ADVANCING EQUITY
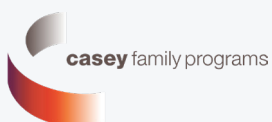# THROUGH RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

A Guide for Child Welfare
Leaders and Decision Makers

NOV. 2022

casey family programs

CHAPIN HALL

Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

ICF

jba
JAMES BELL
ASSOCIATES

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The conceptualization and development of this resource occurred through a collaborative partnership between Casey Family Programs, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Capacity Building Center for States/ICF, James Bell Associates, and the University of South Florida. Representatives from these organizations work together to build research, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement (CQI) capacity within state and local public child welfare agencies. The following individuals contributed to the research, collaboration, and writing of this resource:

Crystal Ward Allen, MSW	Casey Family Programs
Ricardo Hernandez, MPA	Casey Family Programs
Angie Hickenbottom, MSW	Casey Family Programs
Eve Moore, MBA	Casey Family Programs
Kirk O'Brien, PhD	Casey Family Programs
Chereese Phillips, PhD	Casey Family Programs
Kristen Rudlang-Perman, MPA	Casey Family Programs
Sharrica Miller, PhD, RN	California State University, Fullerton, Casey Family Programs Consultant
Angelique Day, PhD, MSW	University of Washington, Casey Family Programs Consultant
Cindy Santos, MS	The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
Yolanda Green Rogers, MSW	Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago
Krista Thomas, PhD	Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago
Carla Carpenter, MSW	Capacity Building Center for States/ICF
Christine Leicht, MA	Capacity Building Center for States/ICF
Nicole Miller, MSW	James Bell Associates
Mary Armstrong, PhD	University of South Florida

INTRODUCTION

> Child welfare agency leaders, including tribal child welfare administrators, and other decision makers possess substantial power and influence that **can be leveraged toward advancing equity in research and evaluation.**

National momentum is growing to identify and address the disproportionality and disparities that diverse communities along the child welfare continuum experience. These include the well-documented disparities and adverse impacts experienced by Black and Native American/ Alaska Native communities; they extend to many different groups of children and families, including those who are Hispanic/Latino/Latina, who are LGBTQIA,[1] who live with disabilities, who are immigrants, and any additional communities that experience marginalization and disenfranchisement by the child welfare system (Kim et al., 2017; Roberts, 2002; Font et al., 2012; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2012; Yi et al., 2020; Cooper, 2013; Fluke et al., 2011; Day et al., 20202).

The research and evaluation process can be a powerful tool for recognizing where disparities exist, identifying root causes and contributing factors, and informing the development of strategies and solutions. However, research and evaluation efforts can also perpetuate inequities, reinforce inherent bias, and contribute to the status quo if equity considerations are not intentionally integrated into the research and evaluation process (Tajima et al., 2021). Inarguably, researchers and evaluators play a critical role in advancing equity in child welfare, and several excellent tools and resources are available to guide their efforts (Andrews et al., 2019; Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015).

This brief (the Guide) was developed as a resource for child welfare leaders and decision makers. For purposes of this resource, these include state and local child welfare agency directors and executive leadership; managers who oversee research and evaluation grants and contracts; and any other decision makers at the federal, state, and local level who are responsible for conceptualizing, funding, and overseeing research and evaluation efforts. This resource can also be an important tool for others, including researchers and evaluators.

Child welfare agency leaders, including tribal child welfare administrators, and other decision makers possess substantial power and influence that can be leveraged toward advancing equity in research and evaluation. Leaders shape what research and evaluation is conducted, often control the investment of resources, and set the parameters that guide this important work. In state- and county-run child welfare agencies, additional agency staff often maintain oversight responsibility for research and evaluation efforts sponsored by the child welfare agency and influence how findings are used to inform future decisions. In tribal communities, the oversight responsibility for research and evaluation is often maintained outside the child welfare agency and likely requires review and approval by the tribal council.

---

1 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual.

