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Creating an Equity Lens at Institutions for Higher Education

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Introduction

Many institutions of higher education commit to serving marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Despite these commitments, many of these institutions struggle to achieve their equity goals for a broad range of historically marginalized groups such as racial and ethnic groups, differently abled populations, and transgender community members. From disparities in student recruitment and retention to tenure rates for faculty to under-representation in staff and administrative positions to student demonstrations and speak outs about their frustration with their learning experiences and campus decisions, universities and colleges look for ways to adopt policies and programs and adapt institutional practices to create the equitable campuses many envision. Equity lenses applied to decision-making processes have emerged as one way to support more equitable policy and program creation at higher education institutions.

I created this document to help you, as a member of a university or college, understand what an equity lens is, how it can be used, and how to begin developing an equity lens for your unit at your institution. The origin of this document comes from the development of the Portland State University (PSU) 2017 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan (DEIP). I served on the writing team for the plan, and we decided to develop a short appendix item to help PSU community members develop their capacity to create an equity lens. That short appendix item grew, and we decided to release it as a standalone document, believing it may be of use to other institutions in higher education looking to create equity lenses. Because of this document's origins at PSU, the examples and references refer to work at PSU and in the Portland metropolitan area, where multiple government institutions and nonprofit organizations have adopted equity lenses. I have also used my experience developing and using equity lenses to inform examples and recommendations throughout the document. As we describe in the PSU DEIP, we focus on racial equity in much of our materials as we believe that racial equity discussions are some of the toughest for our colleagues to engage. I, along with the rest of the DEIP writing team, hope that you find this document helpful in achieving equity in your work!

What is an equity lens?

The purpose of an equity lens or impact assessment is to institutionalize and make clear how equity can and should inform decision making. The lens incorporates a series of systematic questions to ask during policy and plan development and implementation to ensure the needs of marginalized populations are articulated and strongly considered during planning and decision making. The lens questions are designed to develop and sustain an analytical framework to assess the effects of policies on marginalized racial groups, emphasizing reflection in action. An equity lens will not tell you what action to take. Rather, the lens helps you discuss and reflect on the equitableness of the action and decision-making process – that is to contemplate who benefits from the decision, who is harmed, and how might the decision sustain inequity.

The lens pairs an examination of the equity of a planning process with the equitableness of the policies created through the process. Some example questions found in many racial equity lens include: what are the expected results of a policy; how will those results affect different racial groups; and does a proposed policy address a pressing issue identified in data about a racially marginalized group? Equity lenses typically include an assessment of the decision, evaluation of the process, and reflection about the equitableness of the decision throughout the process, and are done in an iterative manner. However, you should develop a lens that suits your institutional context to ensure it works effectively.

Who uses an equity lens?

Government and nonprofit entities are using equity lenses to expand their decision-making capacity to ensure they are serving historically marginalized and oppressed people, and there are many documents that detail how to create an equity lens. In the Portland area, the regional government (Metro), City of Portland, and Multnomah County have all developed equity lenses and supporting materials. Nonprofit organizations such as Meyer Memorial Trust and the MRG Foundation have adopted a very strong equity lens approach in their philanthropic giving. A PSU team comprised of faculty and staff also reviewed the strategic plan using an equity lens to demonstrate how plan goals should be analyzed from an equity standpoint. Two equity lens panels were formed, one addressing race and ethnicity specifically, the other focused on additional diversity dimensions. An example from the PSU team using an equity lens is found later in the document.

Outside of the Portland area, many other governments and organizations are using equity lenses. Visit the Local and Regional Government Alliance for Racial Equity website for their materials to support equitable policy-making (<http://www.racialequityalliance.org/tools-resources/>). Likewise, Racial Equity Tools (<http://www.racialequitytools.org/home>) features a large number of examples of materials to help you develop your capacity to plan equitably. The Puget Sound Educational Service District also has materials you can download to see how they are using equity lenses: <https://www.psesd.org/services/equity-in-education/>.

Why use an equity lens?

Most institutions of higher education emerged during an era of significant systematic oppression. Your institution was likely created in a societal system where people were marginalized along a broad set of demographic factors. As individuals, most of us working in higher education believe in concepts such as equal access to education and supporting student development regardless of their background. However, many people struggle to know what to do to ensure equitable decision-making occurs. An equity lens can help organizations such as yours that are committed to promoting equity, but are looking for concrete decision-making support in undoing the legacy of privilege in which our institutions are rooted. The equity lens supports changes in decision making processes by explicitly naming equity as a component of the decision making process. By giving people a clear set of questions to ask about how a given decision matters to achieving equity, the lens helps people feel less overwhelmed by the sometimes seemingly abstractness of inequity in our institutions.

Figure 1 shows the Multnomah County equity and empowerment logic model. The model helps articulate the intersections between who we are as individuals, the institutions in which we try to achieve equity, and how our work as individuals and institutions can help create systematic change across societies. The logic model allows you to see where your work and actions can fit into trying to achieve equity in general. The equity lens, referred to as “the Lens” appears throughout the model.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

When do you use an equity lens?

From contracting to faculty and staff hires to curricular changes, an equity lens should inform all university decision making. While part of the equity lens emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized voices in and transparency of decision-making, there are decisions that you will encounter that must be made quickly, by one person, or are confidential and open only to a small group of people. When decisions must be non-inclusive by mandate, such as in hiring decisions, or involve a quick time table, such as which adjunct to hire to teach a class at the last minute, the equity lens still plays a central role in understanding the impacts of a decision. In these instances, the people making the decision must articulate who the decision will affect and how, seeking knowledge on their own and thinking through the consequences of the decision from the perspective of various stakeholders.

