

EAT Step 1 Walk-Through — Frame the Decision/Issue

IMPORTANT — Scope of this resource: This walks staff through the methodology of the DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit. It does not perform equity analyses. Actual equity analyses are conducted by the appropriate authorities — your Equity Champion, the One DSD Equity Team, or the DHS Equity Director for your work area.

Content

EAT Step 1 Walk-Through — Frame the Decision/Issue

Resource type: Tier 1 Flagship — EAT Walk-Through (Methodology Education, Not Analysis)

Adapted from: DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide (Minnesota DHS) — Step 1: Set Desired Results and Outcomes

Library home: L01 EAT Walk-Through Library

Companion to: T02_01 (EAT Overview), T02_03 through T02_07 (Steps 2–6), T02_10 (IS/IS NOT)

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What this step is for

Step 1 is the foundation of the entire equity analysis. Everything that comes later — the data you gather, the community engagement you conduct, the impacts you assess — depends on how clearly and honestly you frame the decision in Step 1. A vague or incomplete framing at Step 1 will produce an analysis that is too broad to be useful, too narrow to be honest, or misaligned with what the decision actually is.

This walk-through teaches staff how Step 1 works: what questions it asks, how to articulate the decision being analyzed, how to define scope, and how to identify the stakeholders affected.

Plain-language overview

Step 1 of the DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit asks: What is the decision, and who does it affect?

Before any data is gathered or any community is engaged, the team conducting the analysis must agree on exactly what they are examining. The DHS EAT Guide (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>) describes this as "setting desired results and outcomes" — establishing shared understanding of the proposal's goals, its reach (who it affects), and which disparity domains it touches.

This step sounds simple, but it is where equity analyses most commonly go wrong. Teams often start with a solution in mind and frame the decision to justify that solution. Or they frame the decision so narrowly that affected communities are excluded from scope. Or they frame it so broadly that no meaningful analysis is possible. Good framing at Step 1 is an act of intellectual honesty.

Walk-through (the methodology)

Core questions for Step 1

The EAT Guide identifies these essential questions for Step 1:

1. What is the proposal? Describe the policy, program, practice, budget decision, or action clearly. Use plain language. Avoid framing the proposal in terms of its intended solution before the analysis has begun.
2. What areas does the proposal have the ability to impact, both internally and externally? Internal impacts affect DSD staff — their roles, workflows, safety, and opportunities. External impacts affect the people DSD serves — clients, families, community members.
3. What are the intended results in the community? "Results" in this framework are population-level conditions of well-being — what is the intended change in the lives of people this proposal affects? These are stated in plain language, understood by community members, not just government employees.
4. What are the intended organizational outcomes? Outcomes are system-level indicators of success — what does the organization aim to achieve, and how will it measure success? Both results (for communities) and outcomes (for the organization) must be named in Step 1.
5. Which disparity domains does this proposal align with? Review the full list of disparity domains — education, employment, income, health, housing, transportation, justice, public safety, institutional systems change, employee engagement and belonging, built environment, neighborhood, and social and community context. Identify which domains this proposal has the potential to affect.
6. Is the impact primarily internal or external? This shapes which communities need to be engaged in Steps 2 and 3, and which data sources are most relevant.

Defining scope

Scope is about bounding the analysis appropriately. A well-defined scope answers three questions:

- What is in scope? Which geographies, program areas, populations, and time horizons does this analysis cover?
- What is out of scope? What related issues or populations will not be addressed in this analysis — and why? (There is no shame in bounded scope; what matters is naming it honestly.)
- Who sets the scope? The Equity Director or Specialist for your work area, in consultation with your

Equity Champion, sets and approves the scope. Scope is not set unilaterally by the team conducting the analysis.

Identifying stakeholders affected

The Race Forward Racial Equity Impact Assessment (https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf) offers a complementary framing: begin by identifying which racial and ethnic groups may be most affected by and concerned with the issues related to this proposal. Then ask whether they have been meaningfully involved in defining the problem.

The DHS EAT Guide adds: have the communities most affected been involved in development of the proposal? In Step 1, this means starting to identify — not yet engage — the stakeholders who must be reached in Step 3. Who are the most affected community members? What organizations, advocacy groups, or service providers connect you to them? What are the barriers to their participation?

Step 1 creates the stakeholder map. Step 3 executes the engagement.

The IS/IS NOT test for Step 1

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) (https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ARCHIVE/gare-racial_equity_toolkit.pdf) notes that one of the most common failure modes in equity analysis is starting with a solution instead of a problem. A well-framed Step 1:

- Describes what is being decided, not what the team has already decided to do
- Names the communities affected without assuming which communities matter
- Sets scope that is honest about limitations, not scope that excludes inconvenient communities
- Distinguishes between the decision itself and the context in which it is being made

Timing and the early-start principle

The EAT Guide is explicit: "Using this toolkit early in decision-making is essential. When applied at the last minute, equity analysis is less likely to be fruitful." Step 1 is most valuable when it happens before the proposal is finalized, not after. If Step 1 is being conducted on a decision that has already been made, the analysis is being used as post-hoc justification — which is exactly what it is not designed to be.

Worked example fragment (anonymized, methodology illustration only)

A DSD program area is considering revising its eligibility criteria for a community-based waiver program. The program lead begins Step 1.

Vague framing (problematic): "We are updating the waiver program to improve access." This framing is too broad to scope, does not name affected populations, and could mean anything.