The Guide presents an Influence Framework that systematically walks through the research and evaluation life cycle, elevating certain strategies and the opportunities at every stage where leaders and decision makers can prioritize equity. The four stages include 1) conceptualize research and evaluation needs, 2) commission requests for proposals, 3) engage in the research and evaluation process, and 4) use findings in decision making (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. THE PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT CYCLE

Conceptualize Research and Evaluation Needs

PLAN

Commission Requests for proposals and Contracts

DO

Use Findings in Planning and Decision-making

ACT

STUDY

Engage in the Research and Evaluation Process
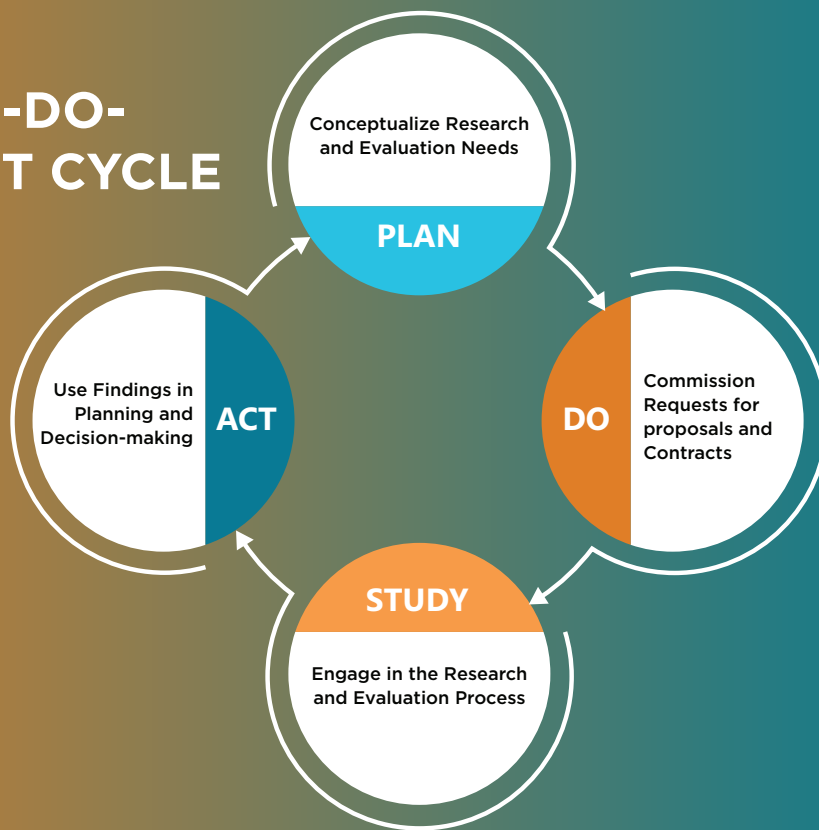
The stages of the framework align with the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle often described in CQI processes. This alignment is intentional given that our collective efforts to systematically improve child welfare practice and outcomes and to address inequities is an evolving process that requires ongoing attention and improvement over time. This work is inherently developmental, and the strategies and action steps reflected in the Guide can be applied wherever leaders and decision makers find themselves in their efforts to address inequities. Additionally, multiple factors influence child welfare leaders' decisions around priority setting and resource investments. The political environment, legislative pressures like lawsuits and consent decrees, and other levers like audit findings and federal review processes influence what is possible at any given time. The authors of the Guide acknowledge this broader context and encourage users to apply these equity strategies whenever possible in leaders' and decision makers' spheres of influence.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All efforts to promote equity should be informed by a set of guiding principles (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019). We suggest aligning agency principles with those outlined below. These principles reflect the agreement and commitment of the collaborative partnership responsible for this resource.

Figure 2. Guiding Principles to promote equitable strategies

1. Research, evaluation, and CQI efforts play an important role in advancing equity; these activities warrant specific strategies and oversight.

2. The work of developing and implementing race equity strategies in research, evaluation, and CQI must be approached with humility.

3. Research, evaluation, and CQI activities are most effective and influential when they meaningfully include representatives from the communities that stand to be most impacted by the work.