How do you create an equity lens?

An equity lens will be most effective when it is created by those who will use it. The first step is your institution’s or unit’s decision to use an equity lens. At PSU, the university decided to adopt an equity lens. The PSU 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, in its Goal 4, states that the university should “develop and utilize an equity lens in campus decision making” (pg. 14). The purpose of this equity lens document is to support all decision-makers on campus in the creation and implementation of an equity lens appropriate to their work. While creating and applying an equity lens might appear daunting at first, with time and practice, incorporating equitable analysis into your decision-making processes becomes faster and its role more apparent after using it several times.

At the end of this document, we provide you with starting guidance and a set of questions common across equity lenses as well as real and hypothetical examples of using an equity lens. However, an equity lens should be calibrated to the types of decisions you make. For instance, most of the government equity lenses consider how a decision might impact a specific place like a neighborhood. Many university units may not need to consider a “spatial” component, and might not include that component in their own lens, while some campus units such as those conducting community-based learning would want to think about the geographic reach or impact of their projects. Figure 3 displays one Portland local government approach to an equity lens.

What do you need to create an equity lens?

Fortunately, many materials exist to help you get started in creating and using your equity lens. The sources listed above in the “Who Uses an Equity Lens” as well as the referenced figures will

lead you to a plethora of support materials. Most likely, your two biggest needs will be time and data.

Learning to think equitably will take time, especially if this is not something you think about on a somewhat regular basis. For people from communities that experience disparities, this type of thinking is often easier to translate into decision-making; many are already accustomed to assessing how their specific needs are left out of decisions. However, for people who come from majority or dominant community groups (i.e., white men), you may find yourself needing to work even harder to make an equity analysis a routine part of your day. Even if you are from one of these groups, you may struggle at first to think about other marginalized groups. Just asking yourself each day how the decision you are about to make could affect or would matter to a given marginalized group can help you begin to fold equity into your daily practice.

Formal decision-making processes where people are not used to incorporating equity considerations will need modifying. Per the lens, you need to set aside time to assess your decision-making structures and identify who should be included in different types of decisions. Making decision-making practices transparent are not just about equity; transparency can make your organization or unit function better.

Equitably based decisions should be data driven. Data could include retention rates disaggregated by race or gender, or could include qualitative measures obtained from focus groups about student program satisfaction. Human resources exit interviews could be used to inform discussions about recruitment and retention of people from diverse and marginalized backgrounds. You must make sure you are collecting data that captures populations who are the target of equity policies (i.e., race, disability). However, do not let a lack of current data hamper your efforts to move forward on developing your equitable lens. Where quantitative or systematic metrics are missing, you should ask for insight from people trained or willing to offer insight into the experiences of these communities. Depending on the nature of the topic, you can review existing programs at other organizations or consult the scholarly literature. At that point you can build in metrics for future evaluation and monitoring of the program or policy such as monitoring student satisfaction or faculty retention. If you are at PSU, please contact Global Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) for additional support in creating and using your equity lens.

How do you know your equity lens is working?

An equity lens should be continuously adapted to ensure its effectiveness. There are three areas to evaluate. The first examines how often the lens is used in your units' decision making processes. You could ask each unit member to reflect on how the lens was used in unit decision-making. For instance, in a faculty academic department, you could discuss how equity considerations informed decision and action items on faculty meeting agendas. As you track how often the lens is used, you should also consider how participants experienced using the lens. You could also ask questions such as: "Do asking the questions from the lens help decision-makers understand the equitableness of the decisions?," or "Is using the lens leading people to a different outcome than previously expected?"

For more participatory decisions, where careful attention to decision-making processes is warranted such as with curriculum reviews and faculty hiring, you should evaluate how participants in decision-making processes felt about the process. You may ask if the decision-making procedures were clear, or if each person involved in the process felt their perspective was respected.

Lastly, decisions should be tracked to see how they affect equity. Evaluation and monitoring metrics should follow the effects of a decision with data collection about marginalized populations. For instance, if you have determined that students of color are graduating at lower rate than white students, then you will want to track what programs you have put in place to support student of color graduation rates and whether these programs change the graduation rate. We cannot know if our decisions have their intended effect if we do not track their outcomes.

The logic model by Multnomah County (Figure 1) I presented earlier in this document offers several useful evaluative examples to help determine the effectiveness of your lens.

Real world equity lens examples

Shifting organizational decision-making to expressly include equity does not happen immediately or easily. Below, I include examples of institutions working to integrate equity lenses into their work.

PSU Strategic Plan and Incorporating Equity

The Portland State University 2016-2020 strategic plan did not start-off with an equity lens. However, stakeholders raised the need to incorporate thinking about equity into the planning process to ensure the plan would have equity relevant outcomes. Based on their feedback, two equity lens panels were formed, as indicated earlier, to address various topics, such as campus climate, to ensure that equity issues were being considered both across the whole set of their issues as well as each individual strategy. After the equity teams reviewed the topic team proposals, one equity lens report was developed together, and offered feedback about the existing proposals as well as equity issues that had not been identified.

In terms of process, the equity committee split into two groups initially. One group focused on racial equity issues; the other group focused on other marginalized groups on campus. Why? People working on equity issues worry that race is lost in discussions when all marginalized groups are considered. The groups worked independently for a short period of time; however, decided that the intersectionality of their issues would be best addressed through a joint effort and closer synergy. Splitting the team at first allowed the teams to discuss the unique challenges of addressing racial equity, and created space for the groups to come back together with these challenges in their mind.

