Embedding Equity Into How Your City Does Business

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of this Early Childhood Municipal Policy Fundamental with policy and practice levers to consider and questions to ask yourself as you move your city's early childhood agenda forward so that ALL young children, their families, and those who care for them thrive.

EQUITY IS CENTRAL TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS

To improve outcomes and ensure success for all young children and families, equity cannot be an add-on to a strategy. For early childhood success, equity should be embedded in how your city does business and embedded in the DNA of local governance.

Key Takeaways

Embedding equity into local government policy and practices requires understanding your community's history, how racism and other oppression show up in governance, policy, practices and a commitment to building equity authentically – so all in your community can see it and feel it. There are four key actions when embedding equity into how your city does business.

Equity is Central to Early Childhood Success

UNDERSTAND THE LANDSCAPE:	What's Available? What's Missing? What's Next? How did we get here?
CREATE & EVALUATE POLICIES/PRACTICES:	Where is the action within the continuum of policy, practice and program? How well have you mapped out the steps in your process? How will you monitor impact?
ALWAYS ASK:	Who's benefiting? Who's burdened? Who's missing? Who's part of the process? Who's deciding?
MONITOR IMPACT (DATA):	On prenatal-to-age 3 (PN-3), PreK, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce Across race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, geographic location, religion, and sexual orientation

Every child deserves the opportunity to succeed. Local Government is KEY to early childhood success.

WHY EMBEDDING EQUITY IS IMPORTANT

Children are our hope and promise. They are our future. Unfortunately, not all children are thriving and outcomes are disproportionately worse for children of color and children living in poverty. To achieve Early Childhood Success equity must be central across the early childhood continuum, inclusive of prenatal-to-age 3, PreK, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce. This calls us to embed equitable policies and practices, that embrace a diverse lens, create opportunity, and systems where all can thrive, regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, geographic location, gender, religion and sexual orientation.

How children and their families experience our communities, their access to resources and opportunities varies and it depends sadly on their race, gender, where they live, socioeconomic status, and more. Many of our policies and practices are informed by long standing systems of oppression and their results. These institutional structures, policies, and practice are the inequities we see in our communities and early childhood outcomes.

INFANT MORTALITY by race

TOTAL	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Black/ African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Non-Hispanic/ White
4.6%	7.5%	3.4%	10.7%	5.1%	4.6%

Source: Kids Count Data Center, 2018

The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups. (Equity Advisor Council, 2013) A goal of equity can be to create conditions that allow all to reach their full potential, erasing disparities in race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, geographic location, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Local leaders are uniquely positioned to address these inequities and take action. Big or small, city, town, or village, each has a feel and a history. It is important to know and acknowledge our histories and understand the way inequities and racism became embedded into our communities, policies, practices, and decision making.

Embedding equity into local governance policy and practices is key to building a brighter tomorrow for ALL children. It takes commitment to build equity authentically – so your entire community can see it and feel it.
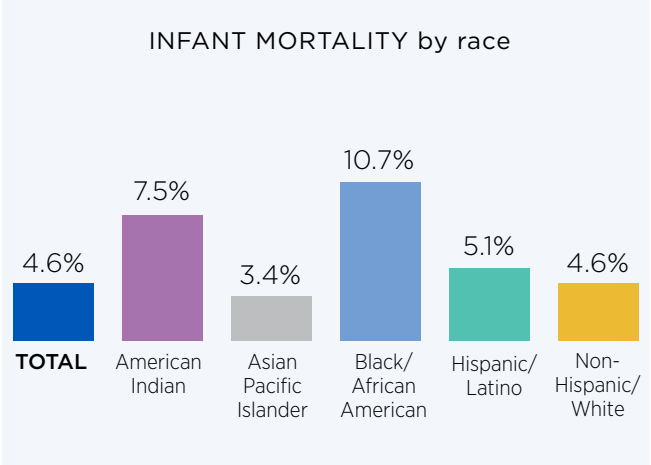
Equality vs. Equity

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE
While often used interchangeably the meanings in action vary.

Equality
the provision of **equal treatment, access, and opportunity to resources and opportunities**
(GUNN, 2018)

Equity
the provision of **personalized resources needed for all individuals to reach common goals.**
(EQUITY EDUCATION, 2019)
Impact Tulsa, 2019

Actions to Embed Equity

Understand the Landscape

Understanding the Landscape allows you to see and acknowledge the current state of your community and how young children and families are growing, who is thriving, and gain insight into their experiences. The review provides an opportunity to understand where your city is now, how you got here, and build a shared vision for your city - seeking answers to the questions what's available, what's missing, and determine what's next in your city's journey toward advancing its early childhood agenda.

