

Embedding Equity Considerations in Process Facilitation



KANSAS HEALTH INSTITUTE

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Development of the Guides

Many organizations may encounter challenges in embedding equity in their research, literature review, technical assistance, facilitation and policy analysis due to uncertainty about effective approaches and strategies. Although numerous valuable resources exist to guide these efforts, they are not necessarily structured by topic, phase of the project or as checklists.

To address this, the Kansas Health Institute (KHI) has developed a set of practical guides to integrate equity considerations at every stage of these processes. Development of the guides was informed by current literature and KHI's experiences.

Feedback on the set of guides was gathered during a convening hosted by KHI on May 14, 2024, titled "*Centering Equity in Research: Developing Practical Strategies and Identifying Considerations*," as well as through a post-event survey. The convening included about 50 stakeholders from across Kansas who reviewed these strategies and provided valuable feedback, which later was incorporated into the guides. The event featured speakers Eusebio Díaz, M.A., Vice President of Strategy, Learning and Communications at the Health Forward Foundation, Shannon Portillo, Ph.D., from Arizona State University and Bridgette L. Jones, M.D., M.S.C.R., from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The speakers discussed the current state of equity in research, addressing challenges and exploring future opportunities.

These guides are organized by process stage and in checklist format. They are designed to be a practical tool for easy application. The strategies suggested are not intended to be a complete list of all possible strategies that could be used. Additionally, it may not be appropriate or feasible to implement all of the strategies listed in a single project. The purpose of this set of checklists is for researchers to consider opportunities to center equity more intentionally and build capacity over time to experiment with and build upon these strategies. Also, while the checklists are presented linearly, we suggest using an iterative and flexible approach in your research as necessary.

The guides are intended for a wide range of audiences, including those engaging in research activities and members of the community who are engaged in or affected by research.

Health equity – The state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Achieving this requires focused and ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices, overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and health care, and eliminate preventable health disparities.

We Value Your Feedback!

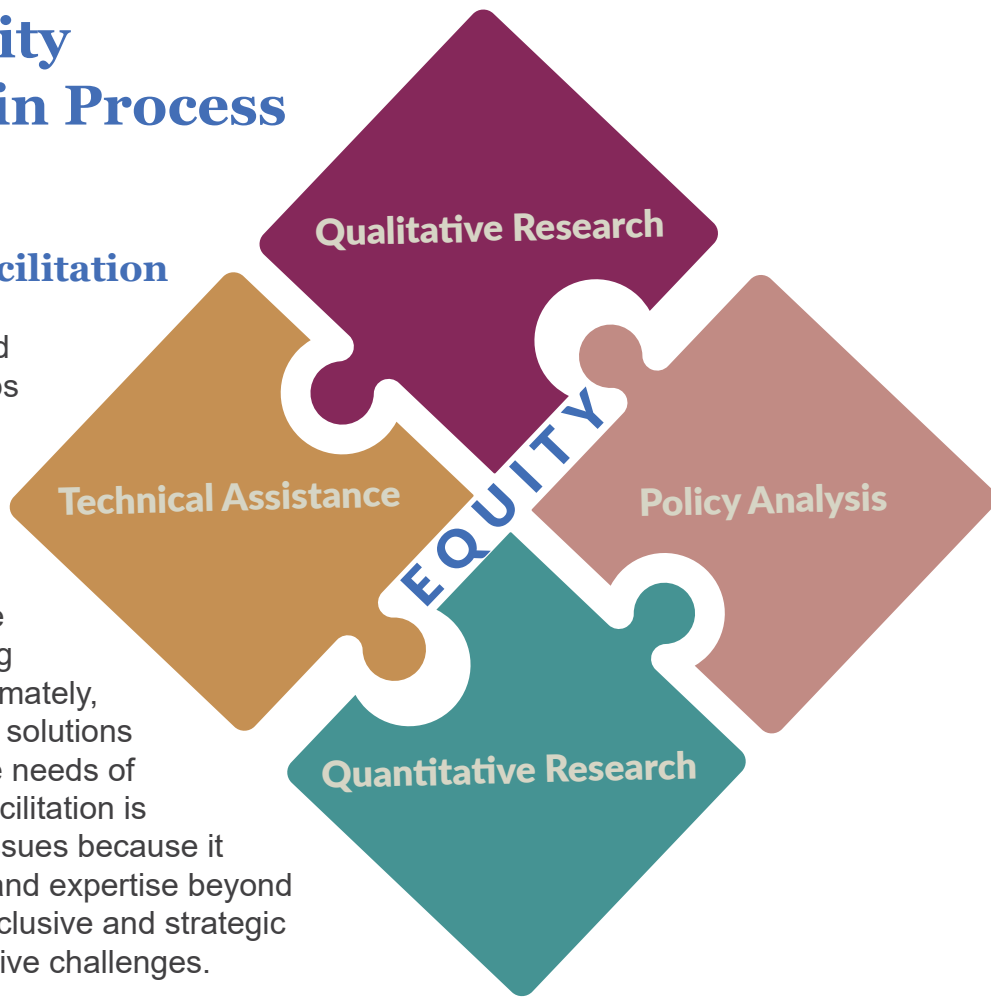
To ensure we hear from as many voices as possible, we are launching an open comment period from July 1, 2024, to Dec. 31, 2024. This period is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts and help us refine these resources further. Together, we can make meaningful progress toward equity in our work. Scan the QR Code to [provide your feedback](#).