The final result, as demonstrated in the plan, was a section in the plan (Section 4: Expand our commitment to equity) and equity lens call-out boxes for each other section to describe specific equity concerns. For instance, in Section 1: Elevate student success, specific equity concerns raised included such issues as “support faculty to understand equity issues to foster better relationships with historically marginalized and underrepresented students” and “develop

academic experiences, including community-based learning, that use universal design, accessibility and appropriate accommodations to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students” (p. 9). The inclusion of a specific equity section as well as equity lens notes for each section demonstrates how equity can be infused across plans and policies. The PSU planning process also demonstrated how equity could be addressed even in less than ideal circumstances (adding it late to the process instead of from the start).

Racial Equity and Homelessness

A Home for Everyone (AHFE), a multijurisdictional governance effort to address homelessness in Multnomah County in Oregon, uses an equity lens in their decision-making processes. Their lens can be found on their [website](#).¹ One example of the lens working effectively comes from the decision-making processes and final decision of one committee to designate programs that could address existing racial disparities in homelessness affecting African Americans as a top priority for a particular funding source.

The committee included many people of color, several people who worked on racial equity, and people who had experienced homelessness, none of whom worked at organizations eligible for the funding source. The government representatives responsible for staffing the committee helped to develop the committee membership with two objectives in mind: 1) compliance with federal regulations, which require representation of multiple stakeholders (including people with lived experience of homelessness) while avoiding organizational conflicts of interest, and 2) application of the locally-adopted racial equity lens.

The committee was tasked with determining which programs would be locally selected to compete for new funding made available from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Data demonstrating the disparate impact African Americans were experiencing was used in discussing, guiding and making the decision. The [2015 Point in Time Count](#) for Multnomah County people experiencing homelessness in this county showed that African Americans were not just experiencing homelessness at a higher rate than whites,² but the number of African Americans experiencing homelessness had grown by 85% compared to four years prior. Whites had experienced comparatively little growth (2%) in people experiencing homelessness. The committee decided that an open and competitive local project selection process would focus on organizations that could most effectively address the existing racial disparities in homelessness among African Americans, with priority going to organizations founded and run by African Americans.

After the call for proposals went out, the committee competitively ranked and selected specific project proposals to submit to HUD for its nationally competitive selection process. The committee considered conventional metrics such as tracking records of successful program implementation as well as ability to leverage funding. However, the committee also included questions about how well the organization could meet the needs of African Americans through demonstrated capacity and effectiveness in delivering culturally relevant programming. In

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566631e8c21b864679fff4de/t/580fd47af5e231fb340423ec/1477432443385/Racial+Equity+Lens.pdf>

² <https://multco.us/file/42320/download>

Multnomah County, there are relatively few social service organizations that are run by and expressly serve African Americans in comparison to non-culturally specific organizations, and among them, fewer who focus on homeless services. A central part of the discussion by the committee looked at whether an organization serving homeless communities but with no intentional focus in serving African Americans should be forwarded to HUD to compete for funding, or whether an African American led and African American serving organization with limited focus in serving people experiencing homelessness should be recommended. The discussions were always framed by looking at what decision(s) would likely yield the most equitable outcomes for African Americans and have the greatest potential for reducing existing racial disparities in homelessness. The discussion was not easy, and not everyone agreed; however, in the end, the committee elected to select organizations serving African Americans that wanted to expand their work and partnerships to serve people experiencing homelessness.

The decisions on how to structure the committee, what should be prioritized for funding recommendations, and discussions about who should receive the funding were all guided by a commitment to racial equity. The decision-making timeline laid out by HUD happened in a few short months, and included a serious and time-consuming commitment by Portland Housing Bureau staff and leadership to support the selected organizations in preparing and submitting their application to HUD. The short turn-around time for the process also required that committee members, several volunteering their time outside of their regular employment, to prioritize meetings and application materials review. Here, the lens worked because people returned to the commitment of racial equity throughout the process, and found time to do the necessary work.

Creating Your Equity Lens

Every unit interested in developing an equity lens should finalize their own. A central part of equitable decision making means that people making decisions and affected by those decisions determine the process for making those decisions. To help you get started, we reviewed various equity lenses and compiled some common questions found across the lenses. Some places use more questions; some places use far fewer.

At its base, an equity lens *must* identify the decision at hand, who is affected by the decision and whether disparities exist, and the decision-making structure. The lens must then be used as feedback into the core description of the decision. The proposed lens is detailed below. Following the proposed lens are three hypothetical cases university decision-makers might encounter.

Equity Lens Sample Questions

Describing the decision and its effects

- What is the policy, program, or decision under review?
- What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?
- What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?
- Who is most affected by the decision, policy, or program?
- What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?

- Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities, intentional or unintentional?
- Will the policy, program, or decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?

Decision-making structure questions

- How are decisions being made?
- Who is making the decision?
- Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision or, who experience disparities in relation to the decision, participating in the decision-making process? Why or why not?
 - If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?
 - Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?

Reflection

- Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?
- What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?

Table 1. Equity Lens Questions and Further Considerations

Equity Lens Questions	Additional considerations/clarifications
What is the policy, program, or decision under review?	Consider the issue in the simplest of terms.
What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?	Consider the cultural and institutional frameworks in which the decision is being created. Assumptions are always built into decisions, and they should be explicated to ensure that inequities are not inadvertently built into the decision.
What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?	State the desired outcome clearly. Focus on what the main purpose of the decision.
Who is most affected by these decisions?	Identify those individuals and groups of people who will be most impacted by the decision.
What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?	Disparities might be current or created by the program. They might also be made greater.
Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities, intentional or unintentional?	Disparities might be current or created by the program. They might also be made greater.
Will the policy, program, or decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?	Consider how the decision could result in systematic change in relation to other decisions.

