# Change and Implementation in Practice

Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

## Considerations for Advancing Racial Equity Through Problem Exploration

To improve outcomes, child welfare agencies develop, implement, and adjust systems, programs, policies, and practices aimed at addressing identified problems.[1] For these interventions to be effective, they must address the true cause(s) of the problem or need.

Problem exploration is the process of identifying **what** needs to change, **why** it needs to change, and **how we know** it needs to change. No matter what the identified problem is, the equitable solution will require:

- An examination of various sources of data and evidence
- An intentional focus on racial equity
- Input and guidance from the people who understand and have experience with the problem, including those with lived experience

Problem exploration affords an opportunity to dig deeply into how structural racism contributes to the problem at hand. Regardless of topic (for example, service array, prevention-oriented systems, or congregate care), an exploration process that seeks to understand the reasons behind the different experiences of different families is more likely to result in better outcomes for all families. When teams widen the lens and tackle structural and institutional factors that harm children and families with the same sense of urgency as agencies tackle individual and interpersonal factors, there is the real promise of more equitable outcomes for people of color who have been disproportionately affected by child welfare.

This publication includes two sections, both of which include links to resources teams can use in their efforts to advance racial equity through problem exploration:

- "Build the Foundation for Advancing Racial Equity Through Problem Exploration" explains foundational concepts and approaches that undergird an intentional process
- "Take Action to Advance Racial Equity Through Problem Exploration" offers action steps and worksheets that teams can use to move their work forward

### Use this publication to:

- Consider and implement an inclusive and intentional problem exploration process that seeks to advance racial equity
- Prepare teams to better understand the underlying causes of their problems and identify solutions that are more likely to make an equitable difference

Visit the Center for States website to learn more about problem exploration and other change and implementation topics.

### Equity vs. Equality

Efforts to advance racial equality assume that treating everyone the same or ensuring they have the same opportunities will ensure equal outcomes. This approach ignores historical factors, structural factors, and power differentials that benefit some groups—most often White people—and disadvantage others (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019; Race Forward, n.d.).

Advancing racial equity, on the other hand, requires acknowledging and addressing systemic disadvantages experienced by people of color and the systemic advantages and privileges that benefit White people in a dominant White culture (Gulati-Partee, 2014).

Simply put, equality assumes all people start with the same advantages while equity recognizes that people are afforded different advantages depending on intersecting factors including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and more.

### Looking for more?

See the following resources to learn more about the difference between equity and equality:

- Equity vs. Equality: What's the Difference? (George Washington University)
- "Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion: Terms and Definitions" (Center for States)

1 This series uses the word "problem" to refer to what needs to change to meet agency priorities. Problems may reflect identified needs or opportunities to improve agency or system functioning and outcomes.

## Build the Foundation for Advancing Racial Equity Through Problem Exploration

Advancing racial equity through problem exploration requires stepping back, centering and sharing power with people with lived experience and expertise (lived experts), and acknowledging how the legacy of structural racism has contributed, and continues to contribute, to inequities.

Agencies can intentionally do this work by adopting an antiracist approach, examining structural factors that contribute to the conditions that families and communities are facing, and authentically including the people who understand and have experienced the problem, including those with lived experience in child welfare, from the very beginning and throughout every aspect of the work.

Child welfare policy, practice, and outcomes are deeply entangled with a history of structural racism that has had (and continues to have) cumulative, negative impact on people of color (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2018; Detlaff, 2020; Hopkins, 2018). Work with your team to ensure that all members have shared understanding of structural and institutional racism.

**Structural racism:** historical, social, political, institutional, and cultural factors that contribute to, normalize, legitimize, and maintain racial disparities, which routinely advantage White people while producing cumulative adverse outcomes for people of color (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019; Lawrence, 2004). Structural racism occurs across organizations and lies underneath and around society, reinforced through history, culture, politics, economics, and relationships (Lawrence, 2004).

**Institutional racism:** the laws, policies, and practices—or lack thereof—that perpetuate racial disparities, create advantages for White people, and harm people of color (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019). Institutional racism occurs within organizations (e.g., child welfare agencies, courts, law enforcement, schools, banks) (Lawrence, 2004).

### Adopt an Antiracist Approach

Antiracism is the "active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices, and attitudes to redistribute power in an equitable manner" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019, p. 3). An antiracist approach involves taking steps to combat racism as opposed to simply not perpetuating overtly racist acts or ideas.

