

Methods and Leading Practices for Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through Government

Submitter: American Public Human Services Association

Areas of Submission: Area 1 (Equity Assessments and Strategies), Area 2 (Barrier and Burden Reduction), Area 3 (Procurement and Contracting)

Organizational Overview:

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) is a bipartisan national membership association representing state and local health and human services agencies and the subject matter experts that help execute their mission to improve outcomes for people nationwide. Building on our long-standing relationships with health and human services leaders, we focus on generating pragmatic solutions that advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

APHSA has extensive expertise working with local, state, and federal government, including:

- Serving as a trusted broker connecting state and local human services leaders together to improve policy and practice;
- Representing the voice of human services agencies to inform national policies that reflect what works for implementers on the ground to achieve desired outcomes;
- Building capacity of human services agencies through our Organizational Effectiveness consulting team that deploys proven tools and methodologies to strengthen organizational readiness to drive systems level change;
- Partnering with federal agency leadership and career staff to strengthen the relationship between federal, state, and local agencies that administer human services and related programs to advance shared outcomes that promote social and economic mobility and move the health and human services field upstream to prevent issues before they happen;
- Supporting federal agencies to advance strategic priorities as a contracted or partner organization on the following projects:
 - [SNAP Employment and Training National Partnership Grants](#) (Grantee for USDA Food and Nutrition Service)
 - Advancing Race Equity through TANF (Subcontractor for BLH Technologies for HHS Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance)
 - [COVID Response Project: Lessons Learned from State Adaptations and Federal Flexibilities](#) (Partnership with HHS Administration for Children and Families, Office of Regional Operations)

Contact Information: Matthew Lyons, Director of Policy & Research, mlyons@aphsa.org

American Public Human Services Association advances the well-being of all people by influencing modern approaches to sound policy, building the capacity of public agencies to enable healthy families and communities, and connecting leaders to accelerate learning and generate practical solutions together.

INFLUENCE. BUILD. CONNECT.

At APHSA, we continue to strive to center equity in our mission and vision. As we look towards the future we will seek to refine and strengthen our approach to dismantling structural inequities that erect barriers to all people and communities meeting their potential. We encourage you to learn more about our approach to advancing equity and transforming the human services system through our series of [Cornerstone](#) policy briefs (including our brief [Laying the Tracks for an Equitable Recovery and Long Term Repair](#)) and our [Call to Action](#) for applying a racial equity lens in human services.

Area 1: Equity Assessments and Strategies

What are some promising methods and strategies for assessing equity in internal agency practices and policies? What knowledge, skills, or supports do practitioners need to use such tools effectively?

APHSA's Organizational Effectiveness team has consulted with numerous state and local human services agencies to assess equity in internal agency practices. Through our work, several themes have emerged as essential to advance these efforts:

- [Shared Language](#) – Developing a common vocabulary to define what equity means and what are the key levers and benchmarks when understanding how to advance equity strategies.
- [Equity Leadership](#) – Having champions willing to sponsor the organization's equity work.
- [Data-Driven Strategies](#) – As agencies develop their vision and focus, deploying data to baseline agencies' understanding of their current state and actively evaluating progress to refine and improve strategies.
- [Peer Learning](#) – Creating safe spaces for racial and cultural caucuses to share and providing peer-driven learning.

To help agencies better document their progress in advancing equity within internal agency practices, APHSA has developed its *Opportunity Ecosystem Assessment Toolkit* (See Appendix A), which is broadly used to foster leadership capacity and collective advocacy for addressing social and economic mobility and racial equity at the policy level. The *Advancing Racial Equity* component of the Toolkit guides organizations through a systematic look at their practices which advance equity from an inside-out approach. The tool is informed by the [Awake to Woke to Work](#) model developed by [Equity in the Center](#).

What are some promising methods and strategies for identifying systemic inequities to be addressed by agency policy?

At APHSA, we have found that integrating an equity lens into human services policy is like developing muscle memory – it takes practice and must be routinized into the on-going work of your agency. A critical first step for APHSA was to intentionally incorporate an equity lens into our organization's policy framework. For each and every human services policy which we would take a position on behalf of our members, APHSA systematically analyzed that policy through an equity lens to identify systemic inequities that the policy was either positively or negatively addressing.

In developing this framework, APHSA had to decide whether to create a new and separate component of the Policy Framework focused on an equity analysis or to integrate the equity analysis into APHSA's existing frame. Through discussions with our state and local human services members, it became abundantly clear that to truly transform our system, equity analysis must be fully integrated into the work we do, rather than function as a

standalone part of our work. Through this approach, we feel we have created stronger and more lasting organizational change to center equity in everything that we do to advance human services policy.