How are decisions being made?	Make the decision making process transparent and clear. Do all parties involved in the making decisions understand the decision-making framework and procedures? What participatory structures are in place to ensure that all participants are equally heard during the process?
Who is making the decision?	Who informs the decision-maker(s)'s thinking on the issue? What other actors have power and influence over the decision-maker? These individuals may not be directly involved in the decision-making, but their influence should be noted.
Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision, or who experience disparities in relation to the decision, participating in the decision-making process?	Why or why not is the group included? If they are included, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)? Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently? Input may include representation in the decision, consultation with people knowledge about the needs of the group, research into existing literature about the group's needs in relation to the decision, etc.
Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?	
What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?	Reflect on the process of using the equity lens and consider what could be improved next time. Also review information you came across during the decision-making process but did not have the opportunity to act on for this decision and make sure that information is shared for future decisions.

Hypothetical Examples Applying the Equity Lens

1. Choosing a Caterer

You are catering an event for students connected to your unit, but at a location where you do not have to use the university caterer. How do you select a caterer?

- **What is the policy, program, or decision under review?** What company to pick to cater a meal.
- **What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?** One could assume that all caterers are equal, or that one type of food is preferred by all students (such as pizza).

- **What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?** Order food to improve quality and turn out for student centered event.
- **Who is most affected by the policy, program, or decision?** The event is for students; any potential caterer will also be affected.
- **What group(s) do or will experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?** Students with dietary restrictions that come from religious practices that are marginalized in the U.S. experience disparities.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities, intentional or unintentional?** The decision could help bring caterers owned by marginalized community members to campus, improving the number of PSU contractors of color. Students with dietary restrictions such as those related to religion, lifestyle, or health conditions may not be able to participate based on your choice of caterer or food. The choice is unlikely to lead to any institutional changes. Intentional benefits could include creating wealth and demonstrating commitment to minority owned businesses. Unintended consequences if a minority owned caterer is not selected is continued wealth concentrated in White communities.
- **Could the policy, program, or decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?** It is unlikely that this single decision could, but making catering decisions university wide like this might help. Also, food that is outside of the mainstream of typical caterers can build awareness of other cultural groups' food choices.
- **How are decisions being made?** This is an administrative decision and will not involve much input. Students will be asked about dietary restrictions in advance to ensure culturally appropriate food is ordered.
- **Who is making the decision?** Administrative staff member in conjunction with unit head.
- **Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision participating in the decision-making process?**
 - **If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?** Student input will be solicited through a survey to ensure all dietary needs are considered. This information could be obtained once a year.
 - **Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?** No.
- **Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?** Student recommendations for culturally relevant or minority owned caterers could be solicited.
- **What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?** Future unit provided meals can rely on much of this information. Other caterers owned by people of color could be solicited. Keeping a list of caterers who are minority owned on hand will help ensure these caterers are considered in the future.

2. Adjunct hiring decisions

A faculty member obtains research funding to buy out of a course close to the start of the quarter. As a school director/department head, you now need to find an adjunct to cover the course quickly.

- **What is the policy, program, or decision under review?** Whom to hire to teach a class at the last minute.

- **What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?** Finding instructors takes times. Using existing networks will expedite the process, and lead us to the best instructor. Someone who previously taught the class may also be available.
- **What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?** To hire a person to teach a course.
- **Who is most affected by the decision, policy, or program?** The students will be most impacted by the decision as will the person who is hired to teach the class.
- **What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?** Adjunct faculty tend to be White and male, more so than tenure track faculty.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities, intentional or unintentional?** If a person of color or woman could be hired, this would address help address the under-representation of these marginalized groups in the classroom across faculty in general, and within the adjunct faculty in particular. Adjunct faculty tend to be White and male for multiple reasons. Efforts to address this require concentrated effort to recruit women and people of color to teach as adjunct faculty members. Failure to hire a non-White or non-Male faculty member could make existing disparities worse.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?** As an individual decision, this hire will likely not make a system change, but could be part of a series of hires that would reflect a commitment to hiring faculty of color and women.
- **How are decisions being made?** The unit head will ask for recommendations from faculty and alumni about who could teach the class, and solicit materials from prospective instructors. While this decision is made in the overall structure of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity hiring processes of the university, the unit may request for a waiver to bypass this process if time is short. In the instances where a waiver is granted, using an equity lens for hiring becomes even more important when the hires occur outside of the affirmative action and equal employment opportunity hiring process.
- **Who is making the decision?** The unit head will make the decision.
- **Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision participating in the decision-making process? Why or why not?** No, other adjuncts do not have time to participate and it is not appropriate to include people in a hiring pool in decision making. The students are not involved as adjunct decisions are usually made by the director only.
 - **If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?** No.
 - **Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?** There are too many adjunct hires to include students effectively. In this case in particular, the decision must be made quickly. Student input will be used to evaluate the instructor.
- **Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?** Because existing networks, including alumni networks, will tend to reinforce dominant populations, locating an adjunct from a marginalized population may take time. In this instance, the unit head may not have time to identify a qualified candidate, and the head would certainly not want to create additional problems by hiring someone unqualified for the sake of diversity. Instead, the unit head should set aside resources (time and staff) to create adjunct lists to cover all required courses that include women and people of color immediately. Such a list would

serve as a starting point to cover a course on short notice in the future. Faculty in the unit as well as alumni and potentially current students could offer ideas. The list would need to be updated on a regular basis to ensure it was current.

