.</p> <p>By October 23, 2023, assess employee experience across the department, gathering insight from as many employees as possible using survey and focus group approaches.</p> <p>By December 1, 2023, along with the Equity Implementation Workgroup, use the results of the assessment to develop recommendations for action that will be shared leadership and, once approved, communicated with all staff.</p>
APPROACH: <i>How will we do this?</i>	<p>Analyze HR trends in turnover as well as internal mobility, segmented by as race, gender, and position.</p> <p>Implement an organization-wide workplace culture survey.</p> <p>Conduct focus groups to contextualize responses on the workplace culture survey.</p> <p>Review feedback from previous exit interviews to understand why past employees left the department.</p>
QUESTIONS: <i>What will be answered by doing this?</i>	<p>What is the turnover rate? Are there differences across groups of staff?</p> <p>How do employees rate their level of satisfaction? Does this differ across groups?</p> <p>How do employees describe their experience within the workplace?</p> <p>What steps can be taken to address turnover across staff?</p>

STEP 3: IDENTIFY WHAT TO ASK

While you may be able to pull from existing data, you may also want to conduct additional assessments of the workplace. If putting together a survey, interview, focus group, or other approach to gathering data from individuals or groups, there are many examples out there of questions you might ask, but whether you are writing them yourself or pulling from promising practice in the field, make sure your approach to questioning is aligned, comprehensive, prioritized, unbiased, and actionable.

KEY QUESTION COMPONENTS	YES	NO	NOTES
ALIGNED			
<i>Do the questions align with the objectives we have identified for the overall assessment?</i>			
COMPREHENSIVE			
<i>Have we considered the use of multiple questioning and information-gathering approaches?</i>			
<i>If we use quantitative data, how will we give context to findings using qualitative approaches?</i>			
<i>Are we asking questions that will get to process, outcome, and/or balance measures?</i>			
PRIORITIZED			
<i>Have we selected enough questions to achieve our objectives without asking too many questions that could lead to respondent fatigue?</i>			
UNBIASED			
<i>Are these questions written in an unbiased and neutral manner or do they have the potential to influence the respondents' answers?</i>			
ACTIONABLE			
<i>Will these questions help us make informed decisions?</i>			

APPENDIX C: Developing Equitable and Inclusive Objectives

The following tool is intended to guide the development of objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.

We will improve/increase: _____ *Name the process or system*

in _____ *List department, team, workflow etc...in which process occurs*

by _____ *Describe action(s) to be taken to achieve intended change*

This work is important because: _____ *Why is this change relevant and timely now?*

from _____ *Add Start Date* to _____ *Add End Date*

We will track progress by: _____ *Enter indicator(s) of progress*

Success will be achieved when: _____ *Enter measure(s) of success – e.g., rate, %, frequency or #*

We have included diverse perspectives from our LHD staff in setting this objective and have considered potential unintended, yet real inequitable impact that could result from our plan to achieve this objective.

<i>List potential disparities addressed</i>	<i>Explain mitigation actions</i>

By making this change we expect: _____ *List inclusion and equity benefits*

APPENDIX D: Leadership and Implicit Bias at Work

This tool is intended to help leaders examine bias in themselves and the workplace as well as steps to mitigate the impact of such biases. Bias is the unreasoned tendency to prefer one person, group, characteristic, or thing over another. We are all skilled at developing such biases based on what we are exposed to over time, and they impact how we think, speak, and act. While some biases are within our awareness, we all also hold biases that are out of our awareness, yet still impact how we think and behave. These are referred to as implicit biases.

IMPLICIT BIASES are biases that operate outside of our awareness, may go against our own self-stated values or beliefs, and stem from deeply ingrained associations that influence our emotional and logical responses to everyday situations.



