

The background of the entire page is a grid of approximately 48 small, square portraits of diverse individuals of various ages, ethnicities, and genders, all smiling. The portraits are arranged in a 6x8 grid and are semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid.

Massachusetts Equity Assessment Report

Prepared for the Office of the
Massachusetts Governor Maura T. Healey

T H E
LAZU
G R O U P

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 5, 2023, Governor Maura Healey signed Executive Order No. 612, "Instituting the Practice of Equity Assessment Government-Wide and Creating the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Increasing Equity Through Data." In this groundbreaking move, Governor Healey not only declared equity to be the standard for all policies, practices, and services delivered in Massachusetts, but also directed state agencies to regularly assess their work as a means to improve equity, transparency, and accountability. Each executive Department was asked to "confront and understand where there are gaps in the programs and services the Department provides or inequitable obstacles to full participation that the Department could lessen." The message of the Healey Driscoll Administration is clear: Our government practices must be informed by data and the determination to increase equity at every opportunity. This first government-wide equity assessment in Massachusetts is a significant step forward in the process of understanding and addressing the persistent inequities along lines that include race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, economic status, physical and mental abilities, geography, religion, veteran status, and more.

PROCESS

I. Building an Understanding of Equity

The process began with “Bias to Belonging” training in 2023, which was attended by all the Secretaries, as well as the Governor and Lieutenant Governor and their senior staff. The purpose of this training was to center the concepts and best practices of equity and ensure there was a shared understanding and a common language for discussing equity. Following the training, each Secretary nominated two people within their team to work on the first equity assessment, with these representatives having authority within the Secretariat and access to data. All the Secretariat nominees became a working group that was then trained in the basic principles of equity.

The working group representing all of the Secretariats discussed different ways to think about equity. The working group together reviewed the history, mission, and future of each Secretariat to build a shared understanding of goals. The working group then decided together which aspects of equity they would seek to measure in the equity assessment. After reviewing many aspects of equity, examining best practices, and talking to experts, the working group settled on five principles to define and measure the experience equity in state programs, policies, and practices:

Guiding Principles for the Equity Rubric

Access - This refers to the quality of being able to be reached or entered. Equal access to social goods is one of the most fundamental principles of social justice, ensuring that resources are equally available to all—across and within diverse communities.

Fairness - Impartial and just treatment or behavior without favoritism or discrimination constitutes fairness. This principle does not mean that everybody gets what they want. Rather it means that everyone within a group has an equal opportunity to benefit. It involves authentic interactions in which individuals feel valued, seen, and heard to foster trust and personal growth.

Transparency - In a business or governance context, transparency refers to being open and honest. This requires proactive disclosure of all relevant information so that others can make informed decisions. Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing.

Accountability - In creating processes and systems, accountability refers to ensuring that individuals and departments are held accountable for their decisions and actions. Accountability requires constantly checking against a set of questions such as: Who is going to benefit? How is the issue being defined? Who is defining success?

Accessibility - In most contexts, accessibility means all individuals have equal access to and are afforded the same opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. Accessibility is measured for a wide range of individuals across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, economic status, physical and mental abilities, geography, religion, veteran status, and more.

II. Building and Using a Rubric Tool

In the months following, the Governor's office, the Secretariats, and The Lazu Group worked closely to design and implement a rubric for capturing qualitative and quantitative data about the experiences of, interactions with, and services delivered to people from diverse groups. Importantly, questions were designed to promote reflections on actions, not judgment. The tool used open-ended questions that allowed Secretariats and their staff to respond through the lens of their programs and practices and share examples of how the equity principles apply to their work.

Adjectival scoring and a rating scale were created to establish a way to gauge how deeply equity is ingrained in a program and how improvements can be made from any point along the spectrum.