4. Individuals with lived expertise must be engaged throughout the life cycle of any research, evaluation, or CQI effort. What that involvement looks like may vary and should be customized to suit the context and preferences of the individuals involved in specific projects.

5. Individuals do not need to be trained researchers, evaluators, or CQI professionals to be valuable members of project teams and decision-making entities within jurisdictions.

6. Leaders, decision makers, and project team members must intentionally and continually examine their own internal biases and how those impact their behaviors, relationships, and decisions.

7. Research, evaluation, and CQI efforts must be trauma-informed,[2] such that any associated activities do not exacerbate or cause further harm to communities that have historically been marginalized and disenfranchised.

8. Advancing equity is a developmental process, and jurisdictions are at different places on the equity continuum. It is important to achieve the balance of addressing inequities with the urgency that is required while meeting jurisdictions where they are developmentally.

---

2 Applying the principles of trauma-informed care to research can be challenging, as researchers may have minimal contact with survivors of trauma (for example, in survey research). There is also not clear consensus between researchers and practitioners on how trauma informed principles are defined and implemented from both a research and practice lens (Berliner & Kolko, 2016). It is important that researchers and community partners take time agree on these principles in developing program manuals and evaluation plans.

ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE EQUITY

Opportunities exist for child welfare leaders and decision makers to leverage their power and influence in prioritizing and advancing equity at every stage of the research and evaluation life cycle. This resource details these opportunities and provides actionable strategies that can complement equity-focused efforts deployed by research and evaluation partners.

Conceptualize Research and Evaluation Needs (PLAN)

The opportunity to elevate equity begins when research and evaluation needs are first being conceptualized. Leaders and decision makers can call on diverse voices to inform the development of research and evaluation priorities from the outset. Specific actions might include cultivating planning teams, working groups, or executive advisory committees representative of those being served by the child welfare agency (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020). This includes persons with lived expertise in the child welfare system as well as representatives from groups historically underrepresented and marginalized. Whether these representative entities are ongoing or time-limited participants, leaders should commit resources to compensating community members and persons with lived expertise for their time and contributions commensurate with their experience in the same way that more traditional professionals are paid for their participation (Brown et al., 2019).

It is also essential that child welfare leaders and decision makers meaningfully engage communities that stand to be most impacted by research and evaluation efforts in early thinking and decision making. In addition to the aforementioned teams and advisory committees, strategies like town halls or attending tribal council meetings can be helpful for engaging a wider array of voices in planning and decision-making processes. Community representatives are best positioned to shape leaders' understanding about the problems that most need to be solved and can lend insight into the most important research questions to ask and answer (Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017; Stern et al., 2019).

Moreover, community members can provide important insight into how key constructs might be defined and measured. Their insight might be more robust, meaningful, and culturally responsive than what is frequently captured in research and evaluation projects. These efforts can lead to establishing shared language and common ground between child welfare agency leadership, researchers, and community members from the outset (Bernabei, 2017). Meaningfully engaging with community members at the exploratory stage can help leaders and decision makers to be

Meaningfully engaging with community members at the exploratory stage can help leaders and decision makers to be more receptive to community priorities and to consider research projects that address the root causes of the factors limiting families and communities from achieving positive outcomes.

more receptive to community priorities and to consider research projects that address the root causes of the factors limiting families and communities from achieving positive outcomes.

Authentic recognition of communities' past experiences can be helpful for establishing a foundation for future partnerships.

Many communities of color and other historically marginalized groups have a history of negative experiences with research and evaluation efforts that can influence their trust levels and willingness to participate in future studies (Kim et al., 2017; Roberts, 2002; Font et al., 2012; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2012; Yi et al., 2020; Cooper, 2013; Fluke et al., 2011; Native American Center for Excellence, n.d.). One strategy to combat this history is for child welfare leaders to acknowledge, with humility and transparency, how communities have been impacted previously by research and evaluation efforts and honor those experiences from the outset (Hawn et al., 2020; Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017; Stern et al., 2019). Authentic recognition of communities' past experiences can be helpful for establishing a foundation for future partnerships. Lastly, this investment in people has the short-term benefit of asking questions of great interest to communities and the long-term benefit of creating champions for sustaining programs when the research is completed. Champions' advocacy is critical in shaping the decision making of child welfare leaders.