Embedding Equity Considerations in Process Facilitation

Definition of Process Facilitation

Process facilitation is a dedicated strategy designed to guide groups and organizations through complex discussions, decision-making processes and action planning. Facilitators focus on ensuring that every voice is heard, enabling a collaborative and effective approach to tackling health policy challenges and, ultimately, creating sustainable and tailored solutions that are responsive to the unique needs of various stakeholders. Process facilitation is crucial for addressing complex issues because it integrates diverse perspectives and expertise beyond quick technical fixes, fostering inclusive and strategic conversations that explore adaptive challenges.



Why Embed Equity In Process Facilitation

Integrating equity considerations in process facilitation enriches discussions by ensuring that all voices, particularly those from underrepresented groups, are heard. This inclusivity is essential in tackling complex health policy challenges where diverse perspectives can lead to more innovative and effective solutions. Equity-focused facilitation promotes fair representation, addresses systemic barriers and builds trust among stakeholders, enhancing collaborative efforts.

A set of general and specific principles important for embedding equity in process facilitation follows. Note that the strategies suggested are not intended to be a complete list of all possible strategies that could be used.

About This Series

The series of guides that include strategies for embedding equity in research was developed by the Kansas Health Institute. This work is supported by the Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Capacity Building Grant funded by the Health Forward Foundation (HFF). The guides should not be construed as the official position or policy, nor should any endorsement be inferred by HFF.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES	
1. Strategies Before You Begin	
	1.1. Recognize that incorporating equity across every stage in your research requires substantial time and effort. Incorporate this time and the resources required into your research project’s budget at the beginning of the project. If a project has already begun, examine how strategies might be intentionally imbedded into the existing project.
	1.2. Identify the sources of funding for your research and discuss with the funder the strategies you plan to use to incorporate equity and why these are important to the research and for building trust with the community you are researching. Additionally, inform your partners and participants about the source of your funding and why they are funding your work.
	1.3. Determine how you will assess implementation and gather community feedback on the strategies selected to ensure your approach is having the desired effect of incorporating equity in research. Outline action steps to address this feedback and build capacity in any areas in which a deficit is discovered, through training, reflection and expansion of the project team.
	1.4. Assess the historical context related to your topic, community of focus or research questions. Assessing the historical context can help the research team navigate existing dynamics and understand what is already known related to the topic. During this stage, it is important to also identify what research or work is already being done related to this topic. Consider what dominant cultural narratives exist related to the topic and how varying research approaches could contribute to or challenge these narratives.
2. Strategies for Building an Inclusive Project Team	
	2.1 Assemble a project team with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to reflect different:
	2.1.a. Race, ethnicity, national origin, etc.
	2.1.b. Gender, sexual orientation, etc.
	2.1.c. Population density, such as rural areas, urban areas, suburban areas, if applicable.
	2.1.d. Socioeconomic status.
	2.1.e. Other considerations pertinent to the research and or event.
	2.2. Evaluate the need to collaborate with external agencies or community members with lived experience to enhance team diversity and representation. If need is identified, select community representatives to serve as a close partner throughout the project.
	2.3 Ensure that policies and practices are in place to create an environment conducive to the success and well-being of diverse team members.
	2.4. Promote self-awareness among team members of their identities, biases, assumptions, preconceptions and positionality. Using regular self-assessments and subjectivity statements can make the worldviews of the team more transparent. Discussing the types of biases that exist and using tools such as a critical appraisal checklist can help the research team assess for biases in a research study.
	2.5. Foster a culture of continuous learning and reflexivity within project teams, encouraging ongoing discussions and training on topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competence and the ethical implications of data analysis in diverse contexts.
	2.6. Establish transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that value input from all team members, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in project planning and implementation.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES	
2. Strategies for Building an Inclusive Project Team (continued)	
	2.7. Regularly assess and reflect on the team’s approach to equity, including how decisions are made and how team dynamics impact collaboration and communication.
	2.8. Foster an environment where team members feel comfortable discussing issues related to equity and diversity openly and constructively.
	2.9. Create mechanisms for soliciting feedback from team members on the equity and inclusivity of project processes and outcomes.
	2.10. Be open to receiving feedback and willing to adjust project strategies and practices to ensure a more equitable approach.
	2.11. Ensure lead facilitator is fluent in the preferred language of the group receiving facilitation or have an interpreter present for meetings who is familiar with facilitation content.
	2.12. Ensure lead facilitator is familiar with the group’s backgrounds and communities or has some level of experience with the topic being discussed for the project.
3. Strategies to Ensure Inclusive Terminology	
	3.1. Select and validate terminology and variables that are culturally competent and reflect the diversity of populations. Consider the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) standards.
	3.2. Consult with stakeholders, experts and community members familiar with the issues discussed to identify and validate the relevance and sensitivity of terms used in the narrative and variables used in the data.
	3.3. Use terms that encompass a wide range of races, ethnicities, gender identities, geographies, socioeconomic statuses and other identity markers.
	3.4. Incorporate terms that allow for the exploration of intersectional identities and experiences. Understanding how overlapping identities impact people's experiences can provide deeper insights into equity issues.
	3.5. Include terms specifically related to groups that are historically excluded. This helps ensure that the data and analysis consider the needs and challenges of these populations.
	3.6. Use geographic-specific terms when relevant to capture regional disparities and local contexts. This approach can uncover inequities that occur at local or regional levels.
	3.7. Use a combination of broad and narrow terms to capture both general and specific aspects of issues. This can help in identifying both widespread and niche concerns related to equity.
	3.8. Include terms that reflect historical injustices and contexts. Recognizing the historical background of inequities can inform a more nuanced analysis. Facilitators can conduct research on this background before a project begins.
	3.9. Pilot test materials with audience members to learn how they understand the terminology used and how to incorporate their terminology.