- **What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?** See above.

3. Donation

A wealthy donor offers your unit one million dollars for research and scholarships supporting environmental sustainability. The donor did not mention social equity or environmental justice, but has not said anything against it. Still, you know their top priority is work that protects the natural environment. Should you approach the donor to ask for social equity to factor into the donation?

- **What is the policy, program, or decision under review?** A donation is being made for one million dollars for environmental stewardship.
- **What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?** The donor values environmental sustainability, and wants to promote study of environmental stewardship.
- **What is the intended outcome of the decision?** The donation will help promote studies in environmental sustainability.
- **Who is most affected by the decision, policy, or program?** The donor, the people receiving the funding, and the people administering the gift.
- **What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?** Environmental sustainability receives more funding than social equity. Faculty and students committed to advancing studies in social equity are at a disadvantage. Faculty and students studying environmental sustainability are primarily White, and when the focus is in the sciences, that disparity is more acute.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities (either intentionally or unintentionally)?** A sizeable donation that explicitly addresses social equity or environmental justice could improve disparities for faculty working on environmental justice issues who do not have access to as much funding or provide scholarships for students pursuing studies related to social equity. Not explicitly involving environmental equity oriented research or scholarships committed to these topics could worsen disparities as faculty who do not work on these topics would have access to funds that others do not. Note that a decision to focus on environmental sustainability without engaging people of color in determining the scope of the program, may also result in focusing research dollars on issues not as relevant in communities of color, or could result in tokenizing those faculty and students who might be recruited into environmental sustainability work.
- **Will the decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?** Yes, this donation could help correct either representation of faculty and students of color working on environmental sustainability issues, or could be used to also support work on social equity.
- **How are decisions being made?** The donor and the PSU Foundation will discuss the gift and determine whether the desires and intentions of the donor fit the mission of the Foundation. The donor and foundation staff will engage in an iterative dialogue about the gift and the expectations around it. The Foundation will consult with relevant university administration, faculty, and staff.

- **Who is making the decision?** The donor is making the decision whether to donate funding. The PSU Foundation is also involved in deciding whether to accept the gift.
- **Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision participating in the decision-making process? Why or why not?** No. Usually large Foundation decisions do not closely involve faculty and students; however, the unit heads of various programs have been asked to give input.
 - **If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?** N/A
 - **Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?** N/A
- **Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?** To address equity, the donor should be approached to incorporate equity issues connected to environmental sustainability.
- **What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?** In order to ensure decision-making where equity is infused, the Foundation is reviewing their decision-making structures to ensure that someone with knowledge about equity is involved in crafting foundation asks and in assessing possible gifts.

4. Curriculum Revision

The faculty in the Department of Marvelous Adventures has decided to evaluate and modify their curriculum. Based on their knowledge and feedback from students and alumni, the faculty are concerned that the structure of their Adventures undergraduate program is outdated. The faculty would like to develop a contemporary curriculum to teach and prepare students for careers in Marvelous Adventures. The program is an applied program, and must fulfill accreditation requirements by the National Association of Marvelous Adventures.

- **What is the policy, program, or decision under review?** An evaluation and restructuring of the undergraduate curriculum.
- **What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?** The department believes in participatory decision-making. The department also worries that their curriculum is out of date, especially in areas of racial equity.
- **What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?** The purpose is to provide a more up to date and relevant education to students to work in the profession of marvelous adventures.
- **Who is most affected by these decision?** All faculty, students, and staff participating in or supporting the program. Current alumni practicing in the area as well as MA clients will be affected as well.
- **What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?** The MA program has few students of color as well as only one faculty member of color. Nationally, the MA program is only 10% practitioners of color, and in the Portland metropolitan area the number drops to only 3%. Meanwhile MA practitioners in Portland serve about 45% people of color.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities (either intentionally or unintentionally)?** The new curriculum could embrace a racial equity framework to ensure that students are receiving the most advanced culturally

responsive curriculum possible. This will help white students serve their diverse clientele. Over time, a culturally responsive program could also help recruit and retain faculty and students of color.

- **Will the decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?** Depending on the outcome of the evaluation and restructuring, the decision could offer a systemic change to addressing institutional inequity.
- **How are decisions being made?** This decision-making process will take one year and includes a committee of faculty, students, and alumni practitioners. They will collect information, and offer recommendations to the full unit faculty.
- **Who is making the decision?** The faculty must approve all curricular changes at multiple levels at the university. The MA accreditation body will also determine whether the program will be re-accredited based on the new curriculum.
- **Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision or who experience disparities in relation to the decision participating in the decision-making process?**
 - **If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?** The committee will include faculty (including adjuncts), students, and alumni practitioners. They will seek input from their respective constituencies. The committee will then co-create recommendations for the full faculty. Specific attention will be paid to obtaining either direct committee membership or at least input from faculty, students, and practitioners of color. Because there are so few faculty and students of color, the committee also wants to respect that they may be over-extended with service activities and will work to accommodate their input in a way that is convenient for them.
 - **Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?** At present no staff supporting the program is involved. It is not clear if they have interest or time to participate. The unit head will check-in with them. No clients of MA practitioners are slated to be interviewed. The committee is considering whether this would be appropriate given that there is such a great mismatch between the racial background of MA practitioners and MA clientele.
- **Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?** The curriculum review will take a full year and be iterative. They expect to revisit this equity lens document at each meeting to determine if additional equity issues need to be addressed.
- **What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?** Some of the collected feedback will be shared with course instructors and with the program coordinators to ensure that identified need areas are addressed in curriculum delivery.