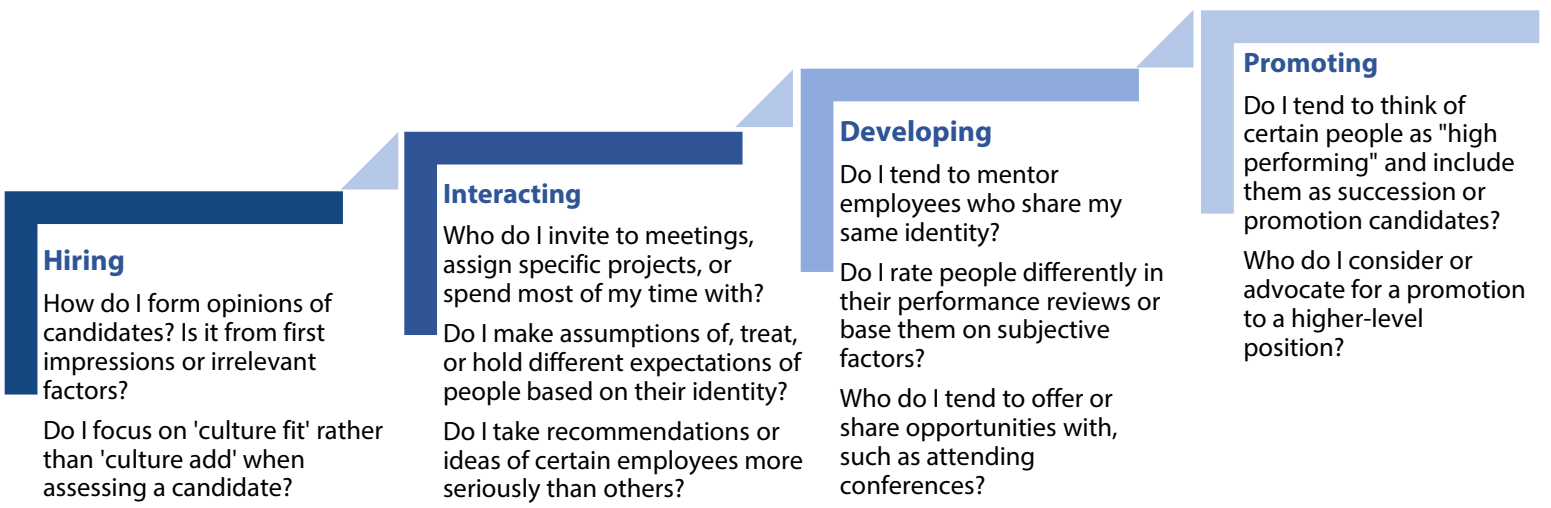
IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST EXERCISE:

Before continuing, it may be beneficial to reflect on your own potential implicit biases by taking at least one [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT) through Project Implicit and reflect on the following:

- *What were my feelings and reactions to my IAT results? Was there anything that surprised me?*
- *Do I see connections between my results and stereotypes or experiences I have been exposed to?*
- *How might these implicit associations have impacted previous decisions or interactions?*
- *How might knowing my results impact future interactions?*

This tool focuses on implicit, rather than explicit biases because of the unique challenges they pose to building an equitable workplace. Specifically, implicit biases are highly ubiquitous, harder to identify, and more challenging to prevent from impacting one’s judgements, decisions, and behaviors.

Therefore, for leaders, it is critical to think about how their own biases may influence them across their decisions and day-to-day interactions, including how it may impact the experiences and outcomes of staff in a team or organization. For example, below are examples of questions leaders may ask themselves to identify where biases may arise at different stages of the employee lifecycle.



So, to mitigate biases and their impact in the workplace, leaders must understand what biases may exist, examine their own potential implicit biases, and take action to mitigate biases within themselves, others, and the organization in which they work.

Identifying Types of Biases

Biases present themselves in many forms in the workplace. Being mindful of the different types of biases everyone is susceptible to can help us identify and lessen the likelihood of falling victim to them in how we make decisions and interact in the workplace.

Types of biases people may exhibit in the workplace include but are not limited to:

- **Affinity Bias:** Favoring and connecting with others who share our interests, experiences, and backgrounds.
- **Confirmation Bias:** Unconsciously seeking out, interpreting, and evaluating information and situations in ways that align with our existing beliefs and expectations.
- **Attribution Bias:** Attributing others' behaviors, accomplishments, or failures to internal or external factors based on previous assumptions or interactions we've had with them.
- **Conformity Bias:** Adjusting our beliefs and behaviors to match those of a dominant group.