Attached to this response is our *APHS A Policy Analysis Framework Overview of Key Levers* (See Appendix B) which shows the questions APHS A uses to explicitly hold ourselves accountable to consider how policy proposals tap key levers to shift the human services system to our desired future state, and whether these shifts proactively address systemic inequities that exist in our system and within the communities we serve. Another useful tool, the [Policy Equity Assessments \(PEA\) Framework](#) (developed by diversitydatakids.org), provides a useful frame of questions to systematically examine the impact of policies on racial equity.

How might agencies collect data and build evidence in appropriate and protected ways to reflect underserved individuals and communities and support greater attention to equity in future policymaking?

There are numerous important issues to consider when crafting strategies to collect data and build evidence in a manner that reflects the needs of underserved individuals and communities and advances equity. Two issues that have particular impact in the human services field include:

Equitable Design and Oversight of Evidence Clearinghouses

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act passed in 2019 provides an important and necessary step forward in prioritizing evidence-based decision-making in public policy. Since that time, federal agencies have made progress in developing metrics, collecting data, and overcoming challenges to support evidence-based policymaking.

One way this has manifested in human services policy is through the use of evidence-based clearinghouses to inform what services and activities state and local human services agencies may receive federal funding for based on the strength of evidence of the intervention as determined by the Clearinghouse. This approach is most evident in the [Title IV-E Family First Clearinghouse](#).

Yet, without centering the design of such clearinghouses in principles of equity, they can have unintended consequences that work to the detriment of underserved communities. Traditional, rigorous research methodologies work best to build the evidence base for those that are most conveniently available and easy to evaluate – most typically white communities. Alternative practices that reflect the norms and cultures of underrepresented communities often do not conform to the parameters of “standard” evaluation criteria and agencies lack the evidence base for adapting eligible services to reflect the needs of these communities. Moreover, community voices are typically not at the table to share their lived expertise when defining evidence and designing review processes.

The result of these factors lead to clearinghouses – and federal programs – that are designed in a bubble and do not reflect the needs of the communities disproportionately represented by them. To ensure such clearinghouses are designed with equity embedded throughout, policymakers should consider the following:

- Ensure that alternative research methodologies are equally weighted when considering culturally-specific evidence-based practices.
- Create pathways for the voices of people with lived expertise to contribute to the design, prioritization, and review of evidence-based practices.

- Prioritize funding and capacity building for development of evidence for communities disproportionately represented in systems and that lack the evidence base to understand what works to support them.

Avoid Oversurveillance of People and Communities in Child Welfare

While data and evidence provide powerful insights that can be used to improve services and outcomes, the act of data collection and evaluation in and of itself can have a powerful effect that can be harmful to people and communities. This is particularly true in child welfare, where an overzealous focus on analyzing risk factors for child abuse and maltreatment and reducing child fatalities can spur actions that inadvertently pull more families into a system that, once in, is very difficult to climb out of. In an effort to avoid negative data on their watch, mandatory reporters and child welfare agencies and staff may, out of an abundance of caution, over-refer, investigate, and ultimately remove children from their homes for factors that call for supportive services rather than punitive action. This oversurveillance disproportionately hurts communities of color that are already overrepresented in the child welfare system.

As state and local agencies seek to move upstream to prevent kids ever entering the child welfare system in the first place, we must be mindful about what data we collect and how it is used to ensure that we only intercede to separate a family when it is absolutely necessary and provide support services to those in need of help without fear of being punished for it. To do so, federal agencies can:

- Avoid relying on overcollection of data as a means to solve issues rather than focus on root causes of child maltreatment.
- Develop guidance, resources, and technical assistance for state and local agencies to create differential responses that offer alternative pathways to support families when they seek help.
- Establish data governance guidelines and parameters that ensure appropriate guardrails are in place so families do not fear asking for help may trigger a child protective services response.

How can community engagement or feedback from underserved individuals with lived expertise on a given policy problem be integrated meaningfully in an agency's use of equity assessment methods?

Meaningful and authentic engagement from underserved individuals with lived expertise is essential to dismantling structural inequities. The State of Washington's [Blueprint for a Just & Equitable Future](#) 10-year plan to dismantle poverty in the state offers a concrete example of how community voices can not only be a part of the solution, but drive the solutions to the most challenging public issues we face as a country.

More broadly, through APHSA's work with state and local human services agencies, we have found the following to be essential ingredients to meaningfully integrate community voice into agencies' equity work:

- **Incorporate community voice from the beginning and sustain that engagement throughout** – Bring in the perspectives of community leaders and people with lived expertise from the outset of efforts to ensure organizational efforts are seen and valued by the communities they serve and use such engagement to design community-determined objectives, goals, and measures that are focused on root causes that contribute to structural inequities. Once designed, maintain continuous interaction with and in the community to generate systemic change.
- **Have a clear Theory of Impact** – This should be used to establish common understanding of why and how agencies seek to achieve change and can be used to assess, adjust, and innovate their collective array of services and supports.