5. Group Formation in Courses

Team work is one of the pillars of the PSU educational approach. Learning together has many benefits; however, some faculty pay limited attention to the formation of teams. Students have raised concerns about equity issues within the teams that range from inequitable distribution of work load to micro-aggressions to students practicing exclusionary tactics in forming the team. Some faculty assign teams, while others rely on students to form the teams. Your unit is developing guidance on forming equitable teams in courses.

Equity Lens Sample Questions

- **What is the policy, program, or decision under review?** How to form equitable teams for coursework.
- **What assumptions frame the policy, program, or decision?** Teamwork in courses is a useful and important pedagogical technique; group work can help or harm university inclusion and equity goals; faculty can adopt useful approaches to create equitable teams.
- **What is the intended outcome of the policy, program, or decision?** Create guidance on helping student teams form and perform equitably in class.
- **Who is most affected by the decision, policy, or program?** Students, faculty, and teaching assistants.
- **What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program, or decision?** Students from all historically marginalized backgrounds report exclusionary acts by other students, both real and perceived. Students who have introverted personalities also report challenges in working in teams without guidance being given to teams on how to incorporate quieter voices. Lastly, some students report often having to carry the brunt of the work in the team where other students are allowed to have “free ridership” when the team grade is shared.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities, intentional or unintentional?** Not addressing this issue could further marginalize disadvantaged communities and negatively affect their learning or encourage them to leave the field of study or university. Further, when marginalized students are further marginalized, majority culture students may perceive those students as fulfilling undeserved stereotypes.
- **Will the policy, program, or decision result in a systemic change that addresses institutional inequity?** No.
- **How are decisions being made?** The unit is first focusing on the undergraduate program as the student populations in the graduate program are quite different. The unit head has formed a task force that includes full-time faculty who teach in the program, adjunct faculty, graduate students who assist in teaching undergrad classes, and undergraduate students from diverse demographic perspectives.
- **Who is making the decision?** The task force will offer recommendations that will be given to the undergraduate program executive committee (half of that committee is on the task force) who will decide to accept the recommendations or ask for revisions. That committee will then send the recommendations to the full-time faculty for approval and adoption. Two student representatives are appointed to the faculty and have equal voting privileges along with the faculty. The task force is also seeking input from OAI and GDI on existing materials and trainings that will ensure equitable group formation and functioning; however, OAI and GDI will not play a decision-making role.
- **Are the group(s) most affected by the program, policy or decision or, who experience disparities in relation to the decision, participating in the decision-making process?** Yes. **Why or why not?** This proposal responds directly to student satisfaction and learning outcomes. Their input will be used to form team work formation and instruction guidance that addresses their issues.

- **If yes, how are they involved (equal decider, deliberative partner, input given, etc.)?** Students are equal partners on the task force. They will help form the deliberative process and decision-making rules.
- **Should they be involved in a different capacity than they are currently?** No. They are equal partners in the formation of the recommendations. Students are also included in the faculty voting procedures per the unit's bylaws.
- **Based on the above responses, what are the possible revisions to the policy, program, or decision under review that could address inequity/promote equity?** N/A (this is a new activity).
- **What can be done with the information collected and experiences during this decision-making process to inform future unit decisions?** This information will be used to inform the graduate student team project task force, including the design of the decision-making process and the data collected and recommendations formed.

Conclusion

An equity lens can help organizational actors make decisions with equity in the foreground. The lens promotes integrating equity based data and decision-making processes into traditional decision-making structures. An equity lens does not tell you what to do. Rather, the lens functions as a tool to explicate and distill the equitable implications and opportunities of whatever decision you have at hand. The lens is designed to function in an iterative manner, helping the people in your unit develop more and better capacity at making equitable choices. Applying the lens also helps decisions be more transparent, and creates an organizational learning environment. The end goal of the lens to help institutions of higher education such as yours, and mine, achieve the equitable campus and communities we desire.

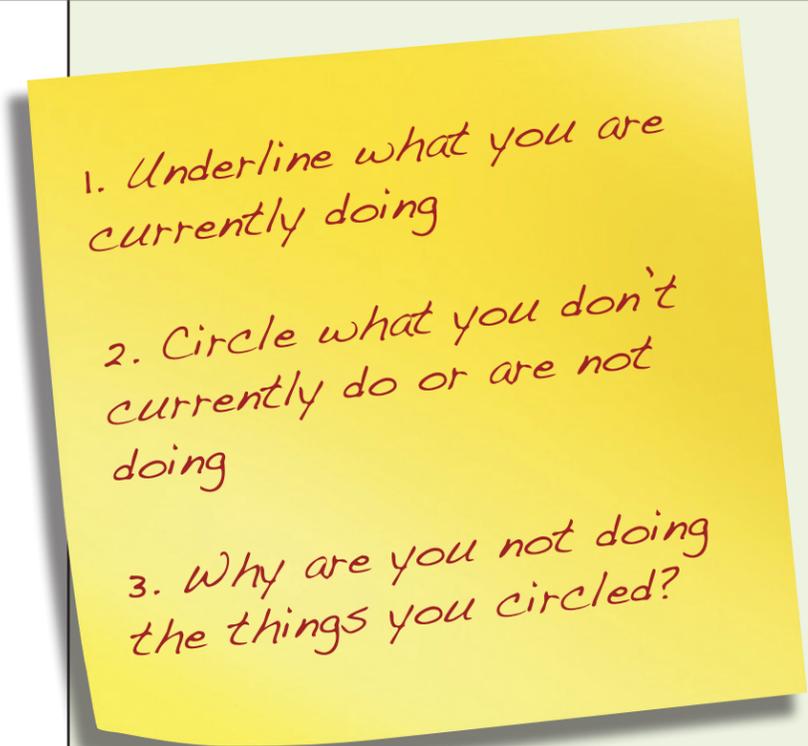
Figures

Figure 1. Multnomah County Empower and Equity Logic Model. <https://multco.us/file/31825/download>

