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Equitable Evaluation: A Toolkit

A Product of Nebraska's Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Performance Evaluation

APRIL 2024

Buffett Early Childhood Institute
at the University of Nebraska

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Contents

Introduction

In 2020, Nebraska was awarded a grant through the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B–5) Initiative, which offered an unprecedented opportunity to assess and improve the state's early childhood system. The work was led by Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS), with support from the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF) and in close partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). The Buffett Early Childhood Institute collaborated with these organizations to support assessment, planning, and performance evaluation efforts. The Institute's performance evaluation team also worked closely with partners at the Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

This Equitable Evaluation Toolkit emerged as a product of Nebraska's PDG B-5 performance evaluation, which had two goals: 1) to assess the degree to which PDG B–5-funded projects were advancing the state's strategic plan goals and objectives and 2) to build Nebraska's capacity to evaluate early childhood efforts using a systems lens. The resources and tools presented here are primarily associated with the second goal. They were developed through a statewide engagement process that included funders, policymakers, agency leaders, early care and education providers, families, and others engaged in early childhood evaluation in Nebraska.

We are making these tools widely available to be used, adapted, and to inform ongoing efforts to enhance equity and quality in systems of early care and education, in communities across Nebraska and in other states across the country. The tools are organized according to three key themes that are foundational to our systemic, equitable approach to evaluating early childhood systems—Learning Through Inclusive Engagement, Prioritizing Simultaneous Equity and Quality, and Employing Multiple Methods for Simultaneous Equity and Quality (underlined blue text links to tools and resources in the appendix).

Learning Through Inclusive Engagement

Taking a systemic approach to evaluation requires the engagement of individuals and organizations representing multiple roles and responsibilities in the early care and education system. To promote inclusive engagement in our capacity-building efforts, we convened a statewide Evaluation Network Team (ENT) that included program developers, providers, participants, evaluators, and funders from across Nebraska.

The team was charged with learning how to use evaluation to drive improvements in Nebraska's early childhood systems. For two years, 30–50 team members, representing more than 20 early childhood partner organizations across Nebraska (see below), met monthly and participated in structured conversations that incorporated three approaches to systemic improvement:

- Regularly engage with a diverse group of interested parties who can inform improvement from multiple perspectives.
- Review current conditions and identify potential opportunities for change consistent with shared values and principles related to equitable evaluation.
- Develop evaluation practices and resources that recognize and work with the difficulty and uncertainty inherent in systems improvement.

Evaluation Network Team Partners
Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Buffett Early Childhood Institute
CEDARS Lincoln
Cultural Competence Center
Educare Omaha
Educare Winnebago
Educational Service Units
First Five Nebraska
Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties
Lincoln Littles
Munroe-Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Nebraska Department of Education
Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative
Omaha Chamber of Commerce
Omaha Public Schools

| OneWorld |
| Sherwood Foundation |
| University of Nebraska at Omaha |
| University of Nebraska–Lincoln |
| University of Nebraska Medical Center |
| Voices For Children Nebraska |

"When families learn about information that impacts the well-being of their children, they can better advocate for their kids, better understand the language of schools. Seeing one piece of information makes them ask if there are other things they haven't seen."

EVALUATION NETWORK TEAM ADVISORY COUNCIL PARTICIPANT

Systems Thinking and Systemic Communities of Practice

To facilitate learning, the Evaluation Network Team was structured as a systemic community of practice. A community of practice refers to a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better through regular, intentional interactions.[1] The team expanded on this definition to incorporate principles of systems thinking,[2] systems change,[3] and systemic evaluation,[4] which emphasize the importance of including multiple perspectives and considering the intersections and boundaries of related components in a complex system. The ENT systemic community of practice applied systems thinking to address problems of program evaluation practice in early childhood efforts.

Evaluation Network Team Values and Principles

One of the first tasks undertaken by the team was defining a shared set of values and principles. These values and principles clearly articulate members' collective commitment to incorporate stakeholder input throughout the evaluation process— from the development of evaluation questions to the choice of evaluation methods and the interpretation and dissemination of findings.

In addition, the team formed an Advisory Council, composed of ENT participants who belong to minoritized groups in Nebraska, to advise them about equitably engaging with families and providers in diverse communities across the state.

