Embedding Equity Considerations in Policy Analysis

KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE
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Development of the Guides

Many organizations may encounter challenges in embedding equity to their research, literature review, technical assistance, facilitation and policy analysis due to uncertainty about effective approaches and strategies. Although numerous valuable resources exist to guide these efforts, they are not necessarily structured by topic, phase of the project or as checklists.

To address this, the Kansas Health Institute (KHI) has developed a set of practical guides to integrate equity considerations at every stage of these processes. Development of the guides was informed by current literature and KHI's experiences.

> **Health equity –** The state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Achieving this requires focused and ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices, overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and health care, and eliminate preventable health disparities.

Feedback on the set of guides was gathered during a convening hosted by KHI on May 14, 2024, titled "*Centering Equity in Research: Developing Practical Strategies and Identifying Considerations*," as well as through a post-event survey. The convening included about 50 stakeholders from across Kansas who reviewed these strategies and provided valuable feedback, which later was incorporated into the guides. The event featured speakers Eusebio Díaz, M.A., Vice President of Strategy, Learning and Communications at the Health Forward Foundation, Shannon Portillo, Ph.D., from Arizona State University and Bridgette L. Jones, M.D., M.S.C.R., from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The speakers discussed the current state of equity in research, addressing challenges and exploring future opportunities.

These guides are organized by process stage and in checklist format. They are designed to be a practical tool for easy application. The strategies suggested are not intended to be a complete list of all possible strategies that could be used. Additionally, it may not be appropriate or feasible to implement all of the strategies listed in a single project. The purpose of this set of checklists is for researchers to consider opportunities to center equity more intentionally and build capacity over time to experiment with and build upon these strategies. Also, while the checklists are presented linearly, we suggest using an iterative and flexible approach in your research as necessary.

The guides are intended for a wide range of audiences, including those engaging in research activities and members of the community who are engaged in or affected by research.

We Value Your Feedback!

To ensure we hear from as many voices as possible, we are launching an open comment period from July 1, 2024, to Dec. 31, 2024. This period is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts and help us refine these resources further. Together, we can make meaningful progress toward equity in our work. Scan the QR Code to provide your feedback.

Embedding Equity Considerations in Policy Analysis

Definition of Policy Analysis

Policy analysis is the process of identifying potential policy options, including those that have been successful in other states or jurisdictions, to address an identified problem or issue and then comparing those options to choose the most effective ones that will produce the most desirable results. Policy analysis also can assess outcomes associated with current policies and past policies. It involves a systematic approach to identifying, evaluating and examining current policy options, assessing the impacts, outcomes or potential unintended consequences or harm of these options and making recommendations for public action. This analysis process is used to inform decision makers in creating effective policies that address specific issues or goals. Policy analysis can cover a wide range of considerations, including economic, social, historical context, structural, environmental and technical aspects, to ensure that policies are well-informed, equitable and capable of creating new opportunities and achieving their intended outcomes. The aim is to provide a thorough understanding of potential policy impacts before implementation, contributing to more informed and effective public policy decisions.

Why Embed Equity in Policy Analysis

By considering equity, policymakers can better understand the diverse impacts of policies on various populations, particularly those that have been historically excluded or underrepresented. This not only leads to more effective and sustainable policy outcomes but also strengthens social cohesion and trust in public institutions.