- **Share power** – By allowing staff and community partners to co-create solutions and establishing clear roles for these voices to help construct the agency’s vision and plan.
- **Connect with community-based organizations** – By incorporating community-based organizations into agencies’ planning processes, they build relationships with trusted brokers that can help understand, relate to, and connect with communities that have been underserved.
- **Establish norms and common language** – When engaging people from underserved communities with lived expertise, agencies should recognize the potential to trigger trauma and to unintentionally use structures and language that are exclusionary. Using inclusive language and spending the time up front to come to shared understanding and build trust so that stakeholders feel comfortable having uncomfortable conversations in a respectful way is key to creating a space for partnership.

Area 2: Barrier and Burden Reduction

- *How can agencies address known burdens or barriers to accessing benefits programs in their assessments of benefits delivery?*

In the human services field, there are a multitude of known burdens and barriers to accessing benefit programs which agencies can address in their assessment of benefits delivery. Addressing this systematically requires agencies to develop and deploy frameworks that assess and prioritize the burden on people and communities when making policy decisions.

Many of these known barriers tie back to the lack of foundational supports – such as transportation, internet, child care, housing, and more – that people need to thrive and which policy can be structured to support. Parallel and equal to these barriers are the ones that our own systems construct which get in the way of people accessing the benefits they need. While not comprehensive, the following represent many of the common known burdens and barriers to accessing benefits that are often baked into the design and implementation of human services systems:

- **Work Requirements** – [Recent evidence](#) reinforces that requirements that condition work participation as a prerequisite for receiving benefits is effective at reducing participation in programs yet has no effect in increasing employment or earnings, which are the ultimate outcomes that benefit programs are intended to achieve.
- **Excessive Administrative Requirements** – Federal rules that require an excessive amount of document submission and customer touchpoints result in avoidable churn, where people frequently lose and must reapply for benefits because of barriers keeping up with the vast array of paperwork and requirements they must provide. This disproportionately hurts people that face transportation, technology, and time barriers to stay on top of what is being asked of them. While ensuring people are eligible for the benefits they receive is paramount, too often we ask for unreasonable amounts and frequency of information that provides little value in preserving program integrity.
- **Misaligned Administrative Requirements** – Compounding the challenge of excessive administrative requirements, federal benefit programs operated by separate agencies set conflicting requirements for interviews, certification periods, and other administrative rules that require people to duplicate the same information numerous times for different programs. Better alignment of these rules so that people can submit information one time for all the benefits they need could simplify and reduce administrative burden for people struggling to navigate the maze of public benefit procedures.
- **Implicit Bias** – Hardcoded within systems intended to support people is implicit bias that can lead to adverse actions disproportionately taken against people from communities where agency staff hold negative attitudes that influence decisions. For example, [in TANF, racial differences have been observed in sanctions](#), receipt of work support services, and access to education and training. Similar biases have been [thoroughly documented in child welfare](#), where Black children are more likely to be reported and investigated for child protective services and be forcibly removed from their homes.

For each of these burdens and barriers, federal agencies can achieve change through policy reforms and investments in state, local, and community partners to build more equitable and accessible services.

What data, tools, or evidence are available to show how particular underserved communities or populations disproportionately encounter these barriers? Which underserved communities experience multiple, cumulative barriers and are disproportionately burdened by specific administrative processes or requirements?

The cumulative and compounding effects of these barriers have a disproportionate effect on underserved communities in many different ways. Some generalized challenges that specific communities face include:

- **People Experiencing Homelessness** – that do not have access to computers to submit information online nor have the means to retain documentation needed to prove eligibility or receive agency communications about program requirements.
- **Tribal Communities** – which do not have access to culturally appropriate services and are frequently not given autonomy to develop their own approaches to serve people in their communities.
- **Formerly Incarcerated Individuals** – that in some cases are barred from receiving SNAP, TANF, and other benefits as they try to transition into the community and face compounding issues they are left ill-equipped to manage on their own post-exit from prison (e.g. accrued child support obligations).
- **Rural Communities** – that lack access to transportation and internet needed to apply for benefits. Rural communities also face barriers to accessing critical services to support family and community well-being. For example, many children in rural communities are unable to travel to summer feeding sites to access meals and a scarcity of SNAP retailers and online purchasing options make it difficult for rural community members to redeem SNAP benefits.
- **Communities of Color** – that disproportionately experience poverty and are subject to implicit bias that result in adverse actions taken against them for benefits and services.
- **LGBTQ+ Communities** – that are overrepresented and face discrimination in the child welfare system.
- **People with Disabilities** – that face barriers to accessing benefits and are often not given the appropriate supports and pathways to meaningfully engage in employment and economic mobility opportunities.
- **Non-English Speakers** – that are not afforded the opportunity to access benefits and services in the language most comfortable to them.