Prioritizing Simultaneous Equity and Quality

Systemic evaluation requires persistent examination of evaluation processes and tools to assess quality and to advance equity among the providers and intended recipients of early childhood programs and services. The ENT identified equitable access to quality early care and education as a core value. The team's Advisory Council met quarterly to review and provide feedback on tools and resources being developed by team members, with a focus on ensuring alignment with the team's values and principles. This led to the development of tools and resources specifically designed to ensure that individuals, perspectives, and dimensions of early care and education that are frequently overlooked or misunderstood are identified and included in all stages of evaluation planning and implementation.

✎ Equity Scenario Analyses

The ENT developed stories to illustrate how current early childhood program evaluation practices are experienced by people in different communities and in various settings and roles. By discussing these realistic "problems of practice" scenarios, team members were able to identify practices that were inconsistent with their values and principles and to generate ideas about changes that could be made to improve those practices.

✎ Equity Action Agenda

ENT members developed the Equity Action Agenda—a process for designing and implementing evaluation in early childhood contexts, with a focus on including all interested parties in collaborative efforts to identify the priorities for understanding, assessing, and increasing quality and equity.

◻ Evaluating Progress in Early Childhood Systems Initiatives

The ENT considered different approaches to measuring progress in early childhood systems. Members agreed that, before indicators of progress can be identified, program and evaluation teams must have a clear and shared understanding of what they hope to accomplish and how they will know if they have achieved their goals.

These tools and resources are included in the Nebraska Equitable Evaluation Repository, which is available to all early childhood audiences, including evaluators, families, providers, program staff, leadership, and funders.

NEBRASKA
Equitable
Evaluation

Employing Multiple Methods for Simultaneous Equity and Quality

Evaluating programs with a lens on equity and quality requires learning from multiple perspectives. This typically requires using various methods and tools and triangulating sources of data. Key performance indicators should be identified, and quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches can be employed to assess progress toward goals and objectives and to elevate the lived experience of community members.

Members of the ENT recommended providing opportunities for professional learning to build capacity for equitable evaluation practice, with a focus on creating shared training and experiences so evaluators, funders, program developers, program implementers, policymakers, and program recipients share vocabulary, concepts, and frameworks for defining change and improvement in early care and education.

In response to this recommendation, the PDG B–5 Performance Evaluation teams at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and Munroe-Meyer Institute launched and supported statewide technical assistance learning activities that promoted capacity-building for evaluative thinking and planning among program providers, increased individual and collective understanding of equity issues in early childhood, and shared existing and new evaluation methods to enhance equitable evaluation practice.

> "If we don't learn what we need to close the gaps and address disparities, and we keep applying tools that we know don't work, then [keep] … waiting for the benefits of science to pay off, we'll keep hurting people. When does the positive edge of science catch up with meeting the needs without harming people?"
>
> EVALUATION NETWORK TEAM ADVISORY COUNCIL PARTICIPANT

Technical assistance was provided that focused on culturally responsive evaluation methods with an emphasis on using multiple sources of data, including quantitative data related to key performance indicators and qualitative data that communicated the lived experience of participants. These technical and other resources can be found on the Nebraska Equitable Evaluation Repository:

- The PDG B–5 performance evaluation team provided training to people involved in implementing PDG B–5-funded projects to help them develop and use logic models in their program development and evaluation efforts.

- We contracted with the **Cultural Competence Center** to provide a **two-day workshop** around developing cultural competence, which was defined as "understanding, appreciating, and effectively interacting with people from cultures or belief systems that differ from our own."
- Members of the Evaluation Network Team, PDG B–5 project leads, and parent liaisons from the Family Engagement Workgroup participated in PhotoVoice Worldwide trainings and studied community-based participatory methods to deepen their practice of equitable evaluation.

Concluding Thoughts

We hope you find this toolkit helpful to you and your early childhood systems change work and in your pursuit of equity for all children, families, and early child professionals in your networks.

We thought it would be helpful for you to see the processes and products that emerged from our work. And of course, the work to transform our early childhood systems and elevate equality and equity is ongoing. Until we incorporate inclusive engagement of system partners and communities, prioritize simultaneous quality and equity values and practices, and employ multiple methods to elevate a culturally responsive systems lens for all early childhood program and evaluation efforts, much of our work remains aspirational.

For more detailed information on the work done in the Nebraska PDG B–5 performance evaluation, please find our year three evaluation report and leadership perspectives briefs on the **Nebraska Equitable Evaluation Repository**.