Antiracist approaches focus explicitly but not exclusively on race. People's race, gender identity, sexuality, immigration status, language, ability, and age (as well as other factors) intersect and inform experiences and outcomes. Effective antiracist approaches recognize people as whole and complex beings with multiple intersectional identities.

### Looking for more?

***Racial Equity Framework***

The following resource can help agencies and teams as they consider the use of a racial equity framework:

Advancing Racial Equity: A Framework for Federal Agencies (Government Alliance on Race and Equity)

***Racial Equity Impact Analyses***

A racial equity impact analysis can help teams better understand whether their actions are likely to contribute to equity or inequity. A number of different tools are available for teams to use. Explore a few options below as your team considers approaches:

Race Matters: Racial Equity Impact Analysis (Annie E. Casey Foundation)

Part of the Race Matters Toolkit, this tool offers five questions for groups to consider in partnership with communities and individuals.

"Race Equity Impact Assessment" (Center for the Study of Social Policy)

Adapted from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Race Matters: Racial Equity Impact Analysis, this tool is designed to assess the racial equity impact of child welfare policies, programs, and practices.

## Authentic Inclusion and Power Sharing

Simply inviting people with lived experience to sit at the table is insufficient. To truly address the problems that communities and families are facing requires the inclusion, empowerment, expertise, and guidance of diverse groups of individuals in those communities and families. Historically, decisions in child welfare have been made by those in positions of power, often in isolation without any input from the people affected by the decisions (Children's Rights, 2021; Roberts, 2001). Laws have been drafted by legislators, policies and programs have been put in place by system and agency leaders, and individual case decisions have been made by courts, caseworkers, and supervisors (Roberts, 2001; Roberts, 1999; Sankaran, Church, & Mitchell, 2019). In our current system, there are significant power imbalances.

Authentically including communities and families in decision-making requires acknowledging and addressing the power imbalance by listening to and following the lead of those who hold expertise in their own families and communities. When we strive to neutralize the power imbalance, families can better drive decisions about their own lives.

According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, diversity efforts alone do not create inclusive environments in which everyone feels accepted and valued. It is, in fact, possible to promote diversity while not addressing the forces that enable structural racism to continue.

Inclusion, on the other hand, is a "state of belonging in which people with different backgrounds and identities feel welcomed and valued as decision-makers and collaborators" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019, p. 6).

As Vernā Myers describes, "diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." (Myers, V., 2015)

## Use an Ecological Model

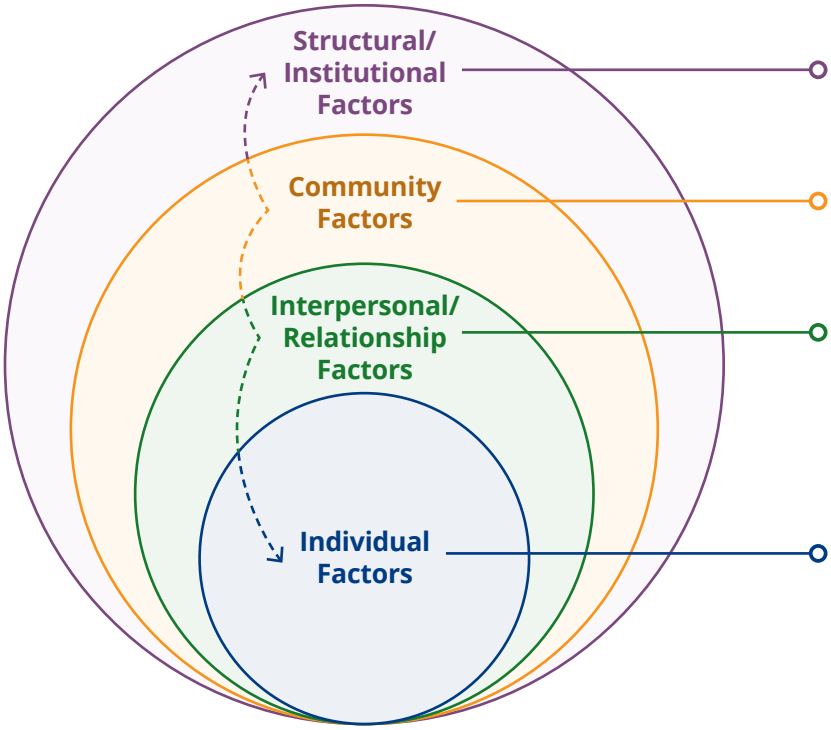
Using an ecological model in problem exploration can help shift away from a narrow focus on individual and family factors to a wider focus that includes historical and societal factors, including structural racism and white supremacy, that are manifested in historical child welfare policies and practices and contribute to the problems that many families and communities currently face.