Specific data, tools, and evidence that help shed light on how underserved communities experience these barriers include:

Impact of Administrative Requirements on Churn in SNAP

Colin Gray. Leaving Benefits on the Table. Journal of Public Economics, Volume 179. 2019.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2019.104054>

Rural Food Access Challenges

Summer Meals Actions Needed to Improve Participation Estimates and Address Program Challenges.

Government Accountability Office. May 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-369.pdf>

Impact of Work Requirements on SNAP Benefit Access

L. Wheaton, T. Vericker, J. Schwabish, T. Anderson, K. Baier, J. Gasper, N. Sick, K. Werner. The Impact of SNAP Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit Reinstatement in Nine States. June 2021. Urban Institute. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/ABAWDTimeLimit.pdf>.

Comparing Barriers in SNAP vs. WIC Benefit Redemption

Carolyn Barnes. "It Takes a While to Get Used to": The Cost of Redeeming Public Benefits. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*; Volume 31. April 2021.

<https://academic.oup.com/jpart/article/31/2/295/5917011?login=true>

Identifying Racism in the Drivers of Food Insecurity (Feeding America)

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/feeding.america.research/viz/IdentifyingRacismIntheDriversofFoodInsecurity/Introductionv2>

Overrepresentation of Black Children in Child Welfare

Jude Mary Cénat, Sara-Emilie McIntee, Joana N. Mukunzi, Pari-Gole Noorishad. Overrepresentation of Black children in the child welfare system: A systematic review to understand and better act. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 120. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105714>

LGBTQ+ Youth of Color Impacted by the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems

Keith Conron, Bianca D.M. Wilson. LGBTQ Youth of Color Impacted by the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: A Research Agenda. July 2019. UCLA School of Law Williams Institute.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-yoc-social-services/>

Serving TANF Recipients with Disabilities

Barden, Bret (2013). Assessing and Serving TANF Recipients with Disabilities. OPRE Report 2013-56. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/assessing_and_serving_tanf.pdf

Tribal Specific Approaches to Working with Families Involved in Child Welfare (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes)

<http://www.nrc4tribes.org/Tribal-Child-Welfare-Practice-Findings.cfm>

Supporting Re-Entry of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

The Federal Interagency Reentry Council: A Record of Progress and a Roadmap for the Future. August 2016.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/032749.pdf>

Improving Access to Benefits and Services for People Experiencing Homelessness

M. Burt, J. Carpenter, S. Hall, K. Henderson, D. Rog, J. Hornik, A. Denton, G. Moran. Strategies for Improving Homeless People's Access to Mainstream Benefits and Services. March 2010. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/strategiesaccessbenefitsservices.pdf>.

Impact of Stigma on SNAP Program Participation

Jenna Anders, Charlie Rafkin. The Welfare Effects of Eligibility Expansions: Theory and Evidence from SNAP. June 2021. https://www.charlierafkin.com/papers/ar_eligibility.pdf

Are there specific requirements or processes (e.g., in-person visits, frequency of recertification of eligibility) that have been shown in rigorous research to cause program drop-off or churn by underserved individuals and communities? Similarly, is there rigorous evidence available that certain requirements or processes have little actual effect on program integrity?

In addition to the numerous resources previously cited, we recommend OMB consider greater flexibility in how states conduct interviews in the SNAP program. As documented in our recent report on [SNAP Waivers and Adaptations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), only one-third of states believe that current interview requirements in the program are a best practice, with numerous alternative methods identified as of interest by states.

FNS' own research which assessed the contributions of interviews in [SNAP eligibility and benefit determinations](#) found that waiving interview requirements increased client satisfaction without resulting in negative overall outcomes for program access, application or recertification approval rates, benefit levels, or churn. The additional insights gained during the COVID-19 pandemic reinforce that a more nuanced approach can be deployed that uses interviews when needed to help people navigate the application process without placing undue burden collecting information that is not ultimately helpful in helping people access the program or to maintain program integrity.

Furthermore, recent evidence suggests recertification rules contribute to reduced participation and increased churn in SNAP. We encourage OMB to examine research findings from the below publications that show the rate of churn in SNAP and impacts of recertification and related policies on higher rates of churn.

Tatiana Homonoff, Jason Somerville. Program Recertification Costs: Evidence from SNAP. National Bureau of Economic Research. June 2020. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27311/w27311.pdf

Colleen Heflin, Leslie Hodges, Chinedum Ojinnaka. Administrative Churn in SNAP and Health Care Utilization Patterns. January 2020. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31688555/>

What kinds of equity assessment tools are more useful for addressing urgent agency priorities versus making systemic change?

