

EAT Overview Walk-Through — What the Equity Analysis Toolkit Is and How It Works

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Content

EAT Overview Walk-Through — What the Equity Analysis Toolkit Is and How It Works

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Adapted from: DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide (Minnesota DHS) + Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Racial Equity Toolkit
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Companion to: T02_02 through T02_14 (all EAT walk-throughs)

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What this step is for

This overview gives every DSD staff member a foundation for understanding what the Equity Analysis Toolkit (EAT) is, what it is not, how its two tracks work, and how it connects to the Equity Lens Needs Assessment. You do not need to be an equity specialist to read and use this walk-through. It is designed for any DSD staff member who will encounter, support, or contribute to an equity analysis process.

Plain-language overview

The DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit is a structured, step-by-step process for examining how proposed policies, programs, practices, plans, and budget decisions affect communities — and particularly communities that have historically experienced inequities. It is the primary tool Minnesota DHS uses to ensure that equity is not an afterthought but is built into decision-making from the beginning.

As the DHS Equity Policy (https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/equity-policy_tcm1053-646921.pdf) makes clear, a formal equity analysis is required for all actions that have prolonged or long-term impact and that are scheduled for approval at the supervisor, director, deputy commissioner, or commissioner level. The toolkit gives staff the framework to do that work — or to understand the work being done around them.

The toolkit functions in two ways simultaneously. It is a process — a series of structured events that produces more equitable decisions. It is also a result — the modifications that communities actually feel and experience when equity analysis is done well. This dual nature is important: completing the paperwork is not the goal. The goal is better outcomes for people.

Walk-through (the methodology)

The six-step process

The EAT is organized around six sequential steps. Each step builds on the last. The six steps are:

Step 1 — Set Desired Results and Outcomes (Frame the Decision/Issue). Start by articulating clearly what decision is being made or what issue is being examined. Define who the decision affects, what the intended results are in the community, and which disparity domains are in scope. Shared understanding at Step 1 is foundational — if team members disagree about what is being decided, the analysis will diverge at every subsequent step.

Step 2 — Data. Gather both quantitative and qualitative data about racial demographics, existing disparities, and the root causes of inequities in the area being examined. Disaggregate data by race wherever possible. Identify data gaps honestly and develop plans to fill them.

Step 3 — Engaging Communities. Community engagement is not optional. The EAT Guide is explicit: "It is not enough to consult data or literature to assume how a proposal may impact a community. Communities know what they need." This step requires genuine engagement with the communities most affected — not token representation, but meaningful participation.

Step 4 — Benefits and Burdens. Use what you learned in Steps 2 and 3 to assess who benefits and who bears burdens from the proposed action. Surface unintended consequences. Identify how the proposal can be modified to reduce negative impacts and expand positive ones.

Step 5 — Implementation. Describe a plan with four elements: the strategy (how you will mitigate unintended consequences or expand positive impact), specific actions, the person responsible for each action, and the deadlines and resources required. Test the plan for feasibility.

Step 6 — Accountability, Communication, and Evaluation. Make the work ongoing. Document impacts. Evaluate whether anticipated outcomes are being achieved. Create feedback loops with communities. Iterate and adjust.

The two tracks

The DHS Equity Lens Needs Assessment (a decision tree) determines which of two tracks is appropriate for a given decision:

Equity Analysis Track. This is the full, intentional examination. It involves all six steps in depth, meaningful community engagement, comprehensive data gathering, and a full Equity Impact Statement. The Analysis Track is used when a decision has significant, prolonged impact on communities experiencing inequities. Per the DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>), the Analysis Track is most valuable when applied early — at the very beginning of a decision process, not at the end.

Equity Scan Track. This is a shorter, more targeted tool. It is used when: (a) a process, project, or program has already been fully analyzed and is being re-reviewed, or (b) when a shortened timeline makes a full analysis impossible. The Scan is not a shortcut to avoid rigor; it is a calibrated tool for specific circumstances. If you are unsure which track applies, consult your Equity Director or Specialist before proceeding.

The Equity Lens Needs Assessment

The Equity Lens Needs Assessment is a decision tree that lives at the very front of the EAT process. You complete it before you begin the six steps. It helps you determine:

- Whether an equity analysis is required at all for this decision
- Which track (Analysis or Scan) is appropriate given the scope, timeline, and impact area of the decision
- What level of staffing and community engagement the process will require

Think of the Needs Assessment as the scoping tool. It sets the frame for everything that follows. Without it, teams often jump into analysis work without agreement on depth, track, or scope — which leads to inconsistent results and community disengagement.

Key impact areas the toolkit addresses

According to the DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>), every analysis should consider impact across three focus areas at minimum:

- Workforce and Leadership Development — how the decision affects the availability and productivity of health and human service workers
- Contracting and Procurement — how the decision ensures inclusion of historically marginalized populations
- CLAS Standards — how the decision ensures effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful care and services responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs, preferred languages, health literacy, and communication needs

Worked example fragment (anonymized, methodology illustration only)

A DSD program area is considering a change to its intake process for a waiver program. The program lead is unsure whether a full Equity Analysis or an Equity Scan is appropriate.

The program lead completes the Equity Lens Needs Assessment. The decision tree reveals: the change

will affect thousands of individuals across multiple demographic groups, will persist for at least three years, and involves a program area with documented racial disparities in enrollment. The Needs Assessment points to the Equity Analysis Track.

The program lead now knows the scope: full six-step process, meaningful community engagement, disaggregated data, and a completed Equity Impact Statement before the change goes to leadership for approval.