Equity and Empowerment Lens Logic Model

A Work in Progress
March 24, 2014



	INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL ¹	SYSTEMIC	
Assumptions	Relational Worldview Empowerment	Mindfulness Hierarchy and Three Levels of Racism	Trauma-Informed Restorative Intent Cultural Responsivity	Transformation Quality Improvement
What Is Needed To Do The Work (Optimal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy sense of self, self-awareness around power, and positive cultural identity - Clarity of purpose towards racial equity - Implicit bias awareness - Knowledge of current racial inequities and strengths in racial equity strategies in region - Understanding of the interconnectedness of climate health, ecology, and racial equity - Courage - Critical thinking - Prioritization of self-care - Equitable opportunity and expectation to participate and learn - Understanding of how to facilitate applications of the Lens and other racial equity tools - Wider sense of self - Whole-brain thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restorative intent - Shared values / goals / vision clearly articulated around racial equity - Clarity of purpose towards racial equity - Increased salience of racial equity in communications - Proper time allocated - Having direct conversations and capacity-building about racial equity and trauma-informed approaches - Organization sets up and maintains structures, processes, and environment where compassion and mindfulness can emerge and flourish. - Baseline employee data gauging levels of autonomy, collaboration, emotional / physical / spiritual safety, feeling valued - Efforts underway to flatten hierarchy - Disaggregated data - People of Color in leadership roles and spread throughout the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular, purpose-driven collaborative meetings amongst key leaders - Analysis of legal barriers and courageous action to amend - Clarity of purpose towards racial equity - Improved economic systems in organizations that flatten hierarchy, and prioritize racial equity strategies - Cross-sector guiding racial equity policy and law - Strong partnerships with community of color leaders and organizations - Encourage collaboration across sectors and leaders. - Value and incorporate racial equity analysis and critical thinking into collaborations and decision-making - Capacity around transformative and trauma-informed approaches - Understanding of historical foundations racial inequity in law and constitution - People of Color in key leadership roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular, purpose-driven collaborative meetings amongst key leaders - Analysis of legal barriers and courageous action to amend - Clarity of purpose towards racial equity - Improved economic systems in organizations that flatten hierarchy, and prioritize racial equity strategies - Cross-sector guiding racial equity policy and law - Strong partnerships with community of color leaders and organizations - Encourage collaboration across sectors and leaders. - Value and incorporate racial equity analysis and critical thinking into collaborations and decision-making - Capacity around transformative and trauma-informed approaches - Understanding of historical foundations racial inequity in law and constitution - People of Color in key leadership roles
Activities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop shared vision and purpose for change, including shared language - Build meaningful community partnerships with communities of color - Institutionalize racial equity policy that is endorsed by the governing body, clearly states it benefits, outlines necessary decision-making structures, and integrates accountability measures to cultural responsiveness and racial equity - Apply and act upon the two promising culturally inclusive tools listed in Footnote 1. - Promote cross-sector, state, and national advocacy efforts around racial equity - Integrate the arts into racial equity processes and discussions - Develop Communities of Practice for staff and other opportunities to learn from each other by articulating their experiences around the use of a Lens and the model. - Activities, relationship-building, and processes integrate reflection, cultural humility, learning, innovation, and community-mindedness - Integrate Lens Concept Papers and related racial equity literature into trainings and ongoing professional development - Utilize community voice and knowledge in decision-making - Apply the 5P's Lens tool and other racial equity tools, and integrate into policy - Engage in exercises that ask an institution to directly face historical laws and processes that have led to inequities - Implement activities that strengthen an organization's purpose and trajectory towards racial equity - Organization-to-organization mentoring - Develop shared vision and purpose for change, including shared language - Build meaningful community partnerships with communities of color - Organization-to-organization mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop shared vision and purpose for change, including shared language - Build meaningful community partnerships with communities of color - Support and fund community-capacity building strategies - Develop continuous communication strategies based on trust, and collective vocabulary - Address legal barriers to racial equity, draft and pass new laws - Integrate voice and experiences of leaders of color into systems planning - Strengthen leaders' capacity around transformative v/s transactional approaches and trauma-informed policy - Create clear purpose-driven collaborative actions in key areas driving social mobility for communities of color: educational and income development (i.e., develop career pipelines leading to hiring/retaining future leaders of color). - Organization-to-organization mentoring - Identify and act upon culturally responsive and equity-based indicators in collecting data and measuring results. - Fill leadership roles with People of Color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop shared vision and purpose for change, including shared language - Build meaningful community partnerships with communities of color - Support and fund community-capacity building strategies - Develop continuous communication strategies based on trust, and collective vocabulary - Address legal barriers to racial equity, draft and pass new laws - Integrate voice and experiences of leaders of color into systems planning - Strengthen leaders' capacity around transformative v/s transactional approaches and trauma-informed policy - Create clear purpose-driven collaborative actions in key areas driving social mobility for communities of color: educational and income development (i.e., develop career pipelines leading to hiring/retaining future leaders of color). - Organization-to-organization mentoring - Identify and act upon culturally responsive and equity-based indicators in collecting data and measuring results. - Fill leadership roles with People of Color

¹ Two promising tools (Culturally Responsive Standards [Coalition of Communities of Color and Portland State University] and an Equity Roadmap [City of Portland, Bureau of Planning and Sustainability]) will be coming out within the year. Our work here does not cover the detail and scope of these tools, but rather sets up the vision and conditions for such implementation.

	INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL ¹	SYSTEMIC
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-reflection exercises around racial and implicit bias awareness - Carry out self-care strategies - Read alternative histories around race and racial inequities - Identify one's purpose in racial equity work, and revisit - Mindfulness practices (breath awareness and compassion-based training and activities) - Trainings on racial and implicit bias awareness, root causes, how to facilitate Lens applications - Activities that stress community mindedness and a wider sense of self - Peer-to-peer mentoring - Making the time and space necessary for learning and reflection - Actively seek learning about and connecting to other promising efforts in racial equity work - Engage all parts of the brain, such as reading poetry, and engaging in music and the arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutionalize racial equity policy that is endorsed by the governing body, clearly states it benefits, outlines necessary decision-making structures, and integrates accountability measures to cultural responsiveness and racial equity - Apply and act upon the two promising culturally inclusive tools listed in Footnote 1. - Promote cross-sector, state, and national advocacy efforts around racial equity - Integrate the arts into racial equity processes and discussions - Develop Communities of Practice for staff and other opportunities to learn from each other by articulating their experiences around the use of a Lens and the model. - Activities, relationship-building, and processes integrate reflection, cultural humility, learning, innovation, and community-mindedness - Integrate Lens Concept Papers and related racial equity literature into trainings and ongoing professional development - Utilize community voice and knowledge in decision-making - Apply the 5P's Lens tool and other racial equity tools, and integrate into policy - Engage in exercises that ask an institution to directly face historical laws and processes that have led to inequities - Implement activities that strengthen an organization's purpose and trajectory towards racial equity - Organization-to-organization mentoring 	
Outputs <i>(must be tied to outcomes, are steps along the way – not a landing point)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of trainings done in racial equity, self-awareness, implicit bias, compassion-based practice, and sustainability - # of times conducted mindfulness practice - # of reading materials on racial equity - Creation of a self-care plan - Creation of circle of support around the work - # of times Lens and other racial equity tools applied to work products and processes - Identified purpose in the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of time data is disaggregated by race, language spoken, culture, etc. - # of action plans related to Lens applications - # of employees with sustained passion to do the work - Policy, procedures, procedural pathways, budget, strat plans centered on racial equity - # of cross-departmental and cross-sector activities - # of employees of color hired and retained in organization - # of collaborative partnerships with communities of color - # of departments or teams who have applied the culturally inclusive tools <i>(see Footnote 1)</i> - Clear evaluation framework around racial equity goals, strategies, and outcomes - Strong positive reputation on behalf of institution for its strategies, policies, and outcomes around racial equity - # of times Lens was applied to policies, decisions, resource allocation, and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of political, legal, and historical barriers identified cross-system - # of barriers analyzed, addressed (some according to organization, some collectively addressed) - # of cross-sector actions and collaborations - Creation of a backbone organization for key cross-sector, collective initiatives - Shared measurement systems - Common vision for change (includes common understanding of issue[s] and joint approaches) - # of times Lens and other tools were applied to policies, decisions, resource allocation, and processes.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased emotional intelligence - Awareness of worldview and implicit bias - Increased positive cultural identity - Greater self-awareness around positionality, one's power, and one's effect on others - Increased understanding of how trauma integrates with decision-making, relationship-building, and service delivery - Increased sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual safety, autonomy, and feeling valued. - Increased sense of purpose and meaning in work - Deepened sense of hope - Increased community-mindedness - Increased critical thinking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater clarity around communicating about racial equity goals - Increased capacity on individual's / team's / department's role in structure and decision-making, especially relating to racial equity - Healthy responsive workforce - Increased number of staff hired and retained who reflect communities most affected by inequities. - Greater visibility and salience of the Relational Worldview in staff and policy-based discussions. - Increased quality and quantity of partnerships with communities of color - Increased emphasis on integrating both qualitative and quantitative data - Increased sense of staff pride in org's goals and identity around racial equity. - Strong understanding of intersectionality of racism and other social oppressions. - Institutionalized professional development models and trainings integrating trauma-informed approaches, transformation, and racial equity. - Increased investments in Minority, Women, Emerging, Small Business (MWESB), and supporting policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Efficiency across systems in key operational areas - Strong partnership-based collaboratives improving indicators of well-being for communities of color - Demonstrated commitment in partnering institutions to flatten hierarchy in their own institutions, and in systemic projects - Increased engagement in strategies that are mutually reinforcing - Systemically well-funded culturally responsive (including culturally-specific) strategies - Increased sustainability and longevity of strategies - Decreased siloism across sectors - Improved disaggregated data collection and use of such data in joint decision-making - Decreased environmental impacts for communities of color
Impact	<p>Elimination of root causes of suffering and inequities affecting communities of color</p> <p>Greater individual and community empowerment</p>		

Figure 2. Equity and Empowerment Lens, Office of Diversity and Equity, Multnomah County, 2014, <https://multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens>