Commission Requests for Proposals or Contracts (DO)

The second phase of the Influence Framework addresses opportunities for child welfare leaders and collaborators as they solicit proposals for research and evaluation projects that the agency aims to fund. When designing requests for proposals (RFPs) or developing contracts, decision makers can specify their organization's expectations and requirements for how equity issues should be centered in those submitted proposals and include corresponding scoring criteria. This could include requiring states and counties who have tribal populations located in their jurisdictions to partner with tribes as part of meeting the requirements of the request for proposals. While some jurisdictions do not have to commission RFPs, the considerations outlined here still hold for an evaluation conducted by the child welfare department or by a contractor who does not go through an RFP process.

RFPs can include expectations for research teams to be representative of the communities included in the research project (including recruiting research teams who employ members with lived experience in the phenomenon being studied) This can involve agencies explicitly welcoming researchers from diverse backgrounds and recognizing that community representatives do not have to be formally trained researchers to be effective and valuable members of research teams. In addition, RFPs can explicitly welcome innovative and responsive research designs that facilitate greater understanding of the presence and impact of institutionalized racism and inequities (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2019). The ideas below outline specific possibilities the agency can include/add to its RFPs for response by potential vendors or when developing contracts for evaluations.

IN THE PROPOSAL RESPONSE SECTIONS, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Agency Overview/ Background

How do the contractor's/ vendor's mission and vision to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion principles relate/ align to the agency's efforts and the proposed research/evaluation? (Bernabei, 2017; Stern et al., 2019; Inouye et al., 2005; Irons, 2019; Nelson & Brooks, 2016)

Team Infrastructure

- What is the diversity of the contractors/research team?
- Does the research team include members with lived experience (birth parents, young adults, kinship caregivers, etc.) in the focus area of the research and evaluation effort?
- What teams/committees are proposed to support the evaluation? What steps will be taken to ensure those groups are diverse and include individuals with lived expertise and members of the community?

Technical and Business Proposal

1. How will the research/evaluation address historical and systemic racism?

2. Describe how the research/evaluation will secure a common understanding of the community-specific historical context around the issues being studied, including:
   - the establishment and lingering impact of racist policies; and
   - the history of race relations/dynamics.

3. Describe the methodologies to be used for inclusion and power-shifting to fully engage all participants in research (such as through community-based participatory research; see Dean-Coffey et al, 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019; Datta, 2018; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010).

4. Describe how the evaluation will ensure that community members with lived expertise are decision makers in the following processes:
   - cocreating research questions and ensuring that questions address root causes;
   - deciding what data to collect (see Dean-Coffey et al, 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019);
   - interpreting the results; and
   - summarizing and presenting findings.

5. How will the evaluation incorporate a strengths-based approach when determining what to collect and how to collect it (resilience, protective factors, hope)? (See Hawn et al., 2020.)

6. Describe the processes that will be used to ensure that findings:

7. Describe how the evaluation will engage child welfare jurisdictions, including tribal child welfare agencies, as active partners throughout the research process (Dettlaff & Fong, 2011).
   - are disaggregated by race/ethnicity (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019);
   - are inclusive of qualitative methodologies that incorporate the voices of community stories, legacies, and history (Andrews et al., 2019; Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019);
   - include a review by research participants (member checking) to ensure the interpretation of findings is accurate; and
   - are interpreted in light of the impacts and influences of racist laws, policies, and local context that may support the interpretation of findings.

> When effectively using equity approaches, participation in research and evaluation includes agency staff and the **community representatives as members of the evaluation team.**

Furthermore, RFPs can acknowledge and provide sufficient time and resources to meaningfully engage community representatives as partners in the research process (Bernabei, 2017; Stern et al., 2019; Inouye et al., 2005; Irons, 2019; Nelson & Brooks, 2016). Building relationships and trust with community members takes substantial time, as does the use of many qualitative methods. All too often, RFPs are accompanied by aggressive timelines and relatively small budgets that are misaligned with the time and resources needed to deploy more inclusive and equitable research and evaluation strategies. When leaders have the capacity to influence the timelines and funding levels, these efforts can significantly advance an equity-oriented research agenda.