Levels of an ecological model generally include individual through societal. The following graphic illustrates one example of an ecological model.

### Looking for more?

Use these Center for States resources and tools to learn more about how to authentically share power with youth, families, and communities:

- A Look Inside Sharing Power in Child Welfare: A Podcast
- Power in Partnerships: Prioritizing Lived Expertise in Child Welfare: Child Welfare Virtual Expo (CWVE) 2022




Consider how historical, political, and societal factors, as well as institutional policies and practices, affect the problem being explored

Consider the cultural values and norms of the communities who have experience with the problem being explored

Consider the formal and informal networks and relationships among youth and families who have experience with the problem being explored

Consider the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of individuals employed by or served by child welfare

### Looking for more?

Use the following resources to learn more about using an ecological model in practice:

- The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- "A Social Ecological Model of Racism & Anti-Racism" (Center for the Study of Social Policy)

## Center Families in Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis are a critical part of problem exploration. When they are approached with caution and consistently center children, young people, and families, they can be instrumental to advancing equity. While the child welfare system has made strides toward becoming more family-focused, an emphasis on traditional notions of data-driven practice persists that may not acknowledge the limitations of decontextualized data or the history of manipulated and weaponized data.

### Use Data With Caution

Data have been—and continue to be—used to harm children, youth, families, and communities of color. For example, historically, redlining was used to exclude Black people's access to housing and insurance (Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media, and Culture, 2020). More recently, facial recognition technology, tested primarily on White men and often used by law enforcement, has demonstrated patterns of misidentifying people of color (Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media, and Culture, 2020). While this harm is perpetuated across systems, child welfare data have also been weaponized to harm families of color, particularly Black and American Indian and Alaska Native families.

Data are often perceived as neutral, but in reality, data collection and use reflect structural racism and human bias. Predictive analytics has been proposed as a less biased and more neutral approach to screen child abuse and neglect reports for investigation. However, consider how data systems predict risk of maltreatment. Algorithms that use public system data to predict risk will, by definition, reinforce bias that oversurveilled communities are more likely to maltreat children. For example, algorithms that include homelessness or public benefits use as risk factors may disproportionately identify risk in unhoused families or those choosing to access services for which they are eligible. Algorithms that include criminal justice involvement as a risk factor reflect well-documented bias in policing.

When systems are proprietary and algorithms are not made public, it is difficult to document how human bias and structural racism may be baked in. Meaningful involvement of communities and people with lived experience in the development and evaluation of predictive analytics, coupled with transparent publication of the algorithm, is one approach used to reduce bias in practice (Teixeira, 2017), while another is to invest in efforts to reduce bias in reporting—the initial driver of disproportionality.

#### What Is Weaponized Data?

The term "weaponized data" refers to the use of data to perpetuate harm against a group or groups of people. Redlining is an example of intentional use of data to oppress, marginalize, and harm Black communities. Consider how data have been weaponized in child welfare, particularly to pathologize communities of color. For example, an examination of data may indicate differences between groups, such as an overrepresentation of Black children and youth at multiple touchpoints (reports, investigations, substantiations, foster care entries, and more). When those data are falsely interpreted as evidence of a difference in parenting ability by race, as opposed to the effects of structural racism, resulting policies and practices may lead to increased surveillance and separation of Black families.

### Shift Toward a More Holistic, Family-Focused Approach

"*Incorporating a racial equity lens during data analysis includes incorporating individual, community, political, and historical contexts of race to inform analysis, conclusions, and recommendations*" (Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, 2020, p. 28).

Data analysis is limited to the data that can be accessed. As child welfare agencies prepare for problem exploration, teams may want to consider how an overemphasis on available quantitative data and an underemphasis on qualitative data, as well as an inability to adequately disaggregate (or break down) and interpret data, can lead to a limited understanding of the problem being explored.