	Great work! This program works and achieves equity in many ways. Reflection Questions: Identify what makes this program equitable and consider how it can be shared with other departments. Are you setting the bar too low? What will you do to continue to push for greater equity?
	Solid! This program extends equity consistently. Reflection Questions: Identify the ways the program extends equity and look for ways to expand those habits. Look at the highest scores to better understand how this program provides equitable services and share internal best practices.
	On the right track! This program can bring equitable practices in its offerings. However, there is more work to do. Reflection Questions: Reflect on what can be strengthened is it structural? Or does it sit in the institution ie; processes to access the program? Does staff need more training or do other implicit barriers exist?
	Getting started. Expanding equity needs to happen on three levels, structural, institutional, and implicit. Reflect on the lowest scores and see what are the barriers preventing the program from extending greater equity throughout the program. Look at the highest scores and find the program's strengths, learn from the strengths to overcome barriers.

In the rubric process, each program is assessed on a spectrum, with more equity principles in practice resulting in a darker color on the scale. This assessment is not meant to produce a passing grade, but rather to encourage reflection.

The rubric is also designed to be used multiple times by a Secretariat to check on the process made by a program or to share insights with a new program. Therefore, it was important for the evaluation to be a simple way to guide action more than produce a grading curve.

THE FIRST ASSESSMENT

Using the rubric, each office of state government then had four weeks to complete a first equity assessment of one program run by their office. Moving forward, Secretaries will be expected to assess additional programs using the rubric.

- **Department of Transportation - Secretary Monica Tibbits-Nutt**
 - Program Selected: [Process to Obtain a Massachusetts Passenger Driver's License for Customers Over the Age of 18](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Economic Development - Secretary Yvonne Hao**
 - Program Selected: [MassWorks Infrastructure Program](#)
 - Rating: Great Work
- **Executive Office of Health and Human Services - Secretary Kate Walsh**
 - Program Selected: [MassHealth Doula Services](#)
 - Rating: Great Work
- **Executive Office of Education - Secretary Patrick Tutwiler**
 - Program Selected: [Social Emotional Learning Grant Program](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) - Secretary Lauren Jones**
 - Program Selected: [MassHire System - Department of Career Services](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Technology Services and Security - Secretary Jason Snyder**
 - Program Selected: [Mass.gov](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities - Secretary Edward Augustus**
 - Program Selected: [Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Public Safety & Security - Secretary Terrence Reidy**
 - Program Selected: [Commonwealth Nonprofit Security Grant Program \(CNSGP\)](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress
- **Executive Office of Veterans' Services - Secretary Jon Santiago**
 - Program Selected: [Veterans Home at Chelsea and Holyoke](#)
 - Rating: On the Right Track
- **Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs - Secretary Rebecca Tepper**
 - Programs Selected: [Massachusetts Offer Rebates for Electric Vehicles \(MOR-EV\) Program](#)
 - Rating: On the Right Track
- **Executive Office for Administration and Finance - Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz**
 - Programs Selected: [Certification process by which contractors apply for certification in categories of work to bid on vertical construction projects under c.149](#)
 - Rating: Solid Progress

RESULTS

I. A tool to be used again and again

In order to achieve equity goals, organizations must be purposeful about it. Equity must be identified as a clear goal and then clear metrics should be established to measure success and failure.

Through this initiative, the Healey Driscoll Administration emerged with a tool that can foster further meaningful equity work. The assessment tool built as part of this first exercise enables equity analysis on existing policies, practices, and programs. It also asks challenging questions designed to provoke reflection and discussion around the broad topic of equity. By using the rubric, Secretariats are able to assess how discrete state programs and services enrich residents' lives and identify additional ways to build equity.

Importantly, the rubric is not meant to be used once and then forgotten. Rather, as part of the culture and best practices, the rubric is meant to be an iterative tool regularly used by Secretariats and their Departments to examine, through an equity lens, all aspects of the work they do. The rubric built in this exercise aims to strike a balance between evaluation and expediency. It can be used often, even multiple times a year, to chronicle updates within a program or establish a baseline for a new program.

Rather than focus exclusively on analysis of quantitative data, the rubric encourages reflection, establishes a common lexicon and understanding of equity, and sets a foundation. The rubric is built with the capacity to evolve into a tool for taking a qualitative pulse on how services are delivered, while also encouraging Departments and individual programs to apply an equity lens in their ongoing thinking, program development, and engagement with the community, partners, and other stakeholders.