A set of general and specific principles important for embedding equity in policy analysis follows.Note that the strategies suggested are not intended to be a complete list of all possible strategies that could be used.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES		
1. Strategies Before You Begin		
	1.1. Recognize that incorporating equity across every stage in your research requires substantial time and effort. Incorporate this time and the resources required into your research project's budget at the beginning of the project. If a project has already begun, examine how strategies might be intentionally imbedded into the existing project.	
	1.2. Identify the sources of funding for your research and discuss with the funder the strategies you plan to use to incorporate equity and why these are important to the research and for building trust with the community you are researching. Additionally, inform your partners and participants about the source of your funding and why they are funding your work.	
	1.3. Determine how you will assess implementation and gather community feedback on the strategies selected to ensure your approach is having the desired effect of incorporating equity in research. Outline action steps to address this feedback and build capacity in any areas in which a deficit is discovered, through training, reflection and expansion of the project team.	
	1.4. Assess the historical context related to your topic, community of focus or research questions. Assessing the historical context can help the research team navigate existing dynamics and understand what is already known related to the topic. During this stage, it is important to also identify what research or work is already being done related to this topic. Consider what dominant cultural narratives exist related to the topic and how varying research approaches could contribute to or challenge these narratives.	
2. Strategies for Building an Inclusive Project Team		
	2.1 Assemble a project team with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to reflect different:	
		2.1.a. Race, ethnicity, national origin, etc.
		2.1.b. Gender, sexual orientation, etc.
		2.1.c. Population density, such as rural areas, urban areas, suburban areas, if applicable.
		2.1.d. Socioeconomic status.
		2.1.e. Other considerations pertinent to the research and or event.
	2.2. Evaluate the need to collaborate with external agencies or community members with lived experience to enhance team diversity and representation. If need is identified, select community representatives to serve as a close partner throughout the project.	
	2.3 Ensure that policies and practices are in place to create an environment conducive to the success and well-being of diverse team members.	
	2.4. Promote self-awareness among team members of their identities, biases, assumptions, preconceptions and positionality. Using regular self-assessments and subjectivity statements can make the worldviews of the team more transparent. Discussing the types of biases that exist and using tools such as a critical appraisal checklist can help the research team assess for biases in a research study.	
	2.5. Foster a culture of continuous learning and reflexivity within project teams, encouraging ongoing discussions and training on topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competence and the ethical implications of data analysis in diverse contexts.	
	2.6. Establish transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that value input from all team members, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in project planning and implementation.	

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2. Strategies for Building an Inclusive Project Team (continued)
2.7. Regularly assess and reflect on the team's approach to equity, including how decisions are made and how team dynamics impact collaboration and communication.
2.8. Foster an environment where team members feel comfortable discussing issues related to equity and diversity openly and constructively.
2.9. Create mechanisms for soliciting feedback from team members on the equity and inclusivity of project processes and outcomes.
2.10. Be open to receiving feedback and willing to adjust project strategies and practices to ensure a more equitable approach.

3. Strategies to Ensure Inclusive Terminology
3.1. Select and validate terminology and variables that are culturally competent and reflect the diversity of populations. Consider the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) standards.
3.2. Consult with stakeholders, experts and community members familiar with the issues discussed to identify and validate the relevance and sensitivity of terms used in the narrative and variables used in the data.
3.3. Use terms that encompass a wide range of races, ethnicities, gender identities, geographies, socioeconomic statuses and other identity markers.
3.4. Incorporate terms that allow for the exploration of intersectional identities and experiences. Understanding how overlapping identities impact people's experiences can provide deeper insights into equity issues.
3.5. Include terms specifically related to groups that are historically excluded. This helps ensure that the data and analysis consider the needs and challenges of these populations.
3.6. Use geographic-specific terms when relevant to capture regional disparities and local contexts. This approach can uncover inequities that occur at local or regional levels.
3.7. Use a combination of broad and narrow terms to capture both general and specific aspects of issues. This can help in identifying both widespread and niche concerns related to equity.
3.8. Include terms that reflect historical injustices and contexts. Recognizing the historical background of inequities can inform a more nuanced analysis. Facilitators can conduct research on this background before a project begins.
3.9. Pilot test materials with audience members to learn how they understand the terminology used and how to incorporate their terminology.