Lastly, leaders and decision makers can establish diverse and representative proposal review panels, including persons with lived expertise in the issues being addressed through the research project (Hawn et al., 2020). Review panels can be provided with scoring rubrics and corresponding guidance to prioritize proposals that respond to issues impacting disparities and that demonstrate the capacity to engage and benefit historically underserved and systematically disenfranchised communities (Bernabei, 2017; Stern et al., 2019; Inouye et al., 2005; Irons, 2019; Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

Engage in the Research and Evaluation Process (STUDY)

The third phase of the framework focuses on agency participation in research and evaluation efforts. Many agencies and staff may have participated in prior research, but only as members of a team focused on implementing a new program or service, as respondents in surveys or focus groups, or as recipients of the research findings. When effectively using equity approaches, participation in research and evaluation includes agency staff and the community as members of the evaluation team and encourages them to be active in the planning, design, execution, reporting, and dissemination phases of a study. As funders of research, child welfare jurisdictions can ensure that every phase of the evaluation includes a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Agency leaders and decision makers should elevate and reinforce equity-related priorities throughout the life cycle of the project (Andrews et al., 2019; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Brown et al., 2019). Here we present strategies agency leaders and decision makers can implement when participating in research and evaluation efforts.

Although contracting with an evaluator to conduct a study that integrates equity strategies is important, it is also necessary for the child welfare agency to be actively implementing or have implemented policies and practices that focus on increasing equity and reducing disparities. As noted in the second phase of the framework, the RFP process should solicit from a vendor/contractor a description of how their own efforts to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion principles relate or align to the agency's efforts and the proposed evaluation. To accomplish this, the agency should have clearly defined its mission, vision, and values related to equity and inclusion and its expectations for staff knowledge and use of equity approaches.

Each agency may be at varying stages in their knowledge, understanding, and practice of equity approaches. For some, more intentional efforts to train staff and address equity and disproportionality may have been in progress for years. For others, their knowledge and efforts are in their infancy. It does not matter how long an agency has been focused on equity. What is critical is that leaders and staff are mindful of their own biases and power when managing/providing oversight in the research process. They should also be thoughtful about any recommendations or guidance that are issued and their impact on equity issues and the research process (Andrews et al., 2019; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Brown et al., 2019).

When the child welfare agency is the funder for a research or evaluation effort, the agency serves as the lead and should set the terms of the contract and the evaluation. Agency decision makers should ensure that contract terms include the application of equity principles and approaches throughout all phases of an evaluation. One key deliverable for any study is the evaluation plan, which should include clear descriptions of how equity approaches will be applied at every stage of the evaluation, including incorporating agency staff and the community as members of the evaluation team, codevelopment of tools and instruments, data collection, data analysis, reporting, and dissemination of findings. Agency leaders and decision makers should review and continually assess the evaluation/research plan to ensure ongoing alignment with the equity principles outlined in the RFP (Bernabei, 2017; Stern et al., 2019; Inouye et al., 2005; Irons, 2019; Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

> What is critical is that leaders and staff are **mindful of their own biases and power** when managing/ providing oversight in the research process.

Having a clear understanding of the agency's focus and efforts on equity will enable leaders and decision makers to reinforce the commitment to equity and address disparities throughout the research process with research and evaluation teams (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019). Research vendors/contractors who are partnering on projects that involve tribal jurisdictions should be able to demonstrate an understanding of what tribal sovereignty is and how to work successfully across multiple government entities.

One key deliverable for any study is the evaluation plan, which should include clear descriptions of how equity approaches will be applied at every stage of the evaluation, including incorporating agency staff and the community as members of the evaluation team, codevelopment of tools and instruments, data collection, data analysis, reporting, and dissemination of findings.