WHERE ARE WE NOW

In understanding the landscape, it is important to note the current outcomes for young children and families, your starting point. Identify the policies, practices, programs, community resources and assets available or missing within the system. This assists with pinpointing opportunities for improvement and areas of greatest need. During this process disaggregate data across demographics, including in race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, geographic location, gender, religion, and sexual orientation and across the early childhood continuum (prenatal-to-age 3, Pre-K, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce).

With equity as a central tenant of understanding your landscape, embrace diversity of thought, perspective, and experiences and consider viewing policies and practices with a diverse lens. Seek to understand the experiences of young children, families, and the workforce and how they are impacted by the current systems, policies, practices, and programs.

HOW DID WE GET HERE

Historical events and cultural beliefs have shaped our cities, in how we have built our neighborhoods, our current policies and practices and contributes to the inequities in early childhood opportunity and outcomes. Our history and current narratives of our cities provide an insight into how structural racism and policy barriers and inequities developed and context to identify opportunities to heal and build resilience. Consider what policies, such as redlining, continue to have an impact in our neighborhoods and contribute to current inequities.

Understanding and acknowledging our communities' history can provide an opportunity for healing and sustainable improvements.

WHAT'S NEXT: CREATING A SHARED VISION

While engaging and listening to the community, stakeholders, and families to understand the current landscape, also listen for the possibilities, what their vision is for their community, for their families and their children. Embedding equity includes disrupting the current narratives and building a shared vision where all can be who they are meant to be.

POLICY & PRACTICE LEVERS

Conduct a landscape review to better understand current early childhood outcomes and the experiences of young children and families

Assign dedicated staff to the work of review

Develop a community-wide early childhood success plan

Align efforts across local government and community

Incorporate a trauma-informed approach in policymaking

MOVING TO ACTION
ASK YOURSELF

How are young children and families doing in your city? Who is thriving? Who is not? How do you know?

What opportunities and resources are in place to support young children and families? Who are they helping? What are the experiences of young children and families? How are supports communicated and made available to families?

How are your city agencies and community working together to align resources and community assets to support children and families? What new or different ways could you leverage current resources and assets to support children and families?

Explore your city's story. What is your history and narratives? How do these contribute to the Early Childhood outcomes in your city? How is your current system adding to your city's narratives? How could you support positive narratives?

Does your city have a shared vision for Early Childhood Success? Is equity and the elimination of disparities in outcomes reflected in the shared vision, goals and strategies of your partnership?

> *Every city, town, and village wants to be a thriving community and have an even brighter tomorrow. It starts with, a shared vision where Quality of Life is universal and then, together with community, creates a pathway filled with opportunity for all."*

DR. ROBERT BLAINE
NLC's Senior Executive and Director
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Create & Evaluate Policies and Practices

Through our local government, policies, practices, and procedures, we frame our communities. They regulate conduct, provide services and have a large impact on what and where resources and opportunities are available. Local infrastructure, emergency services, economic development and the support systems created in our communities' impact how we care for ourselves, each other, and our children. When creating policies to improve outcomes, consider:

What's the issue you wish to address and what do you want to happen?

Be specific, use data and input from the community, when identifying the issue, you wish to address and the intended impact. Integrate and empower family/resident voices into this process. Ask yourself, is the issue and intended impact a goal and priority for the young children and families your wishing to support. Building local policies and practices that support and are responsive to young children and families, takes knowledge and skills, practice, and a commitment to changing "how cities do business."

Where is the action within the continuum of policy, practice, and program?

Whether enacting new policies or evaluating existing ones, a systems approach provides a way to understand what goes into policy development and implementation.

Values are the foundation upon which policies are built. We like to think that policies are based on clearly articulated values and that these values are for the positive benefit of all. But often, unconsciously held beliefs or biases may be at play in shaping policies, programs or practices. Uncovering values and beliefs can help us anticipate – or see in hindsight – why a policy doesn't work.

Policies are the articulation of what we want to change in our communities. Policies are established and implemented by local government as laws, ordinances, regulations, organizational strategies, and as administrative guidelines. Often, they are broad and direction-setting. Some policies are meant to shape administrative functions or organizational practices and may be more specific.

Procedures and processes are the roadmap for carrying out a policy. A program, with its specific protocols and processes, is an example of this level of the pyramid. Legal regulations that ensure the quality, safety, health or personnel knowledge and skills are also at the procedure, process, or program level.

Practices may be formal or informal. These are day-to-day actions needed to carry out the processes, procedures and programs and contribute to the impact and experiences of young children and families.