MICRO-INEQUITIES AND MICRO-AGGRESSIONS

Again, biases present themselves in ways that the person who holds them may be unaware of. However, regardless of intent, the impact of implicit bias is still harmful to the person or group on the receiving end. And two very common presentations of bias that occur and serve to prevent equity in the workplace are micro-inequities and micro-aggressions.

	Micro-Inequities	Micro-Aggressions
What are they?	Small events in which people are singled out, ignored, overlooked, or otherwise discounted based on specific characteristics they hold. They can be hard to prove but their effects are to 'other' someone and are perceived as unfair.	Often subtle and everyday slights, snubs, or insults, whether consciously or not, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to people based solely upon their membership in a marginalized group. The potential impact of their actions is often unintentional and outside of the perpetrator's awareness.
What do they look or sound like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly mispronouncing someone's name even after being corrected. • Leaving someone out of social gatherings. • Disregarding someone's comments during a group discussion or meeting. • Being more receptive to ideas from some people than others. • Introducing one colleague with glowing accolades and the other with just a name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberately not using someone's preferred pronouns. • Using outdated and offensive terminology, such as, "That's so gay." • Complimenting a person of color on their English (e.g., saying to an Asian employee "You're so articulate"). • Saying to a person with a disability, "You're so inspiring." • Clutching your purse when a person of color walks past you.

The impact of these actions is significant, as they can make people feel unwelcome, unsupported, devalued, marginalized, and disrespected at work. Over time, micro-inequities and micro-aggressions can accumulate and affect the confidence and commitment of an individual, leading them to withdraw or even leave an organization.

Micro-Affirmations

Micro-affirmations are small gestures that show people they are valued and respected. They can significantly impact a person's experience and perception, counteracting the negative effects of micro-inequities.

Examine Your Own Implicit Biases and Their Impacts.

In addition to understanding different types of biases, leader must be aware of how those biases show up within themselves to better identify them in their day-to-day. This is why it is recommended that all leaders complete some level of implicit bias training in addition to advocating for others in the organization to do so as well. By recognizing one's biases, individuals can spot moments when their actions or decisions may be influenced by them and take action to counter or overcome them – an essential component of fostering a just and equitable workplace.

This requires significant self-reflection, and below is just one opportunity for leaders to begin such reflection on their own biases that may exist:



PERSONAL BIAS REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

To begin examining some of your own potential biases, reflect on the following:

- *What is my orientation towards difference?*
- *What stereotypes or assumptions do I hold about different groups?*
- *What experiences or influences might have shaped my views about those groups?*
- *Have I had limited exposure to diverse perspectives and backgrounds?*
- *Think about your networks – what's present in my work circles? What isn't?*
- *Am I more likely to give certain people the benefit of the doubt?*

It is also important to note that, while we are always susceptible, we are more likely to fall back on our implicit biases in situations where there is a high level of stress or ambiguity and when quick decisions must be made – things leaders may face daily.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF YOUR BIASES

Once you have reflected on your biases, the next step is to examine how those biases impact the way you understand and react to the world around you. That means becoming skilled in approaching situations without letting biases get in the way. The example below (adapted from [Dreasher, Belden, & Harris, 2018](#)) illustrates what can be considered when identifying and suspending automatic biases, judgements, and assumptions to respond to a situation where biases may be at play.

