

# Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework

SUPPLEMENTAL  
RESOURCE

## Data Equity Principles Checklist



Data can be a powerful tool for improving outcomes when used ethically and effectively, but data are not inherently neutral. How we collect, access, analyze, and report data can have serious and potentially harmful impacts on individuals and communities.

In any project that involves data collection and use, users must think about both the risks and the benefits data might bring. This resource offers a guide for applying data equity principles throughout all phases of a data project. Use the checklists for each principle to self-assess whether your data project adheres to best practices for using data ethically and effectively.

### Data equity throughout the data life cycle

This guidance draws on publications by data equity experts and input from partners who work with education and workforce data. We highlight leading practices for ethical and effective data use throughout six key phases of data projects, or the "data life cycle:"

**Context-setting.** When preparing for a data project, identify which communities are most impacted, and collaborate with community members to understand key issues and how the project can benefit them.

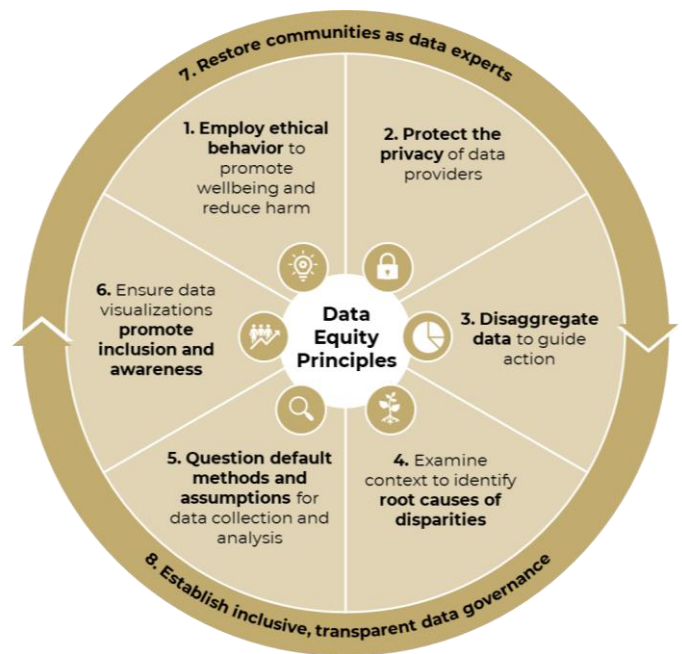
**Planning.** Collaborate with communities to develop the plan for data collection and use. Engage community members in initiative teams or advisory councils. Use facilitation methods that promote equitable participation and apply decision-making criteria that incorporate community perspectives.

**Collection.** During data collection, only gather data that are necessary for achieving the project's goals and have been granted informed consent.

**Access.** Store data in a secure location and train those with data access on proper security measures. When possible, ensure individuals who provide data can access and update their data upon request.

**Analysis.** Disaggregate data on both outcomes and system conditions to illuminate disparities. Acknowledge the limitations of the analysis methods and add dimension to findings through qualitative data. Engage partners in interpreting data and understanding root causes, and focus on the role of systems in addressing those root causes.

**Reporting.** Share data and results with community members while also ensuring the confidentiality of participants. Communicate findings using plain language and accessible, inclusive data visualizations. Co-interpret the results with community members.



### [Data Equity Principles](#)

# Data Equity Principle 1: Employ ethical behavior to respect the rights of individuals who provide data, promote greater equity and well-being, and minimize the risk of harm.

## Context setting

- Conduct listening sessions with community members to understand what types of data projects they believe would be relevant to improving their lives.
- Consider the impact of structural racism and other systemic barriers on the community in focus when assessing needs and setting priorities.
- Review results of past data projects, especially equity-centered approaches, to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

## Planning

- Establish a governance or review body with representatives from multiple contributing groups, including proximate leaders from the community in focus.
- Co-define project goals, identify risks and benefits, develop mitigation strategies, and guide decisions through each phase of the data cycle.
- Draft a social impact statement to formalize a commitment to ethics.

## Collection

- Limit data collection to information essential for achieving the project's goals.
- Recognize that collecting unnecessary information may raise concerns of oversurveillance, especially within marginalized communities.

## Access

- Securely share data with partners as appropriate to minimize the need for duplicate data collection.
- Clearly communicate data storage, access, and usage policies in accessible language.

## Analysis

- Document methods and algorithms used for data analysis, noting any potential for inaccuracies or biases.
- Specify how the findings will be used in decision-making processes.
- Incorporate community interpretations of the data to ensure alignment with their perspectives.