II. Actionable information about individual programs and a change in culture

Completing the first assessment on an initial set of programs also yielded actionable information for each Secretariat. The rubric measured current practices and experiences, and encouraged decision makers to be more conscious of the many ways in which their actions and choices can build or detract from equity. Many programs discovered that they had been making progress toward equity when focusing on one aspect of equity that they often thought about, but that they were standing still when focusing on other aspects of equity that they did not measure or discuss regularly.

Taking a qualitative approach to assessment also fostered deep discussions of what equity means and how it is experienced by different groups in various scenarios and across programs that vastly differ in the types of services, offerings and assistance provided to stakeholders.



III. Takeaways

The equity assessment process was instituted out of the belief that, every day, state programs have the potential to enrich the lives of all people. Further, the Commonwealth, itself, cannot reach its full potential if its residents face barriers and inequities that keep them from reaching their own potential. To that end, here are takeaways and key learnings from the equity assessment process:

1. Tools should be applicable in any Department to measure any programs.

Tools should measure equity in any Department across state governments, with specificity that allows state government officials and staff to think broadly about culture. Moreover, using the same tool in all Departments facilitates the assessment process and allows for discussions and shared learning across Departments.

2. Gather quantitative and qualitative data to set goals.

Paramount to the success of the equity assessment process is the quality of the data, both qualitative and quantitative. This initiative revealed a lack of consistent, actionable data on equity across all secretariats. Each secretariat will now work to be more intentional about collecting qualitative and quantitative equity data in their areas of responsibility. The better the data points, the more they can be used to set actionable goals for achieving desired outcomes and be held accountable for meeting them.

3. Co-creating and learning with each Secretariat reduces silos and provides shared language across Departments.

This ensures that discussions support a cohesive vision and facilitate learning that leads to a comprehensive outcome.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the equity assessment was successful in moving beyond checking the boxes and allowing the Secretariats to reflect on the experience of equity in their programs and Departments without shame. It fostered the understanding that equity is a process perfected through practice, if it can ever be perfected at all. Each member of the working group allowed themselves to be challenged and think differently. This is key to going beyond the theory or the exercise of defining equity and, instead, to explore the tactics and principles that can become behaviors. Further, there is a nuance to equity work undertaken genuinely because principles like fairness are subjective. The Executive Order captured those nuances which then informed the assessment.

Moving forward, the Governor's office will support each Department in their recommendations and continue to assess programs through this equity lens. Rather than being a one-time exercise, the equity assessment is an iterative tool that becomes part of the ongoing culture and best practices used by the Secretariats and their Departments to examine all aspects of programs, services, and partnerships. Programs are the building blocks of government services and making them more equitable will result in Massachusetts government, its programs, and policies becoming more equitable.

RESULTS FROM THE FIRST EVER GOVERNMENT-WIDE EQUITY ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

On May 5, 2023, Governor Maura Healey signed Executive Order No. 612, “Instituting the Practice of Equity Assessment Government-Wide and Creating the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Increasing Equity Through Data.” In this groundbreaking move, Governor Healey not only declared equity to be the standard for all policies, practices, and services delivered in Massachusetts, but also directed state agencies to regularly assess their work as a means to improve equity, transparency, and accountability.

The intent of this first government-wide equity assessment in Massachusetts was to begin the process of understanding and addressing the persistent inequities along lines that include race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, economic status, physical and mental abilities, geography, religion, veteran status, and more. This assessment became a tool for measuring current practices and experiences, as well as a means to encourage decision makers to be more conscious of the many ways in which their actions and choices can build or detract from equity.

This assessment tool enables equity analysis on existing policies, practices, and programs, as well as proposed new actions. It also asks challenging questions designed to provoke reflection and discussion around the broad topic of equity. By using this assessment, any and all state programs and services will assess how they enrich residents’ lives.