Situation	What is the situation at hand?	<i>A group of mostly white, male executives are discussing a group of emerging leaders in their company, and you notice that all of these emerging leaders are white men.</i>
Your Reaction	What is my initial reaction and beliefs about this situation?	<i>We would like to have more diversity at the executive level, but these are simply the people who have shown themselves to have executive presence</i>
Ways You Can Analyze & Reflect on the Situation	What is influencing my reaction? How is it based on my own expectations or cultural values, beliefs, or norms?	<i>How do I define executive presence? How is that definition based on my own cultural values, and perhaps, to the exclusion of others?</i>
Self-Assessment	How are my biases impacting how I am analyzing and reacting to the situation?	<i>I may have a bias that tricks me into believing that non-white people are less likely to hold leadership qualities or skills.</i>

*Source: [Dreasher, Belden, & Harris \(2018\)](#)

Take Action to Mitigate Biases

IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING

It is recommended that leaders, or anyone in a decision-making or supervisory role, engage in training on implicit bias, with such training also expanded to all staff, if possible. Such implicit bias trainings generally cover, at a minimum, topics such as an introduction to implicit bias, how it can influence workplace decisions and interpersonal interactions, how to recognize different types of workplace biases and make more informed decisions, and the connection between implicit bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion. More specific topics may also relate to hiring processes, supervising others, performance management, and organizational development duties.

However, they can look very different across organizations depending on capacity and need. For instance, organizations may choose trainings that are asynchronous or synchronous, led by internal or external facilitators, or are self-paced and individual-focused or interactive and dialogue-based. However, they should be led by someone who has expertise in the area and is skilled in facilitating potentially uncomfortable conversations and building psychological safety.

Re:Work Workshop

As an example, Google has put together a customizable tool that organizations can use to put on their own unconscious bias workshops: [Give Your Own Unbiasing Workshop](#)

BEYOND TRAINING

Training, however, is far from enough. In fact, training should leave participants second guessing their decisions and judgements rather than leaving them with an unrealistic confidence in having understood their biases and their ability to combat them. And knowing our biases is only the first step to mitigating them. So, after training, leaders should work to align actions with what they have learned. For example:

- Be vocal as a leader, expressing honesty and vulnerability in your own biases and advocating for others to evaluate their biases as well.
- Empower others by helping all staff understand implicit bias and their role in making change.
- Policies, processes, and norms are developed by people with biases. Therefore, organizational structures should be built or changed to proactively counter potential biases and modify outcomes like judgments and behaviors (rather than relying on willpower alone to prevent biases).
- Promote accountability for upholding any new structure and expectations among yourself, other leaders, and staff. This includes using the strategies discussed in **APPENDIX E: CALLING IN AND CALLING OUT** as well as collecting and tracking data that provides insights into bias and discrimination in the workplace.
- Consider developing a [community of practice](#) or encouraging leaders to engage in collaboratives with other leaders as they embark on this work. For example, some LHD leaders have engaged in racial equity learning collaboratives with other government entities and community-based organizations to support continued growth and learning.

Sources on Leadership and Implicit Bias

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- ⇒ Catalyst. (2020). *11 Harmful Types of Unconscious Bias and How to Interrupt Them*. Available at <https://www.catalyst.org/2020/01/02/interrupt-unconscious-bias/>

APPENDIX E: Calling In and Calling Out

What do you do when you witness bias in someone else's words or actions that may be harmful to an individual or group? While challenging, these are often instances in which leaders (and others) can play an important role in modeling equitable and inclusive behavior, initiate conversations to address potential harm, and provide opportunities for learning and growth. This tool describes two common strategies that can be used to address biased or discriminatory words or actions when they arise in the workplace.

Calling In. Most often, when faced with displays of bias and discrimination, an effective approach to opening space for dialogue is what is known as 'calling in'. Calling in is an invitation to bring attention to harmful words or behaviors with both compassion and context and is typically done one-on-one or in a small group to create space for listening and understanding. Calling someone in (and being called in), however, requires both courage and vulnerability, and, when power dynamics are at play, may be most effective in an environment where work has been done to build psychological safety, as is described in [Section 1](#). Calling in may sound like:

- "Can you say a bit more about what you mean by that?"
- "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- "Why do you think that's the case?"
- "I'm curious..."