Authentically integrating diverse groups of lived experts (including people of color from the communities who have the deepest understanding of the problem being explored) from the very beginning—and consistently throughout—every step of problem exploration will increase the likelihood that the right questions will be asked, data will be understood more fully, problems and their root causes will be accurate, and the solutions to tackle them will be effective. A critical component of this approach is believing what lived experts of color share about their interactions and experiences with child welfare. Youth- and family-focused approaches lead to youth- and family-focused solutions.

## Take Action to Advance Racial Equity Through Problem Exploration

Advancing equity through problem exploration requires an intentional approach that includes five key tasks. These tasks fall within problem exploration steps as illustrated in the table below. See the "Change and Implementation in Practice: Problem Exploration" brief for more detailed information about problem exploration and each of the steps (described as either milestones or essential functions).

| Key Task | Problem Exploration Step |
|---|---|
| 1. Recruit, engage, and empower a diverse team | Milestone: Form a team to guide the change and implementation process |
| 2. Develop equitable research questions | Essential Function: Create a data plan |
| 3. Use ethical and inclusive approaches to collect and analyze data | Essential Function: Collect and analyze data |
| 4. Build understanding of contributing factors and root causes | Essential Function: Identify possible contributing factors and root causes<br>Essential Function: Explore and validate root causes |
| 5. Tell the story | Milestone: Review findings with partners |

The following pages include considerations and resources to support each of those tasks, as well as worksheets your team can use to:

- Plan for building diverse and inclusive teams
- Assess and plan for authentic engagement of lived experts
- Identify data sources and gaps
- Describe disparities in findings and identify additional data needed
- Plan for root cause analysis
- Outline a strategy for reporting your findings

### 1. Recruit, Engage, and Empower a Diverse Team

Getting the most out of problem exploration requires a diverse team of experts, including people of color from the communities who understand and have experienced the issue being explored, people with lived expertise in child welfare, people with expertise in equitable approaches to data collection and analysis, frontline child welfare staff, and more.

Use the following worksheet to document team representation across groups and plan for next steps. Check the box next to the groups currently represented, then assess who is missing and make a plan for building a more diverse and inclusive team.

**Who does your agency serve?**

Consider which communities are most likely to receive child welfare services in your jurisdiction, and which populations from those communities are most marginalized, underserved, or oversurveilled. Oftentimes, these populations include people of color, a collective term referring to non-White racial groups.

| Membership | Next Steps to Build a More Diverse and Inclusive Team |
|---|---|
| ☐ People with lived expertise representing the communities and racial/ethnic groups most disproportionately likely to receive child welfare services | |
| ☐ Community representatives from the communities and racial/ethnic groups who understand and have experience with the problem being explored | |
| ☐ Community-based agency partners or service providers serving the communities who understand and have experience with the problem | |
| ☐ Frontline child welfare staff serving the communities who have experience with the problem being explored | |
| ☐ Agency continuous quality improvement staff | |
| ☐ Data experts with experience in equitable data collection and analysis | |
| ☐ Child welfare agency leadership | |
| ☐ University partners or researchers | |
| ☐ Other_____<br>☐ Other_____<br>☐ Other_____<br>☐ Other_____ | _____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |

The existing approaches an agency uses to partner with lived experts and communities can challenge or facilitate efforts to recruit, engage, and empower a diverse and inclusive team. Agencies with a strong track record of partnership at the individual, peer, and system levels may have an easier time recruiting, engaging, and empowering a diverse pool of lived experts to participate in problem exploration.

The following table includes a continuum of engagement from tokenized to empowered.[2] Problem exploration will be more effective and accurate if people with lived experience and the people who understand and have experience with the problem are authentically engaged from the very beginning and throughout the process.

Reflect on the levels of engagement and consider current practice by identifying when your agency engages at each level. Consider what types of recruitment strategies have historically been used and if any kind of gatekeeping exists that precludes certain groups from participation (for example, are invitations restricted to youth and families who are considered "success stories" or are people intentionally engaged to help agencies understand what is not working and needs to improve?). Use the information you collect to reflect on strengths and areas for growth, and then make a plan for moving closer to power sharing with lived experts and other community members. Use the resources below the table as you plan for action.

| Level of Engagement | We Do This | Action Steps to Increase Authentic Engagement |
|---|---|---|
| **Tokenized:** People, often asked to represent whole communities, are invited to participate but their contributions are not reflected in outputs. Decisions are made without their input. There is little to no support for participation. | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____ | |
| **Informing:** People are asked to participate by providing information or feedback, typically after a process is underway or completed. Their contributions may sometimes be reflected in outputs. Decisions may be influenced by the information shared. | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____ | |
| **Consulting:** People are asked to participate by sharing their expertise throughout a process. Their contributions are reflected in outputs. Decisions may be influenced by their expertise. | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____ | |