We encourage the Administration to consider lessons learned and recommendations from two recent reports published by APHSA that respectively capture insights from the pandemic response for state SNAP programs and more broadly human services programs. These findings should be used to help agencies develop crisis response and resiliency plans that are centered in preserving equitable access to benefits during disruptive events that threaten our system of supports. Key themes from these reports highlight the importance of the following to ensure equitable agency responses to urgent changes that need to be made:

- Establish **automatic triggers** for agencies to adjust program rules and requirements in times of crisis that preserve equitable access to benefits. Adjustments should include:
 - o Waiving interview requirements
 - o Extending certification periods
 - o Permitting flexible use of telephonic signatures
 - o Granting flexibilities for contracted community partners to support benefit access and communicate program changes
 - o Permitting provision of virtual services and purchasing of equipment people need to access and interact with services remotely
- Coordinate across agencies to align program adjustments during periods of crisis to minimize administrative burden on people.

- Invest in state and local agencies to develop technology and tools that enable them to more nimbly adapt services without disruption for people served and develop emergency planning playbooks that document the full array of flexibilities and authorities available during times of crisis response.

APHSA's two reports can be accessed below –

[COVID Response Project: Lessons Learned from State Adaptations and Federal Flexibilities](#) (January 2021, in partnership with the HHS Administration for Children & Families, Office of Regional Operations and W.K. Kellogg Foundation).

SNAP Waivers and Adaptations During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Survey of State Agency Perspectives in 2020 (June 2021, in partnership with the Institute for Health and Social Policy at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and funding support from Healthy Eating Research).

- [Full Report](#)
- [Executive Summary](#)

How might agencies assess if specific barriers (e.g., specific questions on forms or requirements such as in-person interviews) are achieving their intended purpose?

Federal agencies can better assess specific barriers in benefits and services by investing in demonstrations and pilots that test and evaluate alternative approaches to service delivery that help build understanding of what works and what is unnecessarily placing administrative burden on people accessing services and increasing costs for state and local agencies to administer programs. To gain better understanding through these efforts, it is important for federal agencies to –

1. Adequately resource state and local agencies to test and evaluate such efforts, with funding and technical assistance to properly design pilots, invest in system capabilities to track and measure outcomes, and embed feedback loops to test and understand how different variations in program changes impact people overall and among specific communities.
2. Intentionally fund efforts to engage people with lived expertise to share their input in the design of pilot efforts and their feedback in understanding drivers of impacts observed through the pilots.

How could agencies incorporate considerations of the psychological costs of qualifying or applying for Federal benefits programs into their assessments of equitable service delivery?

Prioritizing trauma-informed approaches when developing federal policy, guidance, and technical assistance plays an important role helping state, local, and community implementers intentionally address the psychological cost of people's interaction with public benefits and supports in their service delivery models. Addressing these issues require agencies both address policies that contribute to a paternalistic relationship between human services systems and the people they interact with, as well as training to reorient organizational cultures to reflect equitable approaches that are sensitive to the experiences of people accessing services.

Child welfare is a field where this psychological toll is especially costly. Agencies are making much needed strides to support families that intersect with the child welfare system due to challenges in meeting their basic needs, rather than take actions that would trigger the removal of a child from their home. Developing these



1300 17TH STREET NORTH, SUITE 340, ARLINGTON, VA 22209

TEL (202) 682-0100

FAX (202) 204-0071

WWW.APHSA.ORG

preventative solutions in a way that is conscientious of the fears and past traumas of parents that have experienced the child welfare system is essential.

Lastly, agencies at all levels can make significant strides reorienting their policies and practices through an understanding that people inherently want to thrive and we should trust them to know what they need best. By taking this mentality, agencies can support people as their allies and champions to achieve their goals and get to truly meaningful engagement in helping people reach their potential.

Area 3: Procurement and Contracting

How might agencies identify opportunities to engage with business owners and entrepreneurs who are members of underserved communities to promote doing business with the Federal Government? What kinds of training and capacity building within agency teams would support equitable procurement and contracting efforts?

In understanding opportunities for achieving equity in procurement systems and identifying opportunities to engage with non-profit organizations who are members of underserved communities to promote doing business with the Federal Government, we urge OMB to review the report “[A National Imperative: Joining Forces to Strengthen Human Services in America](#),” commissioned by APHSA and the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities and prepared by Oliver Wyman and SeaChange Capital Partners with lead funding from the Ballmer Group and The Kresge Foundation.