Calling Out. While used much less frequently, there is a place for 'calling out' in the workplace. Calling something out brings public attention to harmful words or behaviors. This approach does not leave much space for conversation and is typically reserved for situations in which the harm to an individual or group is significant and likely to continue if the behavior is not immediately shut down. This may sound like:

- "I want you to know how your comment just landed with me."
- "I have to pause what's happening right now because..."
- "I need to push back against that. I don't see it that way."
- "That's not our culture here."

What should I consider when deciding whether to call in or call out?

Calling In	Calling Out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence – You have influence with this person through a personal or professional connection. • Safety – A 1:1 or small group conversation will not compromise your safety or wellbeing. • Openness – The individual has shown an openness or commitment to learning how to better foster spaces of inclusion and belonging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgency – There is an immediate need to stop what is going on to prevent further harm and make it clear you do not agree with what is being said or done. • Influence and Safety – A power or relationship dynamic is present that would make calling in harmful, unsafe, or ineffective for you. • Openness – Previous attempts to call in have been unsuccessful.

*Source: [Harvard Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging \(n.d.\)](#)

Sources on Calling In and Out

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APPENDIX F: Team Charter Template

Executive Sponsor	Authorizing Source	Team Leader	Kick-off Date

<p>Team Purpose</p> <p><i>What is the team charged with doing? This can include the mission, key objectives, & scope of the team.</i></p>	
<p>Schedule and Time Commitment</p> <p><i>How often & when will the team meet? Is additional work expected outside of meetings?</i></p>	
<p>Team Members</p> <p><i>Who will be the members of the team? These are individuals committed to consistent engagement & responsible for the deliverables of the team.</i></p>	
<p>Roles and Responsibilities</p> <p><i>What are the expectations for team members in terms of what they will do? This can be specific to each member or broader expectations across all members.</i></p>	
<p>Deliverables</p> <p><i>What are the specific deliverables that are expected to result from the team's work?</i></p>	
<p>Decision-Making Approach</p> <p><i>How will the team come to a final decision? How will members vote? E.g., Will the team strive for a consensus-based process, or will it be based on a majority rules approach?</i></p>	
<p>Supporting Resources</p> <p><i>Is there additional staff support or critical partners (such as workgroups or councils) that are important to the team's work? What will they provide?</i></p>	
<p>Principles and Values</p> <p><i>What principles & values will guide the team's work? These can serve as group agreements & ensure conduct among members is respectful & in line with the core principles of an equitable workplace.</i></p>	
<p>Six-Month Focus</p> <p><i>Developing a shorter-term goal can help build momentum for the team's work & provide further clarity in focus. It can be more or less than 6 months & can be updated as the charter is reviewed.</i></p>	

APPENDIX G: Assessing Equity Impacts in Policy Review

Applying an equity lens means using a process of asking critical questions to analyze and diagnose the impact of both the design and implementation of policies on marginalized groups and to identify and eliminate barriers to equity. This tool is intended as an example of how teams reviewing internal policy may apply an equity lens to prioritizing and assessing possible equity implications of a specific policy.

STEP 1: In determining what policy (or policies) to review using an equity lens, consider asking the questions if you are struggling in your prioritization:

PRIORITIZATION QUESTIONS	YES	NO	NOTES
Is this policy critical to achieving the organization's vision, mission, values, or goals?			
Is this policy integral to workplace health, culture, and/or wellbeing?			
Is this policy associated with historical disparities or has there been employee concern or feedback in the past regarding this policy?			
Have recent events necessitated changes to or the creation of this policy?			
Does this policy disproportionately impact certain employees, particularly those from marginalized groups?			
Is there urgency in the need for this policy or change to this policy?			
Is there the potential for positive change in assessing this policy?			
Are there limitations to the feasibility of assessing (and making change to or implementing) this policy?			