2 Adapted from Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

| Level of Engagement | We Do This | Action Steps to Increase Authentic Engagement |
|---|---|---|
| **Involved:** People are asked to participate directly in planning and development of an effort. Their contributions are reflected in outputs. Decisions are made with their involvement. | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____ | |
| **Collaborating:** People are asked to participate as partners at every phase of the process, including decision-making. They are asked if outputs reflect their contributions and if they have feedback about decisions. | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____ | |
| **Empowered:** People's expertise and perspectives are centered at every phase of the process. Their priorities drive and guide outputs and decisions, neither of which are developed or made without their full input and approval. This level of engagement involves neutralizing power imbalances between child welfare agencies and children, youth, and families. *Authentically sharing power requires a change in existing practice that can be named and felt by all parties.* | ☐ Most of the time<br>☐ Some of the time<br>☐ Almost never<br>When?<br>_____<br>Why or why not?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ | |

### Looking for more?

Use the following resources to plan for recruiting, engaging, and empowering a diverse problem exploration team:

- IM-19-03: Engaging, empowering, and utilizing family and youth voice in all aspects of child welfare to drive case planning and system improvement (Children's Bureau)
- "Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare" tip sheet (Capacity Building Center for States)
- "Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Youth, Family, and Other Partner Engagement" brief (Capacity Building Center for States)
- "Meaningfully Engaging Stakeholders to Improve Outcomes" video (Capacity Building Center for States)
- "Racial Equity and Authentic Engagement in Child Welfare" CWVE 2021 module (Capacity Building Center for States)
- Tenets of a Culturally Responsive and Racial Equity Lens Engagement Process (MPHI)

As you prepare for working together, consider what supports team members will need to participate fully, as well as what type of collaborative environment and shared values will anchor your team from the very beginning. For example:

- How will your team articulate and agree on the value of shared decision-making?
- Do some team members need more foundational information about structural racism and its impact on child welfare outcomes?
- How will your team create a psychologically safe environment to support authentic discussion of issues such as race, racism, and equity?

### Looking for more?

Use the following resources as you consider the individual and collective needs of your team and how to best build readiness for your work together:

- Teaming resources (Capacity Building Center for States)
- "Build a Foundation for Racial Equity in Child Welfare" CWVE 2021 module (Capacity Building Center for States)
- Ten Lessons for Talking About Race, Racism, and Racial Justice (The Opportunity Agenda)

## 2. Develop Equitable Research Questions

The data plan should identify key research questions that, when answered, will help the team understand and address the problem.

The development of equitable research questions requires the intentional engagement of lived experts and those who understand and have experience with the problem. First, identify who–and how–different people will be involved in developing research questions. Questions should reflect community values, history, context, and structural inequities, while acknowledging that communities hold diverse perspectives and priorities (Child Trends, 2019). This engagement is critical because the questions themselves inform what data are collected and analyzed, as well as what conclusions are drawn.

Consider the following questions as your team works to develop research questions (Child Trends, 2019):

- Who has participated in developing research questions? What was the nature of their participation?
- How are the community's values represented in the research questions? How do you know?
- How will the answers to the research questions benefit the community? How do you know?
- How do the research questions account for the cultural and historical context of the community? How do you know?

## 3. Use Ethical and Inclusive Approaches to Collect and Analyze Data

Advancing racial equity through problem exploration requires culturally responsive and racially equitable approaches to data collection and analysis.

### Considerations for Data Collection and Analysis

#### Data Expertise

Teams will need representatives who have expertise in data collection and analysis as well as a deep understanding of how research, data collection, and analysis can contribute to equity or inequity. Agencies may have staff with this expertise. If not, they may need to explore contracting with skilled consultants.

### Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Consider a balance of **quantitative (numerical)** and **qualitative (descriptive)** data in your exploration. Qualitative data provide context by reflecting the stories and experiences behind the numbers. Qualitative data sources may include case reviews, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and more. When people's narratives about their own experience are centered in data analysis, teams are more likely to understand the problem and identify effective and equitable solutions. This approach does not devalue quantitative data but instead places equitable value on qualitative data.

