

# EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT LENS

## LENS AT A GLANCE

### **Ready to Use the Lens**

Now that you have reviewed the background, history, theoretical framework, and organizational readiness summary of the Equity & Empowerment Lens (E & E Lens) you are ready to begin using the components we have laid out to more thoughtfully examine your organization. Below you will find a simple reminder about the underlying concepts present in the actual Lens questions, and tips for maximizing your use of the tool.

### **At its core, the Lens guides the participant to:**

- You are here**
- ➔ **Assess** your current organizational capacity for equity work.
  - ➔ **Describe** current direction and strategies.
  - ➔ **Identify** inequities and injustices in the current issue.
  - Reflect upon and understand** your strengths and challenges.
  - Enhance what is leading** to equity and empowerment.
  - Eliminate strategies** and root causes leading to inequities and injustices.
  - Celebrate** successes and improvements.

### **What are the foundational concepts and theories guiding these questions?**

This basic version of the Lens is based on the foundational assumptions found in the Concept Papers (see pages 56 to 99). Essentially, the Lens asks questions in the areas of **People, Place, Processes, and Power**, and seeks to identify underlying patterns, barriers, and opportunities leading to equity and racial justice. (See *Introduction* for more information on connection to People, Place, Processes, and Power).

### **What are some guiding tips to complete this assessment?**

Before beginning, make a personal and organizational commitment to a specific Lens application process. If you plan to fully apply the Lens, ensure that you have allocated appropriate resources, staffing, and time to move from analysis into meaningful action. If you intend to utilize the Lens to examine a particular institutional dilemma, make sure that you are prepared to shift your decisions in alignment with your reflection and discoveries. If you are interested in using elements of the Lens (e.g. *Concept Papers*) to promote organizational readiness and capacity building, be transparent with your staff about the ultimate goal being application at a broader level. The following suggestions will help guide your work at any initial capacity.

### **Creating the Space, Setting the Tone**

- Arrange to host the Lens application session in a comfortable, private location with limited distractions and space for people to think, brainstorm, and discuss in a variety of ways (e.g. large group, small group, pairs, flip chart, individual notes, etc.)
- In advance, think about who should be in the room in order to meet the goal of representation from communities most affected by inequities. Provide reasonable notice about the day and time for the session to demonstrate the value you place on their presence and to increase the likelihood of their participation.
- Be intentional with time and goals for each session; if you intend to move through the whole Lens in one session, ensure ample time for completion to alleviate the loss of momentum if the conversation has to stop mid-stream because of time limitations.
- When introducing the Lens, explain the broad goals of the initiative and the specific goals of its application in your setting so your team understands the context and what they can expect of the process and outcomes.

### **Moving Through the Lens**

- Moving through the process as a team? Consider breaking down the Lens questions in manageable chunks over a few meetings, and utilize meaningful engagement methods as a way to integrate active listening, diverse viewpoints, challenging conversations, thoughtful communication, and collective wisdom around data-sharing and recommendation creation.
- Strive to have the analysis completed by people who bring different racial and economic perspectives to the table, including communities who identify as people of color and as Caucasian. Diverse perspectives will lead to more robust solutions and bring about a more equitable analysis.
- Racism, class oppression, and gender inequity are often three major drivers of inequities. Think across these three lines in your answers to questions about who is being affected, how, and why, paying particular attention to communities of color, immigrants, and refugees.
- The *Concept Papers* are referenced by icon to questions below as a resource. Look back at the *Concept Papers* for more information, and / or over a longer period of time, commit to reading through them to build overall capacity.
- Some of your answers might be 'I don't know,' or 'we have low capacity in this area.' Honest and accurate answers will help you better determine where to start in terms of creating upcoming actions.
- If possible, engage an equity expert and someone well-versed in data as part of this analysis to ensure adherence to equity and racial justice principles and provide more relevant information for your discussion.

## Equity and Empowerment Lens Questions

### Basic Intro Questions

1. **Describe the policy/decision/program/practice/etc. used for this Lens application.**
  - a. Are social justice and racial justice clearly stated in the vision, mission, and goals?
  - b. Who does this intend to serve, and who is actually served?
  - c. How is this funded, and what are the limitations?
2. **What data or evidence guides the policy/decision/program/practice/etc.?**   
(See Evaluation Summary chapter, p. 51)
  - a. How does your organization currently **utilize** existing data to inform your practice?
  - b. How does your organization make data available for employees and community members to easily access and understand?

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### Connection to People

3. **Describe the groups that will be most affected by and concerned with this policy/decision/program/practice/etc.?**
4. **What are the benefits and burdens that communities experience with the policy/decision/program/practice/etc.?** 
  - a. What factors may be producing and perpetuating these positive and negative effects on communities?

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### Connection to Place

5. **There are three main areas of sustainability and equity (environmental, economic, and social justice) What impacts do communities of color, immigrants, and refugees experience in these areas?** 
6. **How are public resources and investments distributed geographically (such as funding, housing, education, transportation)?** 
  - a. What trends do you see in how resources are flowing in and out of certain areas?

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### Connection to Process and Power

7. **What barriers do you and your staff encounter in making changes directly related to equity and racial justice? (i.e., obligational political, institutional racism, emotional, legal, programmatic, managerial, financial, internal biases)** 
8. **How does your organization engage the community in planning, decision-making, and evaluation?** 
  - a. What policies, processes and social relationships meaningfully and intentionally *include* communities most affected by inequities?
  - b. What policies, processes and social relationships contribute to the *exclusion* of communities most affected by inequities?
    - b.i. For policies and processes that exclude, what actions or strategies could build inclusion?
9. **How does the policy, decision, program, practice build community capacity and power in communities most affected by inequities?** 