PROCESS FACILITATION	
4. Facilitation Planning	
	4.1. Ensure that facilitators undergo regular training in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This training should cover how to handle sensitive topics, encourage respectful dialogue and manage dynamics that may arise from diverse group interactions. Additionally, DEI training should incorporate historical aspects of why the training is needed and assign pre-facilitation work to understand historical inequities.
	4.2. Actively involve individuals who will receive facilitation in the planning process, particularly those from historically excluded communities, to ensure their perspectives and needs are adequately represented.
	4.3. Develop a goal-setting process that involves input from all the individuals who will receive facilitation. This helps ensure that the set goals authentically represent and support the needs of the recipients.
	4.4. Consider the distances participants must travel and the costs of travel and lodging (if needed) when setting meeting start and end times.
	4.5. Use this comprehensive understanding to identify the unique needs, preferences and challenges of the audience. Adapt the training accordingly, considering:
	4.5.a. Standard accommodations according to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, e.g., American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, wheelchair accessibility.
	4.5.b. Presentation of information in various formats to cater to different learning styles. Formats can include but are not limited to infographics, videos, audio summaries, webinars, brochures and site visits.
	4.5.c. Location accessibility.
	4.6. Establish mechanisms for ongoing feedback during and after facilitation sessions. This allows for real-time adjustments to be made, ensuring that facilitation remains responsive to the needs of the audience throughout the process.
	4.7. Utilize surveys or questionnaires before the facilitation sessions to gather detailed information about the participants' expectations, needs and concerns. This preliminary data can help tailor the content and approach of the facilitation to better suit the audience.
	4.8. Have the facilitator and group identify and be aware of governance frameworks, systems and processes that may hinder or impact the success of a project.
	4.9. Establish compensation guidelines when planning to pay individuals with lived experience and other community members for their time and expertise. A person service contract (e.g., consultant structure) is a potential mechanism for this.
	4.10. Establish clear guidelines to the group about the role of the facilitator and the decision-making process. Actively involve individuals who will receive facilitation in the planning process for the decision-making structure.
	4.11. Co-create an evaluation plan with the intended group and project team. Discuss and agree on what is being measured and the intended outcomes of the project.
5. Strategies for Developing an Inclusive Group of Participants	
	5.1. Clearly define what diversity means with your group in terms of cultural, professional and experiential backgrounds. Set specific, measurable objectives for inclusion that align with the group's overall goals.
	5.2. Collaborate with various organizations and communities to reach a broader audience. Use transparent and fair criteria for selecting task force and work group members to avoid bias and ensure a wide range of viewpoints, when it is allowable based on legislative proviso or bill.