## Reporting

- Return data and findings to community members in a practical format and invite collaboration.
- Provide channels for community members to report grievances related to the project.

Clearly report on the strengths and weaknesses of the data.

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## Data Equity Principle 2: Protect the privacy of individuals who provide data while ensuring appropriate ownership and access to information.

### Context setting

- Review relevant federal, state, local, or tribal data privacy laws and policies.
- Determine if memoranda of understanding, data sharing agreements, or consent are needed for data collection or sharing.

### Planning

- Develop a list of data elements for collection, any linked datasets, storage plans, access protocols, usage guidelines, data retention periods, and post-analysis handling procedures.

### Collection

- Communicate data privacy and security processes to participants.
- Seek informed consent for data collection, even if not required.
- Only collect data that are necessary and approved.

### Access

- Store data securely, limiting access to authorized users only.
- Ensure data storage systems have protections like locks, encryption, and passwords.
- Transmit shared data through secure methods.
- Train authorized users on relevant laws and best practices.
- Practice data minimization by limiting access to essential data elements and sets.
- When possible, allow data providers to access, update, or delete their data upon request.
- Discard or return data as agreed upon at project completion.

### Analysis

- Develop analysis plans that include approaches to assess and minimize disclosure risk.

### Reporting

- Maintain participant confidentiality in the reporting period.
- Avoid naming individuals without permission or reporting data that could identify individuals.
- Delete data when it is no longer needed for the intended purpose.

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## Data Equity Principle 3: Disaggregate data on both outcomes and system conditions to analyze disparities, monitor progress, and guide action.

### Context setting

- Consider the impact of structural racism and other systemic barriers on the community in focus when identifying characteristics for measurement and reporting.
- Review results of past data projects to identify known disparities and knowledge gaps.

### Planning

- Collaborate with community members to determine which characteristics to measure during data collection or link into the data if already available.
- When possible, decide with community members how best to label these characteristics in data collection tools and in reporting (e.g., Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx).

### Collection

- Be transparent: explain why you are collecting information on student or individual characteristics and how the information will be used, using plain language and terminology that is familiar to the community in focus.

### Access

- Develop reporting tools, such as dashboards, that allow users to easily view and compare results for different subgroups (while also applying appropriate privacy protections).

### Analysis

- Disaggregate both outcome and systems data at multiple levels to highlight disparities.
- Incorporate qualitative research or community input to contextualize disaggregated data with lived experiences and the root causes of disparities.

### Reporting

- When reporting disparities by subgroup, frame them in relation to systemic and root causes rather than individual characteristics.
- Use data visualizations to highlight disparities while avoiding deficit narratives.

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## Data Equity Principle 4: Examine social and historical contexts to identify root causes of disparities, inform data collection and use, and develop data-driven solutions.

### Context setting

- Identify key historical events, policies, and processes contributing to present-day disparities.
- Use tools like an equity audit, environmental scan, or organizational reflection (for example, a visual timeline activity) to map trends in outcomes against policies and other changes over time.

### Planning

- Collaborate with community members to vet research questions and data collection plans for a root cause analysis.
- Gather community input on whether the prioritized problem of practice is appropriate and whether the proposed data sources provide the right data to explore the issue's root causes.

### Collection

- Develop recruitment materials that use language that community members can easily understand and that address common barriers to participation in the focal community or communities.
- Familiarize the data collection team with cultural norms of the communities providing data (for example, provide training on how to look for verbal and nonverbal cues that might signal discomfort or confusion for communities in focus).

### Access

- When possible, allow data providers to access, update, or delete their data upon request.

### Analysis

- Use the "5 Whys" method to analyze the problem, asking, "Why is this the case?" five times to identify root causes.
- Use visual tools like fishbone diagrams or root cause trees to analyze root causes.
- Focus on the role systems and structures play in perpetuating disparities.
- Achieve consensus on likely root causes and how they could be addressed.

### Reporting

- Identify and recommend evidence-based practices that research has shown can help address root cause(s).
- Share findings with the community to gather reactions and interpretations of root causes.
- Co-create action plans, including data-driven solutions, to address root causes and advocate for change.

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## Data Equity Principle 5: Question default methods and assumptions for data collection and analysis and triangulate quantitative data with other sources.

### Context setting

- Conduct a group reflection with the project team to identify and discuss ways to mitigate biases throughout the project.
- Learn about the history, power structures, systematic barriers, and prior data collection experiences of the community in focus.
- Establish a plan for reassessing biases and assumptions in each phase of the project.