If you have questions or would like to share strategies, processes, and or tools that have been developed in your community, please reach out to Kate Gallagher at the Buffett Institute: **buffettinstitute@nebraska.edu**.

References

[1] Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015) *An introduction to communities of practice: a brief overview of the concept and its uses*. Available from authors at https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice.

[2] Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Chelsea Green.

[3] Kramer, Mark R., Kania, J. & Senge, P. (2018). The Water of Systems Change. Report, FSG.

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Appendix of Equitable Evaluation Tools and Resources

Systems Thinking and Systemic Communities of Practice

The summary below provides a brief introduction to how systems thinking and systemic communities of practice can enhance equity in evaluation planning and implementation. This resource can inform discussions about how to leverage a systemic approach in evaluation efforts.

Complex Adaptive Systems: Structure, Interaction, Chaos, Adaptation[1, 2]

Hierarchical and networked (structure)
- Intervening in one area affects and is affected by other areas

Collective and coupled (interaction)
- Large-scale change requires individual change on a large scale, and an individual's response to a change opportunity is related to others' responses

Sensitivity to initial conditions (chaos)
- Limited predictability

Interaction with environment yields learning (adaptation)
- Sometimes the learning produces desired outcomes, sometimes not so much

Learning in Complex Adaptive Systems[3]

How might we take a systemic approach?

Foster collective intelligence
- Gather information from stakeholders across the system
- Aggregate and make sense of information

Promote double loop learning
- Expose and work with starting assumptions
- Use evidence to drive not only summary statements but also revision of starting assumptions and subsequent adaptation

DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING

Assumptions → Actions → Results
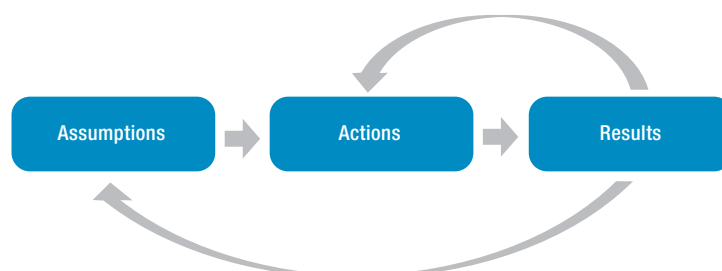
What insights arise from systemic approaches to evaluation?
Systemic methods emphasize:
- Understanding the interrelatedness of elements of a system
- Incorporating multiple perspectives
- Attending to boundaries

while:
- Describing and analyzing situations
- Studying change in systems
- Learning and generating knowledge about change in situations

Communities of practice (COP) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Enhancing Traditional COP With a Systemic Approach
Traditional COP
- Share a domain - area of passion or interest
- Share a community - members that interact regularly
- Share a practice - something the members all do

Our Systemic COP (SCOP)
- Shares an overarching area of passion or interest in early childhood systems, and members are intentionally drawn from multiple interrelated domains
- Is a community of evaluation stakeholders who will interact, and each member of our group is simultaneously located in multiple communities with interrelated interests and pursuits
- Includes some common practices across members as well as unique expertise
- Can become a learning organization, incorporating diverse perspectives and practicing sensemaking to foster learning

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[1] Holland, J. H. (1992). Complex adaptive systems. *Daedalus*, 121(1), 17-30.

[2] Flack, J. & Mitchell, M. (2020, August 21). Uncertain times. *Aeon*. https://aeon.co/essays/complex-systems-science-allows-us-to-see-new-paths-forward

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Evaluation Network Team Values and Principles

The following equitable evaluation values and principles were developed by Nebraska's Evaluation Network Team (ENT). This resource can help define shared values and principles for equitable evaluation.

The ENT developed the following core tenants:

1. We lead with our values

2. We aim for simultaneous quality and equity

3. We use evaluation as a driver of simultaneous quality and equity

4. We recognize, engage with, and co-create with evaluation stakeholders to enhance quality and equity through evaluation

We Lead With our Values

The original Nebraska Early Child Values appeared in the Early Childhood Strategic Planning report in 2020. Beginning in November 2020, members of the ENT reviewed and revised the original value statements and created action statements in the form of principles. Values are qualities that we espouse and desire. Our values are equity, alignment, community voice, community investment, integration, and effectiveness. Principles are guidelines for action based on our values. We believe that principles will drive our actions as evaluators and evaluation stakeholders and subsequently yield simultaneous quality and equity for Nebraska's young children and their families.