Well-framed Step 1 (methodology illustration):

- Proposal: Revision of eligibility criteria for [anonymized waiver program], specifically the income documentation requirement for applicants from households without traditional income documentation (including gig economy workers, informal caregivers, and undocumented household members).
- Internal impact: Affects case managers who conduct eligibility determinations; affects data staff who track eligibility metrics.
- External impact: Affects applicants from communities with lower rates of formal income documentation — disproportionately communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and individuals with disabilities in informal care arrangements.
- Intended community result: More people who meet functional eligibility criteria can access the waiver — reducing a documented disparity in enrollment rates among eligible individuals from non-traditional income households.
- Intended organizational outcome: Eligibility denial rate for income documentation reasons decreases by [measurable target] within [timeframe].
- Disparity domains touched: Income, health, housing (secondary).
- Scope: Current DSD waiver program. Excludes changes to functional eligibility criteria (out of scope for this analysis).
- Stakeholders identified for Step 3: Immigrant and refugee community organizations, disability advocacy groups, case manager focus group, advocacy partners.

This resource walks through methodology only. The actual Step 1 framing would be conducted by the Equity Champion working with the DHS Equity Director.

IS / IS NOT

Step 1 IS — Step 1 IS NOT

A shared articulation of the decision being analyzed — A statement of what the team has already decided to do

An honest identification of scope, including what is out of scope — A way to narrow scope to avoid difficult communities

The beginning of stakeholder identification — Full community engagement (that is Step 3)

A check on whether equity analysis is applied early enough — A retroactive justification for decisions already made

The foundation for all subsequent steps — Something that can be skipped or abbreviated without consequence

Common questions

What if the decision is complex and touches many domains?

This is common. The goal at Step 1 is not to simplify a complex decision but to articulate it honestly. Name all the domains touched, even if the analysis cannot address all of them in depth. Note which domains receive full treatment in this analysis and which are acknowledged but deferred. Transparency about scope is more valuable than artificial simplicity.

What if team members disagree about what the proposal actually is?

This is a signal — not a problem to solve quickly. Disagreement about what is being decided often reflects real differences in understanding, power, or interest. Surface the disagreement explicitly. Use structured facilitation to reach shared understanding before proceeding. An equity analysis built on unresolved disagreement about the core proposal will not produce reliable results.

Who writes the Step 1 framing?

The Equity Champion or Equity Director leads this work, often in facilitated discussion with the team. Your role as a staff member may include contributing contextual knowledge about your program area, the communities served, and the decision history. You are a contributor to Step 1, not necessarily its sole author.

Can Step 1 reveal that no equity analysis is needed?

Yes. The Equity Lens Needs Assessment, which precedes Step 1, may already have determined that a full analysis is not required. If Step 1 reveals that the proposal's scope is genuinely narrow and the populations affected are not experiencing documented disparities, document that finding and consult your Equity Director. Do not use this as a reason to avoid analysis when disparities are present.

Connection to DSD goals

Step 1 directly connects to DSD's commitment to equity in decision-making. By framing the decision explicitly — naming who it affects, what results are sought, and which disparity domains are in play — Step 1 ensures that DSD's six organizational goals are not just aspirational but are built into the analysis from the first moment.

The disparity domains named in Step 1 become the lens through which all subsequent analysis is conducted. This connection — from a specific program decision to named disparity domains to DSD's organizational outcomes — is what the Equity Cascade Crosswalk is designed to make visible. See T02_14 for the full traceability walk-through.

When to escalate / where to refer

- If the team cannot reach shared understanding of the proposal: escalate to your Equity Director before proceeding.
- If Step 1 reveals that the analysis timeline is already too compressed for meaningful work: negotiate the timeline with your supervisor and Equity Director.
- If stakeholders identified in Step 1 include Tribal Nations: refer to the ADSA Tribal Collective for guidance on engagement. Do not attempt to characterize tribal stakeholder interests without that referral.
- If the scope of the decision is unclear because it spans multiple DSD work areas: involve Equity Directors from all relevant areas in the Step 1 scoping process.

Reflective questions

1. Think of a decision your program area made in the last year. Could you articulate the Step 1 framing for

it — the proposal, the affected communities, the disparity domains? What would have been hard to name?

2. Have you ever been in a process where the "decision" was already made before the analysis began? What were the signs? What was the cost?

3. What communities does your work area serve that are least likely to be named in a Step 1 framing without intentional effort?

4. What would it mean for your team to agree on the proposal before beginning the analysis — not after?

5. Where do your current data systems have the most significant gaps in disaggregated data? How does that affect what you can honestly say at Step 1?

Sources

- DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide — Minnesota DHS (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>) (primary source, Step 1)
- DHS Equity Policy — Minnesota DHS (https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/equity-policy_tcm1053-646921.pdf)
- Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide — Race Forward (https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf) (stakeholder identification framing, sections 1–2)
- Racial Equity Toolkit — GARE, via Othering and Belonging Institute (https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ARCHIVE/gare-racial_equity_toolkit.pdf)
- King County Equity Impact Review — Phase 1: Scope (https://blog.homelessinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/King-County-Equity-Impact-Review-checklist_Mar2017.pdf)
- One DSD Program Charter v1.1 (one-dsd-program-charter)

Always defer to the person in front of you.

Ask: What is in scope? Which geographies, program areas, populations, and time horizons does this analysis cover?

Ask: What if the decision is complex and touches many domains?

Ask: What if team members disagree about what the proposal actually is?

Ask: Who writes the Step 1 framing?

Ask: Have you ever been in a process where the "decision" was already made before the analysis began? What were the signs? What was the cost?

Ask: What communities does your work area serve that are least likely to be named in a Step 1 framing without intentional effort?

Ask: What would it mean for your team to agree on the proposal before beginning the analysis — not after?

For all staff, use EAT Step 1 Walk-Through — Frame the Decision/Issue to define the decision, compare evidence and impacts, document limits, and name the owner; use the guidance in the immediate task, check impact and access, and ask for help when authority is unclear. Start by ask: What is in scope? Which geographies, program areas, populations, and time horizons does this analysis cover?

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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