Pyramid (top to bottom): People; Practices; Procedures, Processes; Policies; Values, beliefs, biases
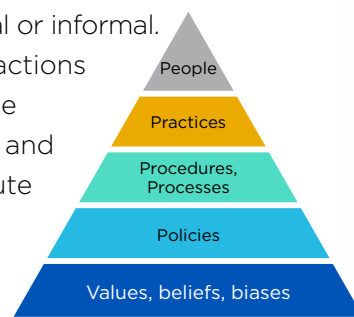
How will you implement your policy and monitor impact? Map it Out.

Policies, procedures, and programs tell us what elected leaders and stakeholder want to occur. But often how a policy, procedure, or program is implemented can vary depending on who is doing it and how they are doing it and influence the impact. Map out your intent. Adaptation may be critical to ensuring that a program works for a particular group. Continuous evaluation and monitoring of practices is needed to ensure that children and families benefit from it.

Mapping processes and implementation communicates your intent and can facilitate achieving your intended impact by building in evaluation and continuous improvement into policymaking.

POLICY & PRACTICE LEVERS

Create conditions for change using racial equity toolkits and trainings within local government and across the community

Elevate family-resident voice in decision-making, include family-residents in leadership positions

Develop and use an Equity Dashboard

Share goal of placing children and families at the center of policy and practice with partners and allies

MOVING TO ACTION
ASK YOURSELF

How does equity show up in your cities policies and practices and in your early childhood agenda? Does your city use a racial equity toolkit?

What is the process within your city to bring a policy from idea to implementation? How is family-resident voice integrated into the process?

Are you using an approach for policy, practice and budgeting, which is based on community identified priorities and informed by data?

In what ways is equity embedded in your policy making processes? How can young children and families be central in policymaking?

How are you evaluating current policies and addressing historical inequities in governance structures?

During policymaking are you identifying how you will evaluate and measuring impact?

> " *Much of what we see in negative outcomes in our city are a result of policy decisions, such as redlining and exclusionary zoning, that did disproportionate harm to our residents of color. To undo some of that harm we need to embed trauma informed practices into our policymaking and how our government does business, so we can create a culture of healing and a culture of care.*"

ZEKE COHEN
Council member, Baltimore, Maryland sponsor Elijah Cummings Healing Cities Act

Always Ask

A goal of local democracy is to support residents and be responsive so that all may thrive. This includes being responsive to the lived experiences of young children, families and the workforce from diverse backgrounds in your community and to integrate family, workforce and resident voice into the democratic process. Throughout your process and evaluations always ask:

Who's Benefiting?
Who's Burdened?
Who's Missing?

Equitable decision making engages all voices and considers who benefits, who is burdened and who is missing from the policies and practices implemented. It is important to review current policies and practices across city government, noting how and who they support and ways they may be a barrier to the overall well-being of young children, their families and the workforce. In asking these questions, be specific, look across the early childhood continuum (PN-3, Pre-K, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce). Additionally, consider who's benefiting, who's burdened, and who's missing from a diverse lens including race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, geographic location, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.

Who's part of the process?
Who's deciding?

Mapping how the voices of young children and families are woven within the municipal structures will provide a shared understanding of current family engagement practices and provide a platform for identifying what is working well and where potential opportunities for improvement may exist.

Consider, how is family-resident voice integrated into how your city does business and the process of creating and evaluating policies and practices. Does your process include focus groups or community conversations to obtain the communities perspective on what is and what could be entry points and supports for integrating family voice? How are families represented in leadership?

Authentic engagement occurs when city leaders and families understand the history of how the policies have developed, understand the current governance structures and have the knowledge, tools and resources to work together. Building the capacity of a responsive public policy and practice in which young children and families thrive takes knowledge and skills, practice, and a commitment to changing "how cities do business."

> *Realizing a brighter future for our children and grandchildren requires that we engage the many voices of our community. As we move forward together in rebuilding amid these challenging times, this work is more vital than ever."*

MAYOR MELVIN CARTER
Saint Paul, Minnesota and Co-Chair NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families Council

POLICY & PRACTICE LEVERS

Conduct regular reviews of current policies with an equity lens

Include review of potential impact on children and families in all policymaking

Align policy with values of community

Elevate lived-experiences of families-residents

Use a two-generation approach to improving early childhood outcomes

Provide opportunities for families-residents to learn about and participate in policymaking

MOVING TO ACTION
ASK YOURSELF

Does your city regularly review current policies and practices, noting who's benefiting, who's burdened, and who's missing?

How is family-resident voice woven into How your city does Business? Is family-resident voice integrated in policymaking?

How are families represented in leadership? Are partnerships and coalitions reflective of the demographics in the community?

How do stakeholders utilize data to assess needs and implement differentiated service delivery?

How is your city engaging with families-residents to share and build understanding of local decision-making processes?