RECOMMENDING EVALUATION COMPONENTS

- Youth and parents with lived expertise in the child welfare system are consulted with and serve as cocreators in the design and conduct of research (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019; Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017; Stern et al., 2019).

- Selected quantitative measures have been normed to the racial/ethnic groups in the community (Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Hawn et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2019; Irons, 2019), or there is a willingness to work with the community to build new, culturally derived instruments if an existing instrument is not available/does not already exist.

- Community leaders are engaged in the selection of qualitative methods that are most appropriate to the community culture (Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Hawn et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2019; Irons, 2019; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010).

- Community members are engaged to serve on the research team and participate in the collection of qualitative data (Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Hawn et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2019; Irons, 2019). Additionally, team members should include those who understand the norms and values of the community and can interpret body language and tone of voice (Andrews et al., 2019; Bernabei, 2017; Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

- Community members are engaged to serve on the research team and participate in the interpretation of findings derived from quantitative analysis (administrative or survey data) to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the community in interpretation of the results.

- Families, youth, and other community members, such as cultural traditionalists (elders) are engaged as cocreators and participants in research through different platforms (such as in person or virtual), and a variety of meeting times accommodate varied work/life schedules (for example, mornings, evenings, and weekends; see Andrews et al., 2019; Bernabei, 2017; Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

- A requirement exists that study findings are disaggregated and analyzed by race/ethnicity and any other available and appropriate demographics.

- Analyses and reporting take into consideration the impact of racist laws, policies, and local context in the interpretation of research and evaluation findings (Bernabei, 2017; Brown et al., 2019; Stern et al., 2015; Inouye et al., 2005; Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

- Reports are constructed in ways that allow the findings to be easily understood by the community so they can be used to inform community policies and practices going forward.

Child welfare agency staff are essential to the research process as they have knowledge of the norms, cultures, and languages of the community being served and included in the research. This information is vital in engaging community members in participating in all stages of any evaluation effort. Agency staff also have experience and working relationships with key community service agencies and leaders. These relationships will serve an important role when analyzing data, given that an essential activity for the evaluation team will be to engage with community representatives in conversations around making meaning of the data being collected and how they experience the research process (Bernabei, 2017; Stern et al., 2019; Inouye et al., 2005; Irons, 2019; Nelson & Brooks, 2016; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010).

Use Findings in Planning and Decision Making (ACT)

Using findings to inform decision making is the primary goal of most research endeavors. How findings are interpreted, summarized, and presented goes a long way in how the research is used to improve practice and policy. It is the belief here that actions that state, county, tribal, and territory child welfare leaders take at this stage with partners3 will ultimately influence practice and policy changes. Further, the degree to which equity is threaded through the activities at this stage can increase applicability of findings and support those practice and policy changes.

ENGAGE PARTNERS IN INTERPRETATION/IMPLICATIONS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

The first step in this stage is engaging a diverse set of partners to interpret and discuss the implications of the data and findings. Specifically, engaging individuals with lived expertise, an equity strategy, in decision making around practice and policy has the potential to leverage research in meaningful ways that are not possible without their inclusion (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019). Participating in research can become an empowering rather than a disenfranchising experience when participants are engaged in all aspects of the research process and not confined to solely the role of a research subject.

BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND ACTIONS TAKEN AS A RESULT OF THE FINDINGS

When engaging during this stage, it is critical for child welfare leaders to be clear and honest about how decisions will be made, what considerations and recommendations will be included for improving practice and policy, and how equity will be addressed. For example, are decisions made by consensus or by gathering input with the child welfare leader as the final decision maker (Hawn et al., 2020; Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017; Stern et al., 2019)? By engaging in conversations, agreements can be reached so there is a shared understanding of the role partners play in supporting considerations and recommendations.

CREATE SPACE TO ENGAGE IN DATA DISCUSSIONS

Next, it is critical for child welfare leaders to create space for meaningful discussions about data and results. Engaging in conversations around data is an important step towards increasing research use (Roberts et al., 2017) and facilitative methods are available to make these conversations engaging (for example, Data Walks and Data Placemats).