STEP 2: Once a policy has been identified for review, gather your policy review team as well as any additional stakeholders and consider the questions below to assess for potential equity impacts:

<i>What is the workplace policy being considered or reviewed?</i>	
What is the policy being reviewed?	
What are the goals and objectives of the policy being reviewed?	
What beliefs or assumptions may be guiding how the policy is being considered or reviewed?	
<i>Who is at the table helping develop or review the policy?</i>	
Whose opinions have we heard most regarding the topic relevant to this policy?	
Which employees may be most affected by this policy? Are they at the table? If not, how can they be included?	
What does data & input from stakeholders tell us about existing inequities impacting staff that should be considered?	
<i>What is the likely impact of the policy?</i>	
How will the policy improve, worsen, or make no impact on existing disparities or inequities?	
Does the policy have the potential to produce any intentional benefits or unintended consequences for affected groups? How will we monitor & address them?	
What benefits will arise if the policy is implemented? Does this impact align with our organization's goals when it comes to equity?	

What are your next steps?	
Based on responses above, what action(s) could be taken for the policy or decision under review that could address inequity or advance equity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Nothing/Keep policy as is. <input type="checkbox"/> Adjust the policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Add provision(s) into the policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate targeted measures to ensure equitable outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider policy alternative(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
How will there be evaluation and accountability for the policy's impact (both intended and unintended)?	

***Some questions have been adapted from [Lane County \(2023\)](#) and [City of Seattle \(2012\)](#)*



APPENDIX H: Clay County Public Health Center Case Study

In 2022, Clay County Public Health Center (CCPHC) launched one internal equity-focused committee – their Health Equity Action Team (HEAT) – as well as an equity-focused external community engagement program.

As it was launched, CCPHC’s HEAT developed a team charter and, from that, built out a logic model that provided continuity across communication and clearly laid out the foundational elements of HEAT, what it does, and what it aims to achieve (see the logic model and charter below). And to build even greater focus in advancing internal equity, HEAT established two subcommittees – one for staff engagement and one for internal policy.

HEAT was formalized in 2022 and gained traction by developing and obtaining approval for developing a 2023 budget in which HEAT was able to hire external consultants to support them in moving forward with the objectives and activities laid out in their logic model. Their consultants helped identify and conduct an organizational culture assessment to establish a baseline that would assist CCPHC in understanding where they needed to start their efforts and how to better support change management.

“I think really early on we just wanted to make sure that we were...being intentional about practicing what we're preaching. We wanted to be role models, so we understood that that internal piece was necessary for us to have any impact at the community level.”

Ashley Wegner, Health Planning & Policy Section Chief at CCPHC

CCOHC’s Baseline Organizational Assessment

CCPHC used the [Denison Organizational Culture Assessment](#) to evaluate their workplace as they began their internal equity efforts. In addition to the assessment’s base survey, CCPHC added additional Denison assessment modules on DEI, trust, and engagement.

The **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Assessment** measured the following validated and benchmarked items:

1. People with different backgrounds are treated with respect.
2. People with different backgrounds are made to feel included and like they belong.
3. Even subtle forms of discrimination are not tolerated.
4. Our recruiting and hiring practices enhance our diversity.
5. People with different backgrounds have fair and equal access to personal and professional development.
6. People with different backgrounds have fair and equal opportunities for promotion.
7. There is good support for learning about diversity.
8. We can be proud of our diversity.
9. Leaders are committed to diversity and inclusion as top priorities.
10. We do a good job of rewarding positive diversity efforts.

In addition, the **Denison Trust Assessment** measured the following validated and benchmarked items:

1. In this organization, decisions are made with employees’ best interests in mind.
2. People in this organization have good motives and intentions.
3. This organization conducts business with integrity.
4. The people who work here are honest.
5. Employees consider this organization to be trustworthy.



Appendix H: Clay County Public Health Center Case Study

The efforts of CCPHC's HEAT are also aligned with the Public Health Center's [2023-2026 strategic plan](#), specifically their strategic initiative to *"Ensure equitable delivery of quality programs and services, through supporting diverse, highly competent and well-trained staff, volunteers and board who are aligned with our mission and values."*



Team Charter
Title: Health Equity Action Team

Appendix#
Date Developed:
Date Last Reviewed:
Date Last Revised:
Number of Pages:

SPONSORSHIP	Section Chief of HP&P
SCOPE OF WORK	<p>Main Purpose: The Health Equity Action Team (HEAT) will guide and hold CCPHC accountable in the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our work and interactions with the public. The work of achieving the best possible health for everyone in Clay County requires a health equity approach that embodies the values, policies, and practices aimed to address discrimination and oppression in all its forms.</p> <p>Overarching Goal: The goal of a health equity approach is to dismantle barriers, eliminate health inequities and improve access to health care, especially for those who have historically faced and continue to face discrimination and disadvantage. This committee will focus initiatives utilizing strategic planning priorities as a road map to achievement.</p>
MEMBERS	<p>Number of Committee Members: Maximum of 10 employees</p> <p>Term for leadership positions: Maximum of 3 years</p> <p>Term Limit: Due to the long-term nature of this work, a term limit will not apply for general membership. Certain positions are lifetime members and remain on the committee. If needed, non-life members can/may rotate or choose to serve a longer term, by committee decision.</p> <p>Selection of Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteer and Appointed: Employees may volunteer for the committee, but all members must be approved by the Section Chief of HPP before being accepted onto the committee (see below for recommended committee membership). The member must be committed to attend meetings and their manager must be supportive of attendance. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Positions Appointed by Senior Leadership: Chair and Co-Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair leads committee meetings, develops meeting materials, generates organizational buy-in for committee activities and works with the sponsor to meet goals. • Co-Chair supports the Chair in all tasks and activities. After the chair has met their term, the Co-Chair replaces that role. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Positions Appointed by Vote of Current Membership: Secretary and Vice Secretary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary: The most important duty the Secretary has is keeping accurate records of the Committee meeting (minutes). • Vice-Secretary: fills the role of taking minutes when Secretary is absent. After the Secretary has met their term, the Vice-Secretary replaces that role. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Membership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, the following structure provides ideal representation for membership; however, these are guardrails and not requirements: Education Committee (1), Green Group (1), CHP Section (1), Environmental Health Section (1), Health Planning and Policy Section (2), Operations Section (1), General Membership (1-3) • Diversity and inclusion of underrepresented groups will be a priority for membership • Consideration for membership will include balancing representation of leadership and front-line staff in addition to representation from across sections • Committee members may fill multiple categories within the structure outlined above to keep the group size at 10 or fewer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Recommended Membership Attributes - HEAT members should have expertise or interest in supporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of health equity and the elimination of health disparities across subpopulations • Increased knowledge of social and upstream/downstream determinants for health; knowledge or application of evidence-based/research-informed strategies to achieve and maintain health equity • Commitment to the intentional inclusion of population representatives in all committee planning, strategy, and implementation efforts • Expertise or interest will be evaluated based on a brief application



	<p>All members are expected to follow the ground rules below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get comfortable with the uncomfortable • Discomfort and imperfection are to be expected • Be open to new ideas • Assume the best • It's ok to disagree • Discuss topics calmly, with respect and humility • Be present and respect the space • Share your experiences, use "I" statements • Assess your safety and use your judgement • The stories of others are theirs to share, maintain confidentiality and trust among the group • Step up, step back (Avoid dominating the conversation; provide input and allow others to share as well) • If you experience yourself making judgements, ask yourself where those feelings came from • Consider and address the impact of actions rather than focusing on your intentions • Consider your privilege • Acknowledge pain or offense in the moment using "ouch" and have the option to discuss it or not at that time • Confront, critique, and challenge your own discomfort
<p>DEFINITIONS</p>	<p><i>[Core definitions of DEI-focused topics not included in this case study]</i></p>
<p>SHARED BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES</p>	<p>HEAT is rooted in the following shared beliefs and principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broader concept of health, meaning that access to health and opportunities for health are just as important as health status. • Shared responsibility for health in contrast to the idea that health is an individual choice. • Integrity • Cultural Humility <p>We recognize that many groups in Clay County experience health disparities, including, but not limited to, Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, those who are LGBTQ+, people living with disabilities and/ or mental health challenges, isolated seniors, new immigrants and refugees, migrant workers and those without documented status, people who use drugs, those experiencing homelessness, as well as low-income and underserved communities in both rural and urban areas. For individuals who identify across multiple groups, barriers to good health and wellbeing often intersect and become more difficult. Health equity principles demand that we adapt our responses to their needs and address the barriers they face with urgency.</p> <p>We recognize that to eliminate health inequities, we must address underlying social, economic and environmental determinants of health, including but not limited to: income, social and employment status, education, housing, transportation, access to services and public spaces, all of which are often shaped and perpetuated by bias, injustice and inequality.</p> <p>We recognize the impact that racism has had — and continues to have — on the health and wellbeing of racialized people and communities. We further recognize the intersecting and compounding impact of other forms of marginalization, exclusion and oppression, including, but not limited to, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and classism.</p> <p>We recognize that while certain groups — including Indigenous people, Black people, people who are LGBTQ+ — may share similar experiences due to their race, ethnic or cultural origin, gender identity or sexual orientation, no group is homogeneous.</p>