Are city services accessible by all? How are you engaging and ensuring families-residents are aware and have access to city and community services, resources, and opportunities?

Monitor Impact

At the top and the focus of local government is people. All communities want to be a thriving community and to truly thrive, all should have the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

Using data and feedback to track impact helps leaders know if their actions are having the intended impact and monitor for unintended consequences. Success isn't limited to socio-economic inequity. Disparities across races, ethnicities, abilities, geographic locations, genders, religions and sexual orientation can be addressed more easily when there's data to see what works and what doesn't. Additionally, it is important to monitor impact within specific age groups, (prenatal-to-age 3, Pre-K, K-3rd grade) and the early childhood workforce to understand how young children, families and the workforce are impacted.

Policies and implementation procedures and practices are developed with the best intentions to support all children and their families to succeed. But families and children have complex and interrelated needs. Even the most forward-looking policy may fail when put into action and existing policies and programs become outdated as conditions change in communities. It is important to incorporate the voices and experiences of children, families, and community as you monitor your actions impact and unintended consequences.

Many cities are adopting a continuous process improvement approach, using data as benchmarks and to monitor progress and adjust their efforts as needed to achieve their shared vision. It is often a combination of data and participant feedback that indicates where or how the policy, program or practice does not work or if underlying values must change for the policy to benefit those for whom it was meant. And it may take insight and honesty on the part of stakeholders to pursue the necessary changes, but in the end, the result is the reward for a policy well-made and implemented and the change the community desires.

> *In solving our challenging and persistent problems, we need to value every voice, promote equitable approaches to systems change, and hold ourselves accountable for the outcomes experienced in our neighborhoods."*

DR. RISHA R. BERRY
CEO Strengths Find Her, and NLC Early Childhood Municipal Fellow, 2020-2021

POLICY & PRACTICE LEVERS

Monitor impact regularly and consistently disaggregate data

Create a dashboard for monitoring, include measures for equity

Execute an open data policy, share data with community partners and make it available to the public

Address barriers to data collection, analysis and sharing i.e., language, digital access etc.

MOVING TO ACTION
ASK YOURSELF

How are you monitoring the implementation and impact of local policies, practices, and programs? When and who reviews the data? Are you meeting the needs of young children and families in your community in an equitable manner?

Is your data and reporting disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, geographic location (neighborhood), gender, religion and sexual orientation? Does your data look across the early childhood continuum (prenatal-to-age 3, Pre-K, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce)?

Are data variables and metrics relevant and clearly defined for collection and reporting?

What is your approach for continuous process improvement?

Do you have data sharing agreements with child and family serving agencies? Do you have shared goals?

Do families and residents have access to data collected and reported, including both summary reporting and their own child(ren)'s data and information?

Taking Action

Municipal leaders across the country are leveraging local policies and practices to **improve today and build a better tomorrow** for young children, families and their communities.

Many local leaders have a shared vision of thriving communities and early childhood success is part of that vision. Local leaders are placing children, families and community at the center of policymaking and aligning efforts by:

- **Considering a strong early childhood system as infrastructure** and an integral part of local economic development;

- **Serving as catalysts** for change using their convening power and bully pulpit;

- **Leveraging** their city departments policies, practices, and programs; and

- **Engaging** with and being a strong partner with families in their community.

MOVING TO ACTION, ASK YOURSELF 💬

What issue, social problem, related to early childhood success, are you trying to solve?

What is the intended impact across the early childhood continuum (prenatal-to-age 3, Pre-K, K-3rd grade, and the early childhood workforce)? And across race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, geographic location, gender, religion, and sexual orientation?

Which of these levers could be implemented in your city? And how? Where is the action within the continuum of policy, practice, and program?

Where is the political will in your community? Whose voices are included in your decision-making?

How will you monitor impact and unintended consequences?

Resources

Advancing Racial Equity in Your City - National League of Cities.

Let's Talk About Race: How Racial Explicit Messaging Can Advance Equity - Center for Social Inclusion

A Fair Start: Ensuring All Students are Ready to Learn - State Policy and Research for Early Education

Cities Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce - National League of Cities

Equitable Early Care and Education: An Alignment Framework and companion tool Early Childhood Alignment Rating Tool – National League of Cities

Early Learning Communities Action Guide - National League of Cities and Center for the Study of Social Policy

Acknowledgements

This policy brief is the first in a series of briefs based on key municipal policy fundamentals. The briefs are designed to support municipal leaders as they leverage and align local policies and practices so that every city, town and village has healthy babies and happy families, and all children are thriving by 3, ready by 5, and on their way by 8.

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Contact

Want to learn more about how to embed equity for early childhood success? Reach out to our team at ECTeam@nlc.org.