ENT members consider our values and principles to be simultaneously aspirational and action-oriented. The detail provided in the value statements and principles clarifies our collective commitment to quality and equity. ENT members centered children and their families in the values and principles so that the definitions of equity, community voice, community investment, alignment, integration, and effectiveness revolve around the perspectives and experiences of young children and their families.

NEBRASKA EARLY CHILDHOOD VALUES	EVALUATION PRINCIPLES
EQUITY: We believe that every child in Nebraska should have access to quality early childhood care and education, and that access and quality should not vary due to race, ethnicity, geographic location, ability status, home language, culture, participation in special education and/or mental health resources, or families' preferred hours, location, and types of care.	Evaluators work with stakeholders before evaluation begins to identify equity action agendas that reveal and address the individuals, perspectives, and dimensions of early childhood care and education that have been frequently omitted, overlooked, or misunderstood in ways that constrain equity in program development, implementation, and evaluation. Evaluators incorporate stakeholder input on equity action agendas throughout the evaluation process to address equity during the formation of evaluation questions, the choice of evaluation methods and instruments, and the interpretation and dissemination of evaluation findings.
ALIGNMENT: We believe that effective alignment among multiple systems and standards is required to support whole-child development (physical, social, emotional, language, cognitive, and academic) as well as to prepare families, professionals, and communities to enhance children's development.	Evaluators investigate how children's early childhood care and education experiences are related to multiple systems—health, education, social service, and local agency systems. Evaluators investigate how the interaction of early childhood care and education with multi-system influences is related to whole-child development.
COMMUNITY INVESTMENT: We believe that everyone in Nebraska benefits from positive and equitable development for all young children, and we believe that communities are actively invested in their children's development.	Evaluators investigate community models for early childhood care and education investment and explore the rationales for and local and state correlates of community models. Evaluators use methods that allow for studying variation of investments across communities as well as following change and improvement of investments within communities.
COMMUNITY VOICE: We believe that communities, and especially families and child and family service providers within communities, are the experts on how to meet the needs of their young children.	Evaluators engage with stakeholders before evaluation begins to identify local goals for incorporating community voice in the evaluation design and process. Evaluators use methods to engage community voice that address known barriers to meaningful participation (such as time, compensation, access to information), while simultaneously investigating ongoing barriers to participation especially for families and providers throughout the evaluation process. Evaluators engage with local stakeholders, especially those with lived experience of the early childhood care and education system, to make sense of evaluation findings and incorporate community sense-making into final reports.
INTEGRATION: We believe that new initiatives to improve early childhood care and education should harmonize with existing systems in ways that promote positive and equitable child development.	Evaluators define the benefits of integrating existing systems in terms of the outcomes experienced by children and their families. Evaluators use methods that allow for identification of population and subgroup outcomes and experiences to trace equity in relation to systems integration.
EFFECTIVENESS: We believe that children and families will benefit when we work from clear understandings of effective programs and policies based on research, awareness of community values and capacities, and families' perceptions of value.	Evaluators use methods that generate sufficient information about early childhood care and education research evidence, community values and capacities, and family perceptions of early childhood care and education value. Evaluators investigate the congruence of research evidence, community values and capacities, and family perceptions of quality and benefit related to Nebraska early childhood care and education efforts.

Equity Scenario Analyses

The scenarios below illustrate how current early childhood program evaluation practices are experienced by people in different communities and in various settings and roles. These realistic "problems of practice" scenarios can be used to identify practices that are inconsistent with a community's values and principles and to generate ideas about changes that could be made to improve those practices.