### Disaggregation

Breaking down data (disaggregating) by race, ethnicity, and other intersecting factors can help teams identify and understand different experiences among different populations receiving child welfare services and is foundational to understanding where there are racial disparities and racial disproportionality. Without sufficient disaggregation, people's experiences can become invisible, and inequities may be difficult to tease out; however, caution must be used so that disaggregation does not exacerbate oversurveillance by shifting the focus to particular communities already under public scrutiny (Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, 2020). Teams should also be cautious about interpreting data for groups with small numbers, as observations may be limited and the findings may not be representative of the population as a whole.

### Ethical Data Sharing and Integration

Teams collecting and analyzing administrative data in problem exploration must consider ethical practice in data sharing and integration. Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (2020) defines the terms as follows:

- Cross-sector data sharing: "the practice of providing access to information not otherwise available across agencies"
- Data integration: "data sharing that includes identifiable information (e.g., name, date of birth, SSN), so that records can be linked or integrated at the individual level"

An ethical approach to data sharing and integration includes (Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy, 2020):

- Acknowledging the role that administrative data have played in perpetuating disparities and "creating, enabling, and sustaining institutional and structural racism" (p. 1)
- Centering racial equity and the perspectives and priorities of the people and communities who have experience with child welfare at the beginning and throughout your process
- Carefully considering risks to privacy and ensuring that the purpose for sharing and integration is directly linked to the action needed to improve outcomes

## Looking for more?

- Use the following resource to deepen your understanding of ethical data sharing and integration:
- A Toolkit for Centering Racial Equity Within Data Integration (Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy)

### Implicit Bias

Everyone holds some unconscious beliefs about certain groups of people. These stem from "mental shortcuts" that humans take to organize and categorize their social worlds and affect people's understanding, actions, and decisions. Implicit (or unconscious) bias differs from explicit bias, which is held on a conscious level.

Implicit and explicit biases at major decision-making points in child welfare may impact decisions that affect "families of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds during reporting, investigation, substantiation [of abuse or neglect], and out-of-home placement" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021, p. 5).

Implicit bias can also affect data analysis and interpretation. Deepening individual understanding of one's own implicit biases, as well as having transparent team discussions about how biases may be showing up in data analysis, can help teams recognize and mitigate implicit bias in problem exploration.

## Looking for more?

Use the following resources to understand implicit bias and mitigate its impact:

- Implicit Bias 101: Exploring Implicit Bias in Child Welfare (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute)
- Implicit Bias Module Series (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University)

### Identifying Data Sources and Gaps

Use the following tables to identify data sources and gaps.

| Data Source | Description |
|---|---|
| | Data Type<br>☐ Quantitative<br>☐ Qualitative<br>Data can be disaggregated by the following factors (list below)<br>Additional Context<br>☐ Data includes perspectives of lived experts<br>☐ Data quality is a concern because _____ |
| | Data Type<br>☐ Quantitative<br>☐ Qualitative<br>Data can be disaggregated by the following factors (list below)<br>Additional Context<br>☐ Data includes perspectives of lived experts<br>☐ Data quality is a concern because _____ |

| Data Source | Description |
| --- | --- |
| | Data Type<br>☐ Quantitative<br>☐ Qualitative<br>Data can be disaggregated by the following factors (list below)<br><br>Additional Context<br>☐ Data includes perspectives of lived experts<br>☐ Data quality is a concern because _____ |
| | Data Type<br>☐ Quantitative<br>☐ Qualitative<br>Data can be disaggregated by the following factors (list below)<br><br>Additional Context<br>☐ Data includes perspectives of lived experts<br>☐ Data quality is a concern because _____ |

Based on the table above, work with your team to identify gaps and potential sources to explore. Give special consideration to sources that reflect the priorities and perspectives of the people who understand and have experience with the problem your team is exploring.

| Data Gaps | Potential Sources to Explore |
| --- | --- |
| | |
| | |

### Examining and Analyzing Data

Use the table below to describe disparities in findings and identify additional data sources.

| Data Source | Findings |
|---|---|
| | Do the data suggest differences in how different populations experience the problem? Describe below:<br><br>Is there evidence of disparities in service delivery or outcomes? Describe below:<br><br>Have these findings been confirmed with the populations in question? How?<br><br>What additional data are needed to understand more about different populations' experiences? |
| | Do the data suggest differences in how different populations experience the problem? Describe below:<br><br>Is there evidence of disparities in service delivery or outcomes? Describe below: |

| Data Source | Findings |
| --- | --- |
| | Have these findings been confirmed with the populations in question? How?<br><br>What additional data are needed to understand more about different populations' experiences? |