PROCESS FACILITATION	
5. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Facilitation Content (continued)	
	5.3. Actively recruit task force and work group members from a broad range of backgrounds, including those with lived experience and underrepresented and/or historically excluded communities. (Consider alternative strategies when not possible.) Consider offering incentives to recruit individuals with lived experience in their preferred method and think about additional accommodations that would enable them to participate (e.g., meals, child care, transportation).
	5.4. Ensure a healthy power dynamic among decision makers, people with lived experience, experts and so forth. Acknowledge power dynamics that may impact the project. Identify liaison positions if groups meet separately to represent their respective perspectives effectively. Conduct training for groups about the value of lived experiences and how to utilize this information in decision-making processes. For example, the project includes both a technical advisory panel and a community advisory board.
6. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Facilitation Content	
6.1 Inclusive Content Design	
	6.1.a. Adapt curriculum content to be relevant, engaging and accessible for a diverse audience.
	6.1.b. Employ inclusive language, visuals and case studies that reflect a broad spectrum of experiences and identities. This ensures that all audience members can see themselves in the material and feel that their perspectives are respected.
	6.1.c. Use terminology that is clear, avoids jargon and is culturally sensitive. This makes the content more accessible to audience members from various backgrounds and proficiency levels.
	6.1.d. Implement accessibility features for all content, including:
	6.1.d.1. Alternative text for images to support audience members who use screen readers, enhancing the experience for those with visual impairments.
	6.1.d.2. Selection of font colors and sizes that enhance readability for audience members with visual impairments, including those who are color blind or have low vision. It's important to ensure that text contrasts well with background colors for ease of reading.
	6.1.d.3. When sharing data and graphs, ensure they are presented in an accessible and comprehensible manner. Avoid overly complex visualizations and ensure the data narrative is clear and meaningful to your audience.
	6.1.d.4. Recognize and accommodate different learning styles and needs by offering content in various formats (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Consider the accessibility of digital platforms and tools used in delivering technical assistance.
6.2 Meetings	
	6.2.a. Foster a respectful and inclusive environment where all members feel safe to express their opinions without fear of discrimination or retribution. Have the group create and reach consensus on a list of guiding principles and rules for engagement to ensure a safe environment for discussion. An example of a guiding principle is, "Assume good intent, but acknowledge impact."
	6.2.a.1. To foster trust in a group setting, set aside time during a meeting for networking and to foster personal connections before presenting content.
	6.2.a.2. Establish room rules appropriate for the meeting, such as limiting electronic use and establishing time limits for speaking.
	6.2.b. Ensure that participants have the appropriate language resources and enough time to understand and absorb information. Break down complex topics into manageable segments and schedule sessions with ample time for reflection and questions.
	6.2.c. Provide compensation for time and transportation costs (e.g., mileage, bus fare, etc.).

PROCESS FACILITATION	
6. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Facilitation Content (continued)	
6.2 Meetings (continued)	
	6.2.d. Use plain language.
	6.2.e. Offer background information and level-setting to ensure all participants begin on an equal footing. Facilitators can acquire this information when planning the project, before meetings begin, and throughout the project.
	6.2.f. Ensure that liaisons from the community advisory board provide information first. This helps prioritize their input and ensures their perspectives are integrated from the beginning.
	6.2.g. For physical meetings, configure the room in a way to facilitate discussion and dialogue that is appropriate for the audience, recognizing some groups may be more comfortable discussing in small group settings.
6.3 Guest Speakers	
	6.3.a. Aim for a selection of speakers from various races, ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity can provide a richer, more comprehensive discussion on the workshop’s topics.
	6.3.b. Prioritize individuals who have personal experience with the focus areas. Lived experience offers invaluable insights that theoretical knowledge cannot fully capture.
	6.3.b.1. Ensure these individuals are paid in their preferred method for their time and expertise.
	6.3.b.2. For less-experienced speakers, the project team can assist these individuals with preparing their presentation.
	6.3.b.3. Use a trauma-informed approach when someone with lived experience is speaking on sensitive topics. Include content warning before the presentation.
	6.3.c. Recognize the importance of intersectionality — how different aspects of identity (like race, gender, class) intersect and shape individuals’ experiences. Select speakers who can speak to these complexities, offering a more nuanced and inclusive conversation.
	6.3.d. Meet with speakers prior to their presentation to provide background, discuss the use of inclusive language and provide guidance for their content. Speakers can consider prioritizing narratives wishing to be addressed by the group.
	6.3.d.1. Ask speaker to reflect on their own bias and interpretations to align with the purpose of the event.
	6.3.e. Have individuals receiving facilitation identify speakers. Facilitators can ask “do you know someone who also may get involved or speak?”
	6.3.e.1. Avoid determining individuals’ identities based on the information you have encountered. Instead, invite them to share their experiences and perspectives directly, ensuring their voices are heard and respected without making assumptions.
6.4 Location	
	6.4.a. When planning the timing and location of meetings, consider the convenience for both speakers and attendees. For virtual events, think about different time zones. For physical events, consider accessibility, medical accommodations, a room conducive to all learning styles and commuting options.
	6.4.b. Verify that entrances, exits, restrooms and seating arrangements are fully accessible, including ramps and 508-compliant facilities.
	6.4.c. Select a location accessible by public transport and provide reserved parking spots near the entrance for those with disabilities.