Scenario 1

Marcia is listening to her quality coach discuss the arrangement of materials in her classroom and how small improvements would support children's access to and productive use of materials for social interactions. Marcia sighs, exhausted, not sure how to respond. How does she tell the coach that she rushes into the classroom by 6:30 each morning to wipe down all of the shelves and materials in case water from the pipes above has leaked overnight? What will the coach think if she learns that water leaks from the ceiling? This coach is tougher than the one last year. She comes from a university lab school, and it sounds like everything was perfect at that school. The coach doesn't know that the director has spoken to the landlord repeatedly about the water leaks—nothing has changed. At least her classroom materials are still there. Last year the outside door of the classroom was broken, and people walked into her classroom over the weekends and stole toys and books. Most of the toys and books in the classroom today were purchased by Marcia and her director with their own money. COVID has shut down many of the businesses in the area, and the buildings next door to the center have been empty for the past year—that's part of the plumbing problem and lack of response from the landlord. Marcia loves her kids—she wants to improve the quality of her classroom, both the materials and the social interactions among kids and adults, but she is tired. Marcia knows that when things go well her kids learn and enjoy learning. They leave her classroom ready to learn and enjoy learning in kindergarten. They leave her classroom ready to make new friends and have a positive relationship with their kindergarten teachers. She knows this because her families come back and tell her. Her quality coach doesn't seem to know this. The most recent evaluation of their program was funded by a local foundation focused on parent engagement as an equity agenda. The evaluation provided a lot of feedback on how the program staff need to do a better job communicating program goals and aspects of quality early education to parents. Now the teachers are working on a newsletter to communicate these ideas to parents. The evaluation didn't talk about the stress parents are feeling as jobs in the neighborhood disappear because of COVID. The evaluation didn't talk about how the loss of local jobs has especially affected Spanish-speaking families. Marcia wonders how families can send their kids to her classroom if they can't find jobs. She's already lost two Spanish-speaking students this year, and they were doing so well.

When you are done reading, review the figure below, and respond to the discussion questions.

EQUITABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS TOOL

The graphic above represents the categories of conditions that interact to drive or constrain equity in early child systems. Equitable evaluation will address and shed light on conditions that constrain equity and identify conditions that enhance equity, leading to insights that will drive improvements.

Discussion Questions (note that the numbered questions request a written response)

Context: In this scenario, what's happening in the nation, the state, the neighborhood, and/or the center that affects access to quality?

People: Who has a stake in delivering or experiencing quality?

Interventions: Who is taking what actions to promote quality? Are they part of larger organizations or movements to promote quality?

Evaluation: Who has a stake in determining whether quality is experienced? Whose viewpoints are represented in any formal evaluation taking place?

1. *How is the interaction of context, people, intervention, and evaluation affecting access to quality for the children enrolled in this classroom? Write your responses here.*

2. *How could evaluation be used to promote better and more equitable access to quality for the children? Write your responses here.*

3. *What are the limits of evaluation in this scenario? Write your responses here.*

The university evaluation team is thrilled. They've just been funded by BIG FUNDER to conduct a rigorous evaluation of an innovative program serving multiple rural communities in western Nebraska. The innovative program helps families select quality child care and other resources from a menu of family-centered services available in their community.

BIG FUNDER was clear that the evaluation should employ "rigorous methods for understanding impact and promise for scaling." Some of the members of the evaluation team have been working on a large-scale evaluation in another state with a national research firm. They've done some very interesting evaluation work on this large-scale project, and they proposed to use some of the same methods with the Nebraska innovative program, considering that this is a high priority and highly visible evaluation opportunity. For example, small-scale randomized control trials, implementation science, and continuous improvement cycles have been very useful in their large evaluation in another state. Those rigorous methods will respond well to BIG FUNDER's request and will be important for learning about the impact of the innovative program in western Nebraska and potential for scaling across the state.

BIG FUNDER has asked the evaluation team to meet with the community leaders to share information about the upcoming evaluation. So, the evaluation team prepares a PowerPoint presentation for the community leaders to show them some of the rigorous work planned for their communities.

When the evaluation team and program officer from BIG FUNDER arrive to the meeting at a large church hall in western Nebraska they ask their host where they can set up their computers to prepare for the presentation. "Oh," says the host, "we didn't expect you to do a presentation. We've prepared a presentation for you!" The evaluation team is a little embarrassed, but they're interested in seeing the community presentation.

Before the presentation begins the host invites people to get a plate of food from the buffet. It's a wonderful spread prepared by families and providers who participate in the innovative program. Once everyone is seated with amply filled plates of food the host thanks the families and providers who prepared the buffet and invites them to start the presentation.

One by one the people who were cooking and serving five minutes ago step in front of the buffet table and make a statement to the evaluation team.

Thank you for visiting us. We want you to get to know our families and what we are doing in our innovative program sites. This innovative program means a lot to us, we built this ourselves, and it's working.