---

3 Partners can include individuals with lived expertise, community members, agency staff, researchers, and partnering agencies.

Further, while making meaning of the data and their implications, it is important to ensure that any decisions that result from research and evaluation findings are made through an equity lens (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019). Specifically, what impact will decisions and actions have on diverse populations within the community? The exercise of creating space to discuss data before it is publicly released is especially critical when working in tribal jurisdictions as some of the data being collected may be sacred (intended for community knowledge and use only). Sharing data deemed as sacred outside of the community can contribute to further distrust of researchers and impede opportunities for future research collaboration.

ENGAGE PARTNERS IN SUMMARIZING AND SHARING FINDINGS WITH DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

It is also critical for child welfare leaders to engage partners in presenting findings in written reports and presentations that describe how each recommendation will support equity (Dean-Coffey et al., 2014; Public Policy Associates, Inc., 2015; Bernabei, 2017; Hawn et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019). For example, individuals with lived expertise should be included as coauthors of reports and presentations. This increases the impact of those materials, because

individuals with lived expertise can articulate how the recommendations affect research participants. Partnering with those with lived experience in dissemination of research ensures that they are in charge of telling their own story whenever possible. This type of research dissemination can increase the compelling nature of the message and urgency with which to act upon the lessons learned from the research.

CREATE AN ONGOING MECHANISM TO ENGAGE WITH PARTNERS AFTER FINDINGS ARE RELEASED

Lastly, it may be mutually beneficial for child welfare leaders to remain actively engaged with partners after the findings are released (Hawn et al., 2020; Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2017; Stern et al., 2019). Partners can act as advocates and champions of the research in their role within the community. Additionally, because this engagement may have been qualitatively different from previous engagements, partners may communicate how the system is working more effectively, particularly by partnering with individuals with lived expertise, in a more authentic way. Finally, partners can be re-engaged around similar and new efforts to provide their expertise. These efforts by child welfare leaders to keep partners engaged supports disseminating research conducted through an equity lens to improve practice and policy

Figure 3. Summary of Equity Strategies to Use Findings in Decision Making

| Engage partners in interpretation/ implications of data & findings | Be transparent about decision-making process & action taken as a result of findings | Create space to engage in data discussions | Engage partners in summarizing and sharing findings with audiences | Create an ongoing mechanism to engage when findings are released |

CONCLUSION

The Guide was developed to showcase the unique contributions that state, county, tribal, and territory child welfare leaders and decision makers can make towards advancing an equity-focused research and evaluation agenda in child welfare. If implemented, the Influence Framework and its corresponding strategies may achieve the following outcomes:

• Increased centering of equity-related issues when defining research and evaluation priorities

• Increased inclusion of equity-related priorities within proposals submitted by researchers and evaluators and the research and evaluation grants and contracts that are ultimately funded

• More equitable distribution of research and evaluation resources across diverse pools of researchers and evaluators, including sharing with family and community representatives who have contributed their voice and expertise to the research process

• Sustained emphasis on equity throughout the research and evaluation life cycle

• Increased elevation of equity-oriented priorities by child welfare leaders and decision makers in planning, decision making, and resource investments

• Increased capacity of communities and those with lived experience to engage in research to inform policy and practice.

As with all transformation processes, this work is iterative and requires sustained attention and improvement over time. That said, state, county, tribal and territory child welfare leaders and decision makers have substantial power and influence to make immediate and measurable steps towards increased equity. The Guide offers clear strategies and suggestions toward achieving these shared goals.

REFERENCES

Andrews, K., Parekh, J., & Peckoo, S. (2019). *How to embed a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research: Practical guidance for the research process.* Child Trends Working Paper.

Berliner, L., & Kolko, D. J. (2016). Trauma informed care: A commentary and critique. *Child Maltreatment*, 21(2), 168–172

Bernabei, E. (2017). *Race equity: Getting to results.* Government Alliance for Race and Equity.