This resource walks through methodology only. The actual analysis would be conducted by the program lead's Equity Champion working with the DHS Equity Director for that work area.

IS / IS NOT

The EAT IS — The EAT IS NOT

A structured, six-step methodology for examining equity impacts — The "answer" to inequities — it reveals them; it does not automatically fix them

A process and a result — A full stop of a process or a reason to delay indefinitely

Best used early — at the beginning of a decision — Only applicable at the beginning (ongoing evaluation is part of the process)

Conducted with diverse perspectives and stakeholders — A substitute for authentic community engagement

A way to ensure racial equity impacts are at the core of decision-making — A separate "add-on" to normal work

A tool for raising the voice of marginalized communities — A tool for creating token representation

An authentic effort to prevent institutional racism and identify options to remedy inequities — A checkbox activity

Required for major decisions per DHS Equity Policy — Optional or advisory only

Common questions

Who is responsible for conducting the equity analysis?

Your Equity Champion, the One DSD Equity Team, or the DHS Equity Director for your work area conducts and oversees the analysis. Your role as a staff member is to understand the process, contribute your knowledge of the affected communities and programs, and support the analysis — not to conduct it independently.

What if time is short and the deadline is real?

The EAT Guide recommends negotiating the timeline first. If the timeline cannot be moved due to external factors, contact your Equity Director or Specialist. They can help you determine whether the Equity Scan Track applies, or whether modifications to the full Analysis are appropriate. Using the toolkit "mid-late in a process" is not a reason to skip it — but it does reduce its effectiveness, which is why applying it early matters.

What if there are data gaps?

This is expected. Both quantitative and qualitative data matter. When quantitative data is absent or incomplete, qualitative data (community testimony, focus group input, staff observations) can speak to subpopulations and nuance. Document the gap and develop a plan to improve data collection going forward.

What are "disparity domains"?

The DHS EAT Guide defines disparity domains as areas where documented differences in health and life outcomes are linked to social, economic, or environmental disadvantage. Domains include: education, employment, income, health, housing, transportation, justice, public safety, institutional systems change, employee engagement and belonging, built environment, neighborhood, and social and community context. Your analysis identifies which domains the proposed action touches.

Connection to DSD goals

DSD's six organizational goals anchor all equity work. The EAT is the mechanism through which those goals move from aspiration to action. The ADSA strategy (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>) connects DSD's program-level decisions to DHS's broader population-level outcomes — and the EAT is the structured tool that surfaces whether a given decision advances or undermines those connections.

The EAT also connects directly to the Equity Cascade Crosswalk, which maps how individual decisions trace upward through DSD's six goals to ADSA strategy to DHS outcomes. Walk-through asset T02_14 covers this traceability in detail.

When to escalate / where to refer

- If you are unsure whether a decision requires an equity analysis: contact your work area's Equity Director or Specialist.
- If the Equity Lens Needs Assessment indicates the Analysis Track and you need support: refer to your Equity Champion or the One DSD Equity Team.
- If a community engagement component is needed: refer to DSD program areas and the CECLC (Community Engagement, Cultural and Linguistic Competency). Community engagement is not a function this resource performs; it is DSD's collective responsibility.
- If you have questions about Tribal Nations-specific equity implications: refer to the ADSA Tribal Collective. Per Charter v1.1 Article 13 (one-dsd-program-charter), tribal content is handled by the ADSA Tribal Collective — this resource does not advise on tribal-specific equity analysis practices.

Reflective questions

1. Think of a recent decision in your work area. At what point in that process was equity formally considered? Would earlier application of the EAT have changed the process or the outcome?
2. What is the difference between using the EAT as a process tool and using it as a result-producing tool? How does your team currently think about it?
3. Who in your work area is your Equity Champion or Equity Director contact? Do you know how to reach them?

4. What data about the communities your programs serve do you have ready access to? Where are the gaps?
5. The EAT is designed to be adapted — not a one-size-fits-all template. What adaptations might your program area need?

Sources

- DHS Equity Analysis Toolkit Guide — Minnesota DHS (<https://mn.gov/dhs/>) (primary source)
- DHS Equity Policy — Minnesota DHS (https://mn.gov/dhs/assets/equity-policy_tcm1053-646921.pdf)
- Racial Equity Toolkit — Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), via Othering and Belonging Institute (https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/ARCHIVE/gare-racial_equity_toolkit.pdf)
- Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide — Race Forward (https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf)
- King County Equity Impact Review Tool (<https://cdn.kingcounty.gov/-/media/king-county/depts/dph/documents/safety-injury-prevention/emergency-preparedness/cre/equity-impact-review-tool.pdf>)
- One DSD Program Charter v1.1 (one-dsd-program-charter)
- One DSD Content Map and Gap Analysis v1.0 (../content_map_and_gap_analysis_v1.md)

Always defer to the person in front of you.

Ask: Who is responsible for conducting the equity analysis?

Ask: What if time is short and the deadline is real?

Ask: What if there are data gaps?

Ask: What are "disparity domains"?

Ask: What is the difference between using the EAT as a process tool and using it as a result-producing tool? How does your team currently think about it?

Ask: Who in your work area is your Equity Champion or Equity Director contact? Do you know how to reach them?

Ask: What data about the communities your programs serve do you have ready access to? Where are the gaps?

For policy regulatory analysts, use EAT Overview Walk-Through — What the Equity Analysis Toolkit Is and How It Works to define the decision, compare evidence and impacts, document limits, and name the owner; trace each recommendation to current authority, preserve exceptions, and document the decision record. Start by ask: Who is responsible for conducting the equity analysis?

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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