Hi. Thanks for visiting. I found child care for my three kids because of the innovative program while I was working as a nurse. But our clinic closed down last month. I want to keep my kids at their school. They love their teachers, but I'm thinking of moving to find steady work.

Welcome to our town. I really like the people at innovative program—they are really friendly. I work third shift, and they haven't been able to find me child care, but they're helping me to think about options.

I'm glad you're here, and I hope you can come see our school. Innovative new program has helped us to buy so many wonderful materials for children. Our enrollment is still low, but we're looking forward to things picking up after COVID.

A woman steps forward with another who will translate for her. The translator listens to the woman and then speaks to the group. The people at innovative program are very kind. I am grateful for them. I am still looking for child care, and so is my sister.

More than 30 people speak about their experiences with the innovative program and their hopes for what the evaluation will do to increase resources in their communities. At the end of the presentation a member of the local Chamber of Commerce stands up and thanks the evaluation team for joining them for lunch and requests that BIG FUNDER and the team do all they can to make sure the evaluation shows how positive the innovative program is for these communities.

As quickly as it started, the meeting has now ended, and people begin to clean up the church hall in preparation for leaving. The program officer from BIG FUNDER invites the evaluation team to "debrief" the meeting later that week.

Briefly discuss the following prompts and move on to the written responses on the next page.

1. *Imagine that you are a member of the evaluation team. What do you want to discuss at the debrief session?*

2. *Imagine that you are the program officer at BIG FUNDER. What do you want to discuss at the debrief session?*

3. *Imagine that you are a child care provider in western Nebraska. What else do you want the evaluation team to understand?*

4. *Imagine that you are a parent who meets with staff at the innovative program but hasn't yet found child care. What else do you want the evaluation team to understand?*

5. *Imagine that you are a professional evaluator and equity consultant. The evaluation team has asked you to help them design an equity-focused evaluation of the innovative program. What do you recommend?*

Please write your suggestions for designing an equity-focused evaluation below.

1. *How could the equity-focused evaluation address context issues?*

2. *How could the equity-focused evaluation be specific to the people served?*

3. *How could the equity-focused evaluation focus on the equity possibilities of the intervention?*

4. *What methods of data collection and analysis seem well suited for promoting equity considering the context/people/intervention?*

Equity Action Agenda

This equity action agenda outlines a process and questions that can be used to equitably engage all interested parties in evaluation planning and implementation efforts.

What is an equity action agenda?
A tool to co-create evaluations that drive simultaneous quality and equity.

Why use an equity action agenda?
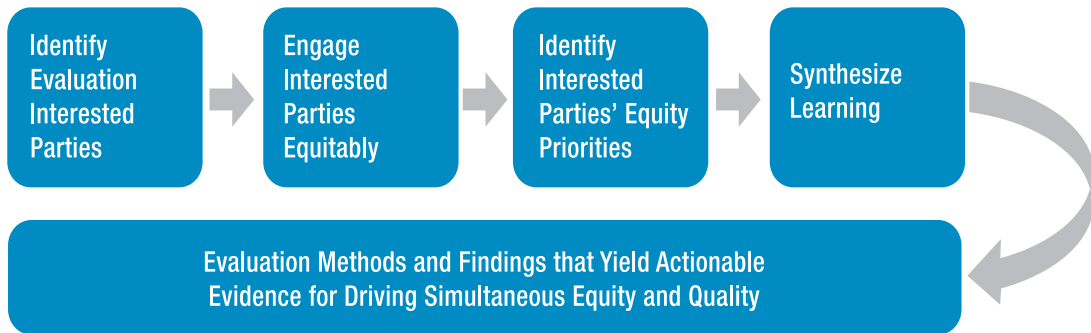To ensure those closest to the work inform how to design and evaluate quality and equity.

Who uses an equity action agenda?
All interested parties: Program Implementation Partners, Evaluators, Community Members, Participants, Funders

How is an equity action agenda created?
Before program selection and evaluation begin, interested parties will work together to identify priorities for understanding and increasing quality and equity through implementation and evaluation.

PROCESS FOR INCREASING QUALITY AND EQUITY USING EQUITY ACTION AGENDA

Identify Evaluation Interested Parties → Engage Interested Parties Equitably → Identify Interested Parties' Equity Priorities → Synthesize Learning →

Evaluation Methods and Findings that Yield Actionable Evidence for Driving Simultaneous Equity and Quality

Core questions guide discussion and decisions at each step in the process.