PROCESS FACILITATION	
6. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Facilitation Content (continued)	
6.4 Location (continued)	
	6.4.d. Include sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, high-contrast visuals and subtitles for videos to cater to hearing and visual impairments.
	6.4.e. Establish clear, accessible evacuation plans and ensure easy access for emergency services.
	6.4.f. Create quiet zones for sensory breaks, identify areas for nursing stations and child-friendly restrooms, and cater to all dietary restrictions during refreshments and meals.
	6.4.g. Provide detailed pre-meeting accessibility information and actively seek participant feedback to continuously improve accessibility.
7. Strategies for Inclusive Decision Making	
	7.1. Implement tools and techniques during meetings to ensure all participants can contribute their perspectives. Use tools like sticky notes, online polls or other technology that allows for anonymity. This can help prevent any single viewpoint from dominating and encourage members who are less vocal to share their thoughts.
	7.1.a. Communicate to individuals whose voices may be perceived as holding more traditional authority that they should consider allowing space for others in the room to contribute their perspectives.
	7.2. Use decision-making processes that strive for consensus, allowing for the consideration of diverse perspectives. If consensus is not reached, allow space to record voices of dissent and offer alternatives.
	7.3. Incorporate regular feedback mechanisms into the decision-making process. This could involve follow-up surveys or feedback sessions that allow participants to reflect on how decisions are made and suggest improvements.
	7.4. Ensure that individuals with lived experience and community representatives actively participate in decision-making processes. If a community advisory board is formed, it is crucial that its perspectives and recommendations significantly shape the decisions.
	7.5. Clearly note the steps, rules and expectations of the decision-making process in writing.
8. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Products	
	8.1. Create reports based on the discussions and decisions made during the facilitation process. Ensure that these reports accurately reflect the needs and perspectives of all parties involved.
	8.2. Provide participants with relevant data and research to help inform the development of recommendations. This ensures that decisions are grounded in evidence and context.
	8.3. When characterizing and prioritizing recommendations, include criteria such as the impact on specific populations and how they will be affected.
	8.4. If certain recommendations are not included in the final product, provide a clear justification. This transparency helps maintain trust and understanding among all stakeholders.
	8.5. Create a detailed plan for implementing the recommendations, including how they will be monitored and evaluated over time. This plan should outline how the organization will measure the effectiveness of the recommendations in promoting equity and what steps will be taken if adjustments are necessary. The group can co-create what will be measured with the evaluation team.
	8.6. Ensure that the report acknowledges each individual in their preferred way. This could include using their pronouns, titles or the specific acknowledgments they have requested, which respects and values their contributions and identities.

PROCESS FACILITATION

8. Strategies for Developing Inclusive Products (continued)

	8.7. At the end of the process, conduct the final evaluation to capture the experience of being in the group. Include questions about the extent to which equity processes were embedded in the procedures and products.
	8.8. Establish ownership of the work and describe how results and products can be shared.
	8.9. Invite members who served on the group to be in the audience or co-share results.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How effectively are the voices of historically excluded populations been integrated into the facilitation process?
2. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that decision making within the facilitation process remains inclusive?
3. How well does our process facilitation address the specific challenges and barriers faced by underrepresented groups?
4. How is the impact of incorporating equity considerations into the facilitation process being measured?
5. What improvements or adjustments can be made in the facilitation approach to better support equity and inclusion?

RESOURCES:

Alston, G. D., Hansman, C. A., & Freeman, S. (2021). Equity-Focused Online Facilitation for Adult Learners. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2021(169), 61-69. doi:10.1002/ace.20402

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National Equity Project. (n.d.). *Designing and Facilitating Meetings for Equity*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/training/designing-and-facilitating-meetings-for-equity>

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