POLICY ANALYSIS		
4. Strategies for Inclusive and Effective Formulation of Research Questions		
	4.1. Familiarize yourself with the literature in your area of interest to identify what has been studied, gaps in the literature and potential biases or limitations. For strategies on how to embed equity in literature reviews, see the guide, *Embedding Equity Considerations in Literature Review.*	
	4.2. Build relationships with stakeholders by listening and setting aside your own agenda. Focus on listening to the stakeholder's priorities and needs before engaging stakeholders in your work. Identify if there is alignment rather than expecting the community to align with your priorities. This approach helps prevent tokenism, where connections are made only when "we need them." Over time, reassess to confirm continued alignment.	
	4.3. Engage stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in identifying questions that should be addressed and be open to being wrong about your own agenda or premise of what is needed. Take direction from community members. Consider the distances participants must travel and the costs of travel and lodging (if needed) when setting meeting start and end times. Share with the stakeholders how this information informed your work. When finalizing questions:	
		4.3.a. Determine the number of questions to focus on, considering the availability of evidence and data, resources, timing, the opportunity to make an impact and which questions most align with the community members' stated priorities and needs.
		4.3.b Ensure that the research questions are centered on understanding the impact of the issues on the social determinants of health and populations who have been historically excluded.
		4.3.c. Recognize, define and address biases:
			4.3.c.1. Acknowledge biases in theoretical frameworks by engaging in discussions with a diverse group, including meetings or listening sessions with community stakeholders, and seeking frameworks created by researchers to respond to the need for more equity in research suitable for your research question and setting. For example, one option is to consider frameworks created by researchers in non-Western cultures or by Black, Latino and female researchers. Examine how your research frameworks could potentially reinforce existing power dynamics and marginalization and adjust accordingly.. Determine what can be done to recreate or change the framework. Use the framework created by stakeholders to make the research more meaningful to them.
			4.3.c.2. Acknowledge that the biases in research are often shaped by those allowed to pose questions and undertake the work and use inclusive wording or terms in the questions. Recognize the historical contexts, assumptions and dominant cultural narratives that the questions may reinforce or challenge. Priority questions for the community members involved may differ from the research questions most of interest to the research team. Ensuring diverse inclusion and preventing repetitive exclusions can mitigate the recurrence of the same biases. Additionally, consider the impact of funding sources on which questions are asked, by whom and the partnerships that are created as a result. With this information, work to modify the questions to limit the potential impact of these biases.

POLICY ANALYSIS		
4. Strategies for Inclusive and Effective Formulation of Research Questions (continued)		
		4.3.d. Consult with communities on how to best to incorporate asset-based framing for questions, as appropriate for the community's context and need. Asset-based framing focuses on recognizing and identifying community strengths and resources instead of leading with gaps and challenges (deficit-based framing).
		4.3.e. Recognize the value of addressing a small number of questions thoroughly as opposed to taking on numerous questions and diluting resources.
		4.3.f. Before beginning the study, analyze the questions developed through an equity lens and the historical context of the community with whom you are researching.
5. Strategies for Inclusive Policy Analysis		
	5.1. Create mechanisms for ongoing community feedback. The work and results of the analysis should be disclosed and discussed with stakeholders throughout the process. This allows for the continuous evaluation of the policy's impact on different groups and facilitates adjustments as needed.	
	5.2. Engage communities that might be impacted by policies and assess their perceptions by utilizing this strategy:	
		5.2.a. Provide a simple explanation of the policy change to ensure understanding. Ask about observable community changes, such as: "What recent changes have you noticed in local services or resources?" "How have these changes affected your daily life?"
		5.2.b. Use questions that reveal impacts without needing detailed policy knowledge: "What new challenges are you facing recently?"
		5.2.c. Use hypothetical situations to gauge potential impacts: "If funding for a local program were reduced, how would this affect you?"
	5.3. Evaluate policies through an intersectional lens, considering how different aspects of identity (like race, gender, class, etc.) interact and impact individuals' experiences with the policy. Also evaluate policies through a historical lens, looking at the situation that exists and determining what caused the problem and why.	
	5.4. Utilize accurate disaggregated data from a reputable source to understand the diverse impacts of policies. Consider ways to present data for small populations that acknowledge data limitations but provide data that could be important to understanding disparities. Consider who will be impacted or harmed by disaggregation.	
		5.4.a. Explore the feasibility of disaggregating data by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, etc., to gain a more comprehensive understanding.
		5.4.b. Any effort to disaggregate data must ensure that the resulting information is meaningful and actionable. Disaggregation should not be performed for its own sake but should lead to a deeper understanding of issues, allowing for targeted interventions.
	5.5. Incorporate equity impact assessments in the policy development process to systematically examine how different demographic groups will be affected by proposed policies. This can help to identify and mitigate negative impacts before they occur.	
	5.6. Adopt adaptive policy frameworks that are flexible and can be revised in response to new evidence or changing community needs. This approach allows for the continuous improvement of policies in a way that responds to the lived realities of those most impacted.	
	5.7. Maintain transparency in policy analysis and monitoring processes. Share findings and adaptations publicly to build trust and accountability (e.g., how decisions were made, issues were selected and not selected, discuss biases – need a safe environment).	