This report focuses on the economic and social impact of human services community-based organizations (CBOs) working alongside government, and the need to strengthen and ensure their pivotal role in the larger human services ecosystem. The potential value of the human serving ecosystem is much greater than what has been realized so far, and, critical to advancing equity.

At the same time, against the backdrop of an increasing need for human services, the financial stability of the human services sector is increasingly tenuous. According to the study’s 2018 findings, too many CBOs operate under persistent deficits, have few or no financial reserves, and lack access to capital to invest in technology and modern data sharing tools. The pandemic further revealed both fragility and the critical role of CBOs as trusted community partners in the nation’s social services system.

To bolster our nation’s capacity to advance equity on-the-ground, especially in traditionally underserved communities, the federal government must recognize the pivotal, high trust role that CBOs play in concert with state and local governments. The report identifies five “north star” initiatives designed to improve the human services ecosystem to generate population health and well-being, increase economic productivity, and lower social costs over time. The transformative power of human services CBOs can be achieved through greater integration and coordination across the ecosystem on five key issues the report calls “north stars,” including (1) a shift in focus from service provision to equitable outcomes, (2) improving the sector’s capacity for innovation, (3) establishing generative partnerships, (4) adopting new financial strategies, and (5) reforming the regulatory environment. The report provides detailed recommendations in each of these 5 areas and every recommendation included in the report is backed by a specific of it already happening at a state or local level in the country.



1300 17TH STREET NORTH, SUITE 340, ARLINGTON, VA 22209

TEL (202) 682-0100

FAX (202) 204-0071

WWW.APHSA.ORG

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Opportunity Ecosystem Assessment Toolkit – Advancing Race Equity Component

Appendix B: APHSA Policy Analysis Framework – Key Levers

Appendix A:

Opportunity Ecosystem Assessment Toolkit

(Revised March 2020)

An **Opportunity Ecosystem** is a strategic, action-oriented, dynamic, and enduring environment formed by people and partners, aligned by a shared purpose and set of values that allow everyone in that community to live well and thrive. The ecosystem must be fueled by the people who live there, along with multiple networks contributing value through distinct vantage points, and collective impact efforts aimed at addressing systemic barriers developing the community's capacity for change in order to advance social and economic mobility and racial equity.

Through the use of the *Opportunity Ecosystem Assessment Toolkit*, we hope to foster leadership capacity and collective advocacy- both formal and grassroots- for addressing social and economic mobility and racial equity at the policy level. The Toolkit, originally developed in 2017 and consisted of one tool, is a compilation of four resources for Ecosystem Teams and Health and Human Services Systems to utilize as they prepare to advance community change efforts and monitor those efforts throughout their course.

As we guide ecosystems in their identification of environmental and structural root causes, in addition to their focus on the individual and family, we reinforce the importance of using shared data, analysis, and rapid experimentation cycles, to learn together and discover answers to chronic challenges. While it is important to include and encourage a component of facilitated conversation with the Ecosystem Team through the use of these tools, they can also be completed through self-reflection on paper and the web, as a Leadership Team, Ecosystem Sponsor Team or by the whole organization.

Opportunity Ecosystem Investment Tool (Pre-Assessment and Ongoing Monitoring)

Our ecosystem framework focuses on the capacity of individual communities to advance social and economic mobility and racial equity. Through the seven major elements, four progressive stages and related indicators of effectiveness, this tool is designed to guide community partners to define their related objectives, goals, and measures, as well as the ways to work together and monitor their progress.

Organizational Readiness for Change Assessment (Pre-Assessment)

The Assessment was designed to guide you as you reflect on your organization, Health and Human Services System or community partnership prior to beginning continuous improvement work through the ecosystem effort. Teams that get the most out of this exercise will be those that engage in honest self-reflection and work to identify both organizational strengths and current barriers to success within each of the four major areas of Readiness: Organizational, Leadership, Staff, and General Capacity Readiness.

Workforce Well-Being and Health Tool (Pre and Post Assessment)

The Assessment is designed to guide organizations and Leadership Teams in a reflective exercise about their current efforts in advancing workforce well-being. The self-assessment focuses on five well-being factors: (1) social connectedness, (2) safety, (3) stability, (4) mastery, and (5) access to resources. By completing the self-assessment, organizations and Leadership Teams will gain an understanding of how their workforce aligns with the well-being indicators. This assessment can help organizations and Leadership Teams determine where there is interest in making changes within their organization.

Social and Economic Mobility (Pre and Post Assessment and Ongoing Monitoring)

The Assessment is designed to guide ecosystem-level partnership groups to link their current and emerging programs and services to a set of standard drivers of Social and Economic Mobility, helping them to understand replication or gaps in their collective service array and front-line practice strategies. The SEM drivers are organized around four progressive clusters: (1) family stabilization, (2) 2Gen Practice and engagement, (3) capacity building, and (4) ecosystem capacity. This assessment approach can be used over an extended timeframe to help evolving ecosystems to gauge, adjust, and focus their collective efforts.