MEETING
PROCESS

Frequency of Meetings, to Include if Set Schedule: Monthly. Deadlines to Meet: See HEAT Work Plan
Confidentiality and/or HIPAA issues? Yes No



HEAT LOGIC MODEL 2022 - 2025				
Purpose: The Health Equity Action Team (HEAT) will guide and hold CCPHC accountable in the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our work and interactions with the public. The work of modeling best equity practice for the community achieving the best possible health for everyone in Clay County requires an approach that embodies the values, policies, and practices aimed to address discrimination and oppression in all its forms.				
Goal: Address Racism and other forms of oppression				
Inputs		Outputs	Outcomes	
		Activities	Short term	Long Term
Staff Engagement	HEAT Committee Contractors/Training Budget	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish Ground Rules 2. Increase the use of the Intranet for health equity communication 3. Increase contact hours for health equity trainings through STAG day and new hire trainings 4. Engage with a contractor for change management solutions 5. Develop a communication strategy to demonstrate leadership buy in to Health Equity 	Communicate and educate on the historical and current context for racism and other forms of social injustice	Build an inclusive and diverse culture through staff education, change management techniques and transparent communication.
	HEAT Committee Contractors/Training Budget	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct Lunch and Learns for staff (Research incentivizing lunch and learn opportunities to increase engagement) 2. Work with Social and Wellness Committee to celebrate all cultures (October is Cultural Diversity Month) 3. Provide all staff education through STAG days (Increase contact hours required for health equity training through STAG days) 4. Seeking SME training for HEAT committee and staff via contract agency or other paid and unpaid forms of training 5. Ensure CCPHC website is representative of the populations served 6. Develop a policy education toolkit to educate the community on political hot topics (Robert Wood Johnson, communicating from a conservative context) 	Address structural and institutional racism/other forms of social injustice and its impact on equity through culture and communication	
Policy	HEAT Committee Training Budget HR Best Practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand our job postings to build a more diverse candidate pool 2. Include diversity statement in job postings, website, job applications 3. Review job postings for inclusive language 4. Review "BAN THE BOX"- i.e. span of criminal history, requirements of position 5. Implement a system to track hiring demographics/application review process 6. Identify KSA (knowledge, skills, abilities) that we want employees to have for hire 7. Review Interview questions and scoring tool for inclusiveness 8. Train leadership team for inclusiveness practices for the hiring process 9. Review required equity trainings for the BOH 	Diversify workforce and generate awareness regarding BOH representation	Establish and implement anti-oppressive policies and practices to promote workforce diversity, equity, and capacity building.
	HEAT Committee Budget Data Evidence Based Methodology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research other assessments to conduct: (BARHII, org climate, PH WINS, core competencies) 2. Conduct a Policy Review using an equity-oriented policy review guide from a reputable source in conjunction with the Continuous Improvement Committee 3. Review practices for staff equity based on staff feedback, ex. parental leave, paid internships, non-teleworker benefits (Review practices for all staff to receive professional development and coaching from direct supervisors) 4. Policy feasibility assessment 	Conduct Internal Policy Review, feasibility, and readiness assessments	



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