Brown, K. S., Kijakaze, K., Runes, C., & Turner, M. A. (Feb 2019). Confronting structural racism in research and policy analysis: Charting a course for policy research institutions. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99852/confronting_structural_racism_in_research_and_policy_analysis_0.pdf

Center for Evaluation Innovation. (2017). Equitable evaluation framing paper. *Equitable Evaluation Initiative.* https://www.equitableeval.org/blog-main/2017/7/17/equitable-evaluation-framing-paper

Cooper, T. A. (2013). Racial bias in American foster care: The national debate. *Marquette Law Review*, 97(2), 215–277.

Datta, R. (2018). Decolonizing both researcher and research and its effectiveness in indigenous research. *Research Ethics*, (14 (2). 1-24.

Day, P.A., Day, A.G., McCarthy, M., Best, C., Briar-Lawson, K., & Pryce, J. (2022, Spring). Justice-centered child and family wellbeing systems to address neglect. *Family Integrity & Justice*, 1 (2). 52-69. https://publications.pubknow.com/view/1055841541/52-53/

Dean-Coffey, J., Casey, J., & Caldwell, L. D. (2014). Raising the bar: Integrating cultural competence and equity: Equitable evaluation. *The Foundation Review*, 6(2). https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1203

Dettlaff, A. J., & Fong, R. (2011). Conducting culturally competent evaluations of child welfare programs and practices. *Child Welfare*, 90(2), 49–68. PMID: 21942104.

Fluke, J., Harden, B. J., Jenkins, M., & Reuhrdanz, A. (2011). Disparities and disproportionality in child welfare: Analysis of the research. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/15376/Casey_Disparities_ChildWelfare.pdf

Font, S., Berger, L., & Slack, K. (2012). Examining racial disproportionality in child protective services case decisions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(11), 2188–2200. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.childyouth.2012.07.012

Hawn N. A., Jenkins, D., Zanti, S., Katz, M., Berkowitz, E., et al. (2020). *A Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity throughout Data Integration*. Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, University of Pennsylvania.

Inouye, T. E., Yu, H. C., & Adefuin, J., (2005). *Commissioning multicultural evaluation: A foundation resource guide*. The California Endowment.

Irons, J. (2019). *Shifting the lens: Why conceptualization matters in research on reducing inequality*. William T. Grant Foundation.

Kim, H., Wildeman, C., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2017). Lifetime prevalence of investigating child maltreatment among US children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(2), 274–280.

LaFrance, J. & Nichold, R. (2010). Reframing evaluation: Defining an indigenous evaluation framework. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 23 (2). 13-31.

Native American Center for Excellence (n.d.). Steps for conducting research and evaluation in native communities. https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nace-steps-conducting-research-evaluation-native-communities.pdf

Nelson, J., & Brooks, L. (2016). *Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity*. Government Alliance for Race and Equity.

Public Policy Associates, Inc. (2015). *Considerations for Conducting Evaluation Using a Culturally Responsive and Racial Equity Lens*. http://publicpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/PPA-Culturally-Responsive-Lens.pdf

Putnam-Hornstein, E., Needell, B., King, B., & Johnson-Motoyama, M. (2012). Racial and ethnic disparities: A population-based examination of risk factors for involvement with child protective services. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37, 33–46. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.08.005

Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered bonds: The color of child welfare*. Civitas.

Roberts, Y. H., Killos, L. F., Maher, E., O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P. J. (2017). *Strategies to promote research use in child welfare*. Casey Family Programs.

Stern, A., Guckenburg, S., Persson, H., & Petrosino, A. (2019). *Reflections on applying principles of equitable evaluation*. WestEd. https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/resource-reflections-on-applying-principles-of-equitable-evaluation.pdf

Tajima, E. A., Day, A. G., Kanuha, V. K., Rodriquez-Jenkins, J., & Pryce, J. A. (2022). What counts as evidence in child welfare research? *Research on Social Work Practice*. Doi: 10.1177/1049731521106

Yi, Y., Edwards, F., & Wildeman, C. (2020). Cumulative prevalence of confirmed maltreatment and foster care placement for US children by race/ethnicity, 2011–2016. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(5), 704–709. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305554