POLICY ANALYSIS

6. Strategies for Inclusive Development of Policy Documents

	6.1. Write in plain language to ensure your summary is accessible to a wide audience, including those with varying levels of education and literacy. Be mindful of jargon, technical terms and language that may unconsciously reflect biases. Choose terms that are inclusive.
	6.2. Make a concerted effort to include and highlight the perspectives of diverse groups and within diverse groups, especially those that are often marginalized or underrepresented in policy discussions.
	6.3. Clearly articulate how the policy affects different groups, especially historically excluded communities. Discuss both the potential benefits and the risks or harms to ensure a balanced view.
	6.4. When providing examples or case studies within your summary, choose those that reflect a variety of experiences and backgrounds.
	6.5. Before finalizing your summary, consult with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to get feedback on your draft. This can help identify any blind spots or biases.
	6.6. For digital summaries, include accessibility features such as alternative text for images and accessible PDF formats, and consider the readability on various devices.
	6.7. Acknowledge and reflect on your own biases and how they might influence your writing. Work with a partner to identify your biases. Seek to challenge these biases to ensure fair representation.
	6.8. Offer recommendations that not only address the findings of the policy analysis but also suggest ways to enhance equity and inclusiveness.
	6.9. Highlight the need for continued evaluation of the policy's impact on different communities to ensure it remains equitable and effective over time.

7. Dissemination of Policy Analysis Findings and Conclusions

	7.1. Make all data gathered publicly available. Prepare a package of data that can be used by those who participated in the process that can be shared with other members of the community or organization they represent.
	7.2. Be transparent about the methods and processes used during data collection and analysis. This may include dissemination of the coding protocol and assumptions, summary reports and summary table with all data coded.
	7.3. Present findings in ways that will be understandable to different audiences, including community members and those with technical expertise, who can use the findings to support their own efforts and goals. It also may be necessary to extract and produce dissemination formats for specific audiences, such as the public, health care providers, public health officials, policymakers and their staff, and elected officials. Consider using stories from people with lived experience.
	7.4. For in-person presentations, tailor them to the needs and preferences of the audience, allow sufficient time for discussion, be open to feedback and constructive criticism and incorporate suggestions and insights from the participants.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How can researchers ensure that the approach to the various stages of policy analysis, from the identification of topics to the creation of summaries, remains genuinely inclusive and represents the diverse voices and experiences of all stakeholders, particularly those from historically excluded groups?

2. How can historical context inform our understanding of the current policy landscape?

3. When considering transparency and methodology, who are the groups or individuals that might be harmed or helped by the policy?

4. What potential harms or losses might arise from implementing new policies?

5. What are the potential unintended consequences of the proposed policies, and how can they be mitigated within the context of the policy?

6. How can we ensure that we close the feedback loop with communities and stakeholders regarding research, data, findings and other relevant information?

RESOURCES:

Dewidar, O., Kawala, B. A., Antequera, A., Tricco, A. C., Tovey, D., Straus, S., et. al. (2022). Methodological guidance for incorporating equity when informing rapid-policy and guideline development. J*ournal of Clinical Epidemiology, 150*, 142-153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2022.07.007

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The Urban Institute. (2021). *Data Equity: How to Incorporate Equity into Data-Driven Policy Analysis.* Retrieved from https://www.urban.org