Advancing Race Equity (Pre and Post Assessment and Ongoing Monitoring)

The Assessment is designed to guide organizations and Leadership Teams through taking a closer look at their practices which advance race equity from an inside-out approach. The focus areas of this assessment include: (1) organizational area, (2) organizational culture, (3) learning environment, (4) board of directors, (5) communities, and (6) data.

Advancing Race Equity

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<i>Diversity</i> <i>Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</i>	<i>Inclusion</i> <i>Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people’s contributions</i>	<i>Equity</i> <i>Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</i>
Organizational Area	Executive Management Upper Management High-Level of Decision Making High-Level of Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes diverse representation is important but may feel uncomfortable discussing issues tied to race • Identifies race equity champions at the board and senior leadership levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies race equity champions • Prioritizes an environment where different lived experiences and backgrounds are valued and seen as assets to teams and to the organization • Leadership holds a critical mass of people of color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantles shame • Models a responsibility to speak about race dominate culture and systemic racism both inside and outside the organization • Identifies organizational power differentials and changes them by exploring alternative leadership models, such as shared leadership • Shows a willingness to review personal and organizational oppression, and has the tools to

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<i>Diversity</i> <i>Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</i>	<i>Inclusion</i> <i>Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people's contributions</i>	<i>Equity</i> <i>Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</i>
				analyze their contribution to structural racism
	Managers Mid- Management Reports to Director/CEO High-Level of Decision Making Responsible for Direct Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushes past their own low comfort level to discuss race-related issues with staff • Possesses an emergent understanding of the race disparities that exist among the populations they serve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes and speaks about race disparities and/or bias internally and externally • Values diverse teams, providing training and coaching/mentoring support • Takes responsibility for a long-term change management strategy to create a race equity culture, which includes having a critical mass people of color in leadership roles • Holds team members accountable by asking them to identify racial disparities in their programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity goals are outlined in hiring plans and focus on increasing the number of racially diverse staff members
Organizational Culture	Human Resources Systems Goals Internal Processes Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware that a white dominant workplace culture exists, but expect people to adhere to dominant organizational norms to succeed • Learning to address challenges that occur in diverse environments as a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows willingness to review personal and organizational power differential and changes them by exploring alternative leadership models such as shared leadership • Tracks retention and promotion rates by race (within teams) to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff, stakeholders, and leaders are skilled at talking about race, racism, and their implications

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<i>Diversity</i> <i>Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</i>	<i>Inclusion</i> <i>Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people's contributions</i>	<i>Equity</i> <i>Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</i>
	<p>Employees</p> <p>Policy and Procedures</p> <p>Communication</p>	<p>result of unconscious biases and micro-aggressions that create conflict and resentment among staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a shared vocabulary Places responsibility for creating and enforcing DEI policies within the Human Resources department 	<p>identify where professional growth and development may be needed</p>	
Learning Environment	<p>Physical Locations</p> <p>Aesthetics</p> <p>Learning Tools and Resources</p> <p>Instructors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides Learning and Development specific to understanding Race Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Race Equity learning is central to all employee onboarding Race Equity is listed in values and norms of the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shares race equity learning and development with community partners to include data and outcomes
Board of Directors	<p>Governing Body</p> <p>Voting Rights</p> <p>Decision-Making Authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies race equity champions at the board and senior leadership levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Names race equity work as a strategic imperative Shows a willingness to review personal and organizational oppression, and has the tools to analyze their contribution to structural racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds the Executive Director/CEO accountable for all measures related to performance on race equity, ensuring that financial resources are allocated to support the work

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<i>Diversity</i> <i>Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</i>	<i>Inclusion</i> <i>Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people's contributions</i>	<i>Equity</i> <i>Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</i>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commits fully to building a Race Equity culture and holds the organization accountable for race equity policies and practices • Adapts their mission to engage and empower communities to work with the organization to achieve shared advancements and benefits 	
Communities	<p>A group of people living in the same place</p> <p>Partner Organizations</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Religious Institutions</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>Government Institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values the community and population served, and believes they are worthy of partnership and investment • Develops personal relationships with community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the community and population the organization serves has been disenfranchised by systemic issues that were most likely not created by the people served by the organization • Believes it is the role of the organization to help fix those inequities and injustices • Regularly seeks community input on programs and services they provide or intend to provide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Level of wealth and economic stability for communities of color • Programs are culturally responsive and explicit about race, racism, and race equity • Communities are treated as stakeholders, leaders, and assets to the work • Uses a vetting process to identify vendors and partners that share their commitment to race equity