### Looking for more?

Use the following resources to learn more about equitable data collection and analysis:

- "Making the Most of Your Data: Information Interpretation" (Capacity Building Center for Tribes)
- Data for Equity and Action (Center for the Study of Social Policy)

## 4. Build Understanding of Contributing Factors and Root Causes

As your team begins discussing contributing factors and root causes of the problem you are exploring, identify where and how structural and institutional racism are linked to the problem your team is exploring.

**Root Cause Analysis**

As in every step of problem exploration, the perspectives and experiences of lived experts and the people who understand and have experience with the problem need to be centered in root cause analysis. Root cause analysis should include members of your team but should also include a wider group of people in marginalized communities that disproportionately experience child welfare.

Use the following table to make a plan for inclusive root cause analysis.

| What Is the Problem? |
| --- |
| |
| **Who Is Most Likely to Understand or Have Experience With It?** |
| |

| How Have Those Individuals and Communities Already Been Involved in Exploration? |
| --- |
| |
| **How Will Those Individuals and Communities Be Involved in Root Cause Analysis? What Strategies Will Be Used?** |
| |
| **How Will Their Perspectives About the Problem, Contributing Factors, and Root Causes be Documented and Reported?** |
| |

### Looking for more?

Use the following resource to learn more about problem exploration that looks specifically at institutional factors:

- "The Institutional Analysis: Uncovering Pathways to Improving Public Systems & Interventions for Children and Families" (Center for the Study of Social Policy)

## 5. Tell an Accurate and Complete Story

As your team prepares to report your findings, consider how to tell an accurate and complete story in a way that will be widely understood. Use the table below to outline your team's strategy for sharing your results.

| Elements to Consider | Strategy |
| --- | --- |
| **Accuracy:** Often what we think we know differs from reality. Reports that reflect the priorities and experiences of the people with the most direct understanding of the problem are more likely to tell an accurate and complete story. Confirm the report's accuracy with young people, families, and communities, including those who have been involved in the problem exploration process. | What steps will you take to confirm the report's accuracy with people with lived experience? |

| Elements to Consider | Strategy |
|---|---|
| **Context:** Presenting data without context allows the audience to fill in the gaps on their own. This can lead to biased and inaccurate interpretation, running the risk of reinforcing stereotypes or harmful narratives. Could the information be misinterpreted, misused, or weaponized? What context could reduce that risk? | What context will help prevent biased or inaccurate interpretations of the findings? |
| **Visualization:** Data visualization can help increase understanding through the use of visual elements such as graphs or illustrations that can be easily understood and interpreted by non-technical audiences. Use caution to be sure the visuals lead the audience toward an accurate interpretation of the data and do not inadvertently misrepresent findings. | What visuals could support and clarify findings? |
| **Accessibility:** Findings are more accessible to a wider audience when plain language is used, jargon is avoided, and features attend to audiences with different abilities. Consider testing early drafts of the report to understand how different audiences understand the findings. | What steps will you take to increase and test accessibility? |
| **Presentation:** Consider whose perspectives are centered in the report. How will those with the most direct understanding of the problem perceive the information? Will they see themselves and their priorities reflected in positive ways? Does the information accurately reflect their experiences? Have they been involved in telling the story to other partners and decision-makers? | What steps will you take to ensure that the report accurately represents the perspectives and priorities of people with lived experience? |

## Looking for more?

Use the following resources as your team prepares to report your findings to a wider audience:

- "How Can We Avoid 'Blaming the Victim' When We Present Information on Poor Outcomes" (Race Equity Tools)
- *Do No Harm Guide: Applying Equity Awareness in Data Visualization* (Urban Institute)
- Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity (W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

## Conclusion

Regardless of topic, problem exploration is an opportunity to advance racial equity in partnership with lived experts and communities of color who have experience with child welfare. When people are authentically integrated and their perspectives centered at each phase of the process, teams are more likely to fully understand the problem and its root causes. This accurate understanding sets the stage for solutions that will be effective in tackling the root causes of the problem and that lead to more equitable experiences and outcomes for children, youth, and families.

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