### Planning

- Ensure the data team reflects diverse lived experiences, particularly those relevant to the data project's focus.
- Evaluate the proposed data collection or research model (e.g., traditional, community-engaged, full community partnership) for its alignment with community needs and to avoid undue burden.
- Pilot quantitative and qualitative data collection tools with community members to ensure cultural and linguistic alignment and accuracy.

### Collection

- Use qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, town halls, narratives, or longform surveys to complement and validate quantitative data.
- Incorporate a variety of sources to strengthen analysis and provide context for findings.

### Access

- Deidentify qualitative data to protect individuals' privacy, such as by using pseudonyms in lieu of real names of people and places in quotes or interview transcripts.

### Analysis

- Carefully consider whether findings perpetuate or reinstate a negative stereotype or deficit narrative, inviting the community to weigh in or offer feedback.
- Address institutional or systemwide factors in findings, using community input to supplement gaps and to provide a fuller perspective if needed.

### Reporting

- Present multiple types of data together to provide a fuller picture, and clearly report on the strengths and weaknesses of each type of data.

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## Data Equity Principle 6: Ensure data visualizations promote inclusion and awareness across culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse audiences.

### Context setting

- Identify key historical events, policies, and processes contributing to stereotypes about communities in focus.
- Establish a plan for assessing biases and assumptions in data visualizations.

### Planning

- Build a data team with diverse lived experiences to help review for implicit bias in visualizations.
- Establish shared norms around language, review processes, and iterative collaboration to embed inclusiveness in processes and products.

### Collection

- Not applicable for this principle*

### Access

- Not applicable for this principle*

### Analysis

- Identify which groups are not represented in the analysis or visualizations, acknowledging the gaps explicitly (whether due to the study's focus or insufficient data).
- Evaluate whether an "Other" category is needed and, if so, whom it includes.
- Provide contextual information and note limitations to aid accurate interpretation.
- Seek feedback from community members to validate and/or refine the narrative and confirm the visualizations are easy to interpret.

### Reporting

- Create accessible visualizations that use people-first language and avoid reinforcing stereotypes.
- When possible, share visualizations with people in the community in focus before publication.

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## Data Equity Principle 7: Restore communities as data experts, using culturally responsive approaches to engagement and co-creation that support equitable data use.

### Context-setting

- Define focal or "priority" communities by identifying who is directly and indirectly affected by the issue (as well as who is not).
- Do not assume that racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic diversity among groups automatically equates to lived experience relevant to the project and the community.
- Collaborate with community members to identify key issues and perspectives to prioritize.

### Planning

- Recruit members of communities in focus to join initiative teams or advisory councils.
- Acknowledge the intersectionality of collaborators' identities by including individuals with diverse, but relevant, experiences within the same community.
- Develop decision-making criteria that integrate community perspectives systematically.
- Use facilitation methods that encourage equitable participation, such as anonymous ranked-choice voting or group decision-making.

### Collection

- Collaborate with community members to design recruitment strategies and train data collectors to use approaches that resonate with communities in focus and minimize burden on data providers.

### Access

- When possible, allow data providers to access, update, or delete their data upon request.

### Analysis

- Incorporate qualitative and contextual information to add depth to findings.
- Involve community partners in reviewing preliminary findings to validate (and if necessary) reshape interpretations and avoid misrepresentation.

### Reporting

- Use plain language to visualize and communicate findings, making them accessible and actionable for communities.
- Share data through multiple channels, such as town halls, cultural events, emails, or webinars.
- Build trust by providing timely access to data, ensuring it is available when needed for decision-making.

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## Data Equity Principle 8: Establish inclusive data governance structures and practices with transparent decision-making processes.

### Context-setting

- Document the purpose and guiding principles of the governing body (such as a committee, board, or council) that will make decisions on data collection, access, and use.
- Identify which groups should be represented on the governing body, prioritizing those who provide and use data from the system.

### Planning

- Include multiple contributing groups in the governance process, including leaders from the community in focus.
- Define clear roles and responsibilities for decision-making, ensuring communities can govern the collection, ownership, and use of their data.

### Collection

- Work with the governing body to create guidelines and protocols for data collection, linking, and use.

### Access

- Develop protocols for data security and access.
- Train data users on laws and best practices to ensure compliance.

### Analysis

- Develop guidelines for use of technology in data analysis.
- Identify who (or what organization) is responsible for enforcing guidelines about how data can be used.

### Reporting

- Document and publicly disseminate the body's mission and vision, internal roles, and decision-making processes.
- Build trust by sharing decisions about data management and access with the public, along with the standards or criteria that guided the decisions.

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