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<p>Diversity Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</p>	<p>Inclusion Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people's contributions</p>	<p>Equity Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</p>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expects staff to work with the community to co-create solutions to problems as a key to meet the organization's mission • Understands that only through continuous interaction with, and in, the community they serve, will race equity be achieved at a systemic level • Is seen and valued as an ally by the community they work with
Data	<p>Program Outcome Data</p> <p>Human Resource Data</p> <p>Predictive Analytics Data</p> <p>Disparity Outcome Data</p> <p>Program Usage Data</p> <p>Financial Data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaggregate data • Gathers data about race disparities in the populations they serve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaggregates internal data • Staff data is available to identify areas where racial disparities exist, such as compensation and promotion • Analyzes staff data to find root causes of racial disparities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation efforts incorporate the disaggregation of data illustrated through longitudinal outcomes data • Efforts impact racial disparities in the communities they serve • Expenditures reflect organizational values and a commitment to race equity

		Awake Markers	Woke Markers	Work Markers
		<p><i>Diversity</i> <i>Organizations are focused on representation by increasing the number of racially diverse staff</i></p>	<p><i>Inclusion</i> <i>Organizations are evolving their culture to value all people's contributions</i></p>	<p><i>Equity</i> <i>Organizations are accountable to addressing systemic racism and root causes of inequity internally and externally</i></p>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement in race equity work is prioritized • Salary disparities do not exist across race, gender, sexuality, and other identities through analysis of mandated all-staff compensation audits

Appendix B

Table 1 Key Levers for APHSA Policy Analysis

Key Lever	Objective	Uses of Lever When Analyzing Policy
Investing in Outcomes that Work	Measures outcomes rather than process outputs and supports the use of evidence-based practices and continuous quality improvements to achieve outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there clear outcomes the policy seeks to achieve and are those outcomes aligned with APHSA’s values? • Do compliance requirements focus on processes or outcomes? • Does the policy help frontline staff prioritize working with clients to achieve outcomes? • Does the policy consider different types of research evidence that apply multiple methods and approaches when measuring program effectiveness? • Does the policy illuminate disparate outcomes, with particular attention paid to race and ethnicity? • Does the policy address root causes of disparate outcomes and not just their manifestations? • Are funding levels set based on objective measures of need to achieve outcomes and indexed to respond to changing real costs of services?
Modern Platforms	Builds system and operational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there stable and predictable funding to support the fundamental service array that must undergird an effective human services system? • Is there funding for technology to support program implementation? • Does the policy breakdown barriers to data sharing and interoperability of systems? • Does the policy support more efficient delivery of services or reduce delivery costs? • Does the policy improve access to services? • Does the policy eliminate systems and operations that reinforce differential outcomes by race?
Space for Innovation	Supports state and local efforts to test new strategies to address evolving needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there flexibility to adapt services to meet local needs? • Does the policy fund demonstration projects? • Does the policy draw from best innovations in government and the private sector? • Is there opportunity to modernize fiscal or procurement models to improve operations? • Is funding flexible to respond to increased needs during periods of economic downturns?
Integrated Policy Levers	Encourages alignment of services across sectors, such as	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the policy help shift services towards an integrative and generative state that addresses root causes and system conditions that limit mobility?

American Public Human Services Association advances the well-being of all people by influencing modern approaches to sound policy, building the capacity of public agencies to enable healthy families and communities, and connecting leaders to accelerate learning and generate practical solutions together.

INFLUENCE. BUILD. CONNECT.

Key Lever	Objective	Uses of Lever When Analyzing Policy
	whole family approaches, social determinants, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the policy enable agencies to address social determinants of well-being and help move from stability to mobility? • Are whole family approaches being used to address the needs of families holistically? • Are state and local agencies empowered to move upstream to preventative and early intervention services to avoid negative long-term outcomes? • How does the policy interact with existing policies to encourage alignment of services?
Applying Science & Design	Uses human insights to inform design, delivery, and expected outcomes of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are services person- and family-centered to engage with clients in meaningful ways? • Does the policy use behavioral insights to design and test more effective interventions? • Does the policy consider how race, gender, and other cultural differences influence how people view and engage in services? • Are narratives in the policy evidence-informed and do they use framing research? • Does the policy deliberately apply neuroscience and executive functioning research to redesign service delivery models?
Partnering for Impact	Creates seamless boundaries across sectors by blending and braiding services to meet local needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the policy breakdown barriers for agencies to coordinate services across programs within government? • Are there opportunities to connect across public and private sectors to maximize collective impact? • Are the needs of key community providers being met to support successful implementation? • Are communities of color mobilized in the delivery of services through use of community-based organizations, community advisory groups, etc.