CORE Questions to Identify Evaluation Stakeholders

Identify Interested Parties

- Who are the interested parties?
  - ° Funders
  - ° Designers
  - ° Implementers
  - ° Participants
  - ° Evaluators
  - ° Community members
- Whose relevant voices might be missing from the groups and individuals named above?

Engage Interested Parties Equitably

- When are interested parties available to engage?
- What supports and resources are needed?
- What methods of engagement are acceptable and feasible to them?
- What steps will you take to make sure all interested parties engage?
- How will the methods proposed in response to the core questions above lead to meaningful and fair engagement of stakeholders?

Identify Interested Parties' Priorities

- How do interested parties define quality and equity related to the intervention?
- Do they perceive any tensions in the pursuit of simultaneous quality and equity?
- What current inequities in access to quality do they perceive?
- What role do they believe the intervention has for addressing current inequities?
- What do they believe will be sufficient evidence that the intervention has reduced inequities in access to quality? That is, what has to change or be different as a sign that the intervention is reducing current inequities?

Synthesize Learning

- What did the evaluators learn during the identification, engagement, and priority processes?
- How will learning from the identification, engagement, and priority processes drive the final evaluation methods?
- How will the elements of the evaluation plan yield actionable evidence to improve simultaneous quality and equity?

Evaluating Progress in Early Childhood Systems Initiatives

This resource summarizes a model to develop measurable indicators of progress for the Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan. Using a model can inform decisions on how to evaluate progress in early childhood systems change initiatives.

A Model for Measuring Progress

Promoting understanding of the progress achieved by an initiative like the early childhood strategic planning process begins with fostering collective appetite for evaluating progress. Who is invested in early childhood systems progress? Are those who are invested prepared to do the work of making and evaluating progress? What do they want to see happen? How will they know that progress is occurring? What will convince them? Answers to these questions reflect four elements of measuring progress beginning with a foundation of **collective appetite** where a sufficient number of invested stakeholders desire to achieve and measure progress. Building from collective appetite, measuring progress requires an **operationalized theory of progress** with clear statements about components of the progress initiative taking place and the impacts they should yield. Upward from the theory of progress there is a need to develop or activate processes and methods for gathering and analyzing information about the implementation and impact of the progress initiative. Once gathered, relevant information can be analyzed to provide answers to questions implied by the theory of progress. To what degree are we implementing the components of our progress initiative? Does implementation of progress components yield proximal indicators of progress? Are the proximal indicators of progress leading to our desired outcomes? Beyond data analysis and progress monitoring, measuring impact of progress initiatives addresses five key questions.[1]

Measuring Progress

- Capacity for Strategic Reporting
- Capacity for Gathering & Analyzing Relevant Information
- Operationalized Theory of Progress
- Collective Appetite for Evaluating Progress

Key Questions for Measuring Impact

What are the outcomes?

Who is experiencing the outcomes?

How much impact is experienced?

Who/what is contributing to the impact?

Is the impact different from what we expected?

Progress is more than a process—progress is a social phenomenon where a group of informed and invested stakeholders has the **capacity** to name what improvement would look like and measure whether improvement is happening. Recognizing progress requires a strategic combination of social and technical resources. Technical resources refer to the data and analytic capacities needed to provide trustworthy and relevant information about progress initiative implementation and impacts. Social resources refer to the relationships, social conditions, understandings, and agreements as capacities needed to generate shared understanding of what progress looks like, when progress is happening, and how to manage progress. Large-scale systems change initiatives benefit from community input into not only the components of progress initiatives but also how to measure, achieve and manage impact.[2]

Strategic reporting will move beyond typical dissemination practices—such as public documents and dashboards—to include methods for promoting, sustaining, and bolstering progress. Methods like data storytelling expand communication techinques so people with the power to name and achieve progress have the information they need to activate change and leverage resources.[3]

Community-Driven Systems Impact

Build local capacity to analyze impact

Empower communities to determine priorities

Generate new and better information

Demonstrate value and impact

Data Storytelling

A compelling story sparks public imagination and draws people to think. Data stories, at their best, push the audience from simply believing, to knowing with a degree of confidence.

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