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APPLYING THE EQUITY LENS FRAMEWORK

A companion guide

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## UNDERSTANDING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PURPOSE

This equity framework is part of MnDOT's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Unified Strategic Plan. It is designed as a general starting point to guide planning and development discussions and should be tailored as needed to support specific projects. A series of guiding principles and targeted questions comprise the framework. To promote and implement this framework throughout MnDOT, dialogue around the understanding of equity as well as grasping the definitions of key terms (p.6) is essential. This dialogue should be driven by leadership, office directors, managers and supervisors as they become experts of the equity framework and as they progress developmentally in cultural competence.

The reasons for applying an equity lens are to identify and implement the most equitable outcomes possible in any planned updates to budgets, policies, projects, or programs and to mitigate bias in all processes. This requires awareness of and accountability to equitable outcomes. It also requires an understanding that decisions within the agency, however big or small, can affect all groups of people differently. Rather than a deficit mindset that has an outcome with winners and losers this framework helps to identify strategies that support equitable practices that benefit all people.

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## STAGE 1: DEVELOPING YOUR PROCESS

1. **Prepare to answer difficult questions.** The questions in the equity lens framework are designed to guide your conversations and help you to discover unintended consequences or systems bias. There is some redundancy built in by design because it helps you to focus and level set your thinking process in ways that ensure the most equitable outcomes. This is a team process that requires participants to slow down and think deeply about challenging concepts. This should be an integrated part of your regular planning process rather than a burdensome add-on.
2. **Practice centering equity.** This means learning to understand and acknowledge historical events that caused disparate outcomes for marginalized communities, working to mitigate those negative outcomes and preventing continued inequities in future plans. Centering equity also means making sure equitable practices touch all work areas and that we are actively working to correct past inequities in addition to stopping past unequitable practices.
3. **Shift from an analytical framework to a conceptual framework.** This process is not strictly linear/analytical so it may be a new way of thinking for some. While an analytical framework is focused on a detailed analysis of all variables needed to complete a current project, a conceptual framework focuses on relationships and discovering important factors that others may miss. In this framework, time is spent learning different ideas and perspectives and it describes the varying vantage points you need to understand before a project begins.
4. **Examine Discomfort.** For many, focusing on underrepresented groups and acknowledging disparities will be new and challenging. Remember that discomfort is part of the process and is necessary for real and lasting change. That said, it is also important to recognize that not everyone will be ready to apply this framework. Ask for help when you need it and work in teams that are genuinely interested in and ready for the work. Take time to become familiar with the tool and how to apply it in ways that meet your specific needs.

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## STAGE 2:

### IDENTIFY SOCIAL EQUITY VARIABLES

Questions	Prompts and Considerations
What is the policy, plan or program?	While this may seem obvious it is your chance to develop a shared understanding of the work being proposed. Think of it as your "elevator speech", a clear and concise description of the policy, program, activity, budget decision etc.
What are all the groups that are affected by the policy or program in question?	Be as specific and detailed as possible. This will require research. Use disaggregated demographic data to describe affected groups.
Are any tribal nations affected by the policy or program in question?	Any project or program decision that involves tribal nations requires the expertise and involvement of <a href="#">the office of Tribal Affairs</a> .
Are some groups affected differently by its implementation, if so, how?	This question is designed to help you drill deeper into past or future inequities. Ask yourselves if and how the desired outcome will adversely affect marginalized communities and/or perpetuate inequities. This is a chance to be intentional and clear about disparate impact on communities with emphasis on historical and systemic inequities.
What are the relevant social disparities within the agency and broader community that need to be considered?	List specifics. Is access an issue? Are there financial implications? What have stakeholders mentioned?

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## STAGE 3:

### OUTLINE MITIGATION STRATEGIES AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

Questions	Prompts and Considerations
Does the proposed action affect any institutional norms or systems in the agency?	Is the proposed policy or program perpetuating or helping to mitigate any of the relevant social disparities identified? Will this maintain a status quo, perpetuate inequities, improve systems for everyone? Describe how and why.
Are there potential negative agency and or social outcomes?	How will you know who benefits from or is burdened by this policy, plan or program? Who is accountable for results? How is that being communicated, evaluated and tracked?
What strategies are in place to mitigate these negative outcomes?	Is this in your power to change? If not, who has that power? Explain the methods you used to examine and mitigate bias. These questions are designed to help you slow down and think through any details you may have overlooked individually. This is also in response to the disparate impact you identified earlier, how will you avoid or mitigate disparate impact?
Is there any indication of conscious or unconscious bias being applied?	Remember that equity is about fairness rather than sameness. Is there some perpetuation of historical inequities that will result from this policy, plan or program? If so, how will this be resolved? What needs to happen to dismantle inequities and reshape the system for an equitable outcome? Is anyone blocking progress? Do you meet resistance? If so explain.

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## STAGE 4:

### DESCRIBE METRICS

1. **Define your Methods** for tracking the effects of the policy or program. There should be measurable impact when systems have been changed and institutional barriers have been identified and eliminated. You should be able to identify systems and programs within MnDOT that can be of assistance as you work to implement strategies.
2. **Framework Integration** consider how regularly you've applied the equity lens framework to your process. Describe how it has helped or hindered new development and thinking.
3. **Describe involvement** who is regularly involved in your process, have you considered contracting in ways that supports disadvantage business enterprises? Are you engaging community partners? Who are your internal and external stakeholders and how are you involving them?

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## DEFINITIONS

- **Bias** - Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another.
- **Diversity** - Reflecting populations including race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, age, sexual orientation, class, education level, family classifications etc.
- **Equity** - Giving everyone what they need to be successful.
- **Inclusion** - All employees feeling valued and contributing their best.
- **Institutional** - Involves the adoption and implementation of policies or practices at an organizational level.
- **Intersectionality** - Refers to the complex cumulative ways that different cultural and social identities combine, overlap, and intersect.
- **Protected groups** - Mn State Statute 43A provides the following: For affirmative action purposes, "protected groups" include females, persons with disabilities, and members of the following minorities: Black, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan native.
- **Structural** - Encompasses interlocking institutions across society, where compounding effects impact outcomes.
- **Tribal Nations** - referring to the 11 federally recognized tribes which are sovereign nations located inside the boundaries of Minnesota.
- **Underrepresented groups** - Groups that are inadequately represented and/or underutilized in the workforce, in community engagement strategies, and in public participation.