Importantly, this equity assessment is not meant to be a one-time exercise. Rather, as part of the culture and best practices, the assessment will be an iterative tool used by the Secretariats and their Departments to examine, through an equity lens, all aspects of the work they do. Moreover, the assessment tool can be used to gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data about how each Secretariat is carrying out its work in order to envision what continuous improvements can be made to increase equity through the programs.

“The ongoing practice of performing equity assessments, to identify the positive and negative effects of policies, programs, actions, and decisions, holds the potential to reveal alternative steps that could be taken to advance equity and avoid perpetuating inequity.”

PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The equity assessment process and tool centered the core principles of equity and were informed by best practices for civic engagement. Participants worked together to build consensus around a robust definition of equity. Specifically, five key principles (further described in this report) were used as touchpoints to define what is meant by the term equity:

1. **Access**—Being able to reach or enter
2. **Fairness**—Impartial or just treatment for all
3. **Transparency**—Being open and honest, especially when disclosing relevant information
4. **Accountability**—Creating processes and systems to ensure everyone is held accountable for their decisions and actions
5. **Accessibility**—Having equal access to and being afforded the same opportunities

The equity assessment process was instituted out of the belief that, every day, state programs have the potential to enrich the lives of all people. Further, the Commonwealth, itself, cannot reach its full potential if its residents face barriers and inequities that keep them from reaching their own potential.



¹ Mass.gov, "No. 612: Instituting the Practice of Equity Assessment Government-Wide and Creating the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Increasing Equity Through Data," May 5, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.mass.gov/executive-orders/no-612-instituting-the-practice-of-equity-assessment-government-wide-and-creating-the-inter-agency-coordinating-committee-on-increasing-equity-through-data>

WHAT ARE EQUITY ASSESSMENTS?

Equity assessments are tools used by governments, corporations, and non-profit organizations to assess how people from diverse groups are affected by policies, programs, and processes.² These assessments aim to create a baseline by providing data and feedback on how well (or poorly) people from different demographics are being served.

On the federal level, equity assessments received a major endorsement in January 2021 when President Biden, in one of his first actions after taking the oath of office, issued an executive order on “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.” The President directed the federal government to “pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”³ As directed by the President’s executive order, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in a report to the White House, analyzed existing practices. It also called for a more systematic approach to equity among government agencies: “embedding equity in agency priority goals, learning agendas, financial management, procurement, and strategic planning...”⁴

**An equity and inclusion within an organization, state agency, or other entity.
Its purpose is to:**

- Gather actionable data
- Increase transparency around the current state of equity and inclusion
- Inform leaders about the challenges, barriers, and obstacles that currently exist – and opportunities for improvement
- Enable goal setting grounded in reality
- Encourage greater accountability
- Create a holistic view across all agencies

In October 2022, The Brookings Institute, through a partnership between Brookings Metro and The Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School, issued a report that found “a range of communities across the country and across multiple functions and levels of government” are using assessments to apply an equity lens. Such assessments have gone from “the margins to the mainstream.”⁵

² Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), “Conducting Intensive Equity Assessments of Existing Programs, Policies, and Processes, September 2022. Retrieved from: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/dd148f52c519a5bcc4fde76b4932f53b/Intensive-Equity-Assessment.pdf>

³ WhiteHouse.gov, “Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” Jan. 20, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

⁴ WhiteHouse.gov, “Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President,” July 2021. Retrieved from: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.1.pdf

⁵ Brookings Institute, “Keeping Promises While Keeping Score: Gauging the Impacts of Policy Proposals on Racial Equity,” Oct. 11, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/keeping-score-measuring-the-impacts-of-policy-proposals-on-racial-equity/#chapter1>

In this country, Massachusetts is at the forefront of this work with its equity assessment to gather data and quantifying experiences among a diverse group of constituents. To carry out the Governor's executive order, an assessment tool and process were established to reflect on how equitably services from state government are being delivered, including:

- Who is served and are communities served differently?
- How can programs be more equitable?
- How are promises kept?

Such reflections encourage Secretaries and their staff, along with other stakeholders, to take up the cause of continuous improvement. This allows people to point out the mistakes and inequalities of the past in order to correct the errors of the present and establish a more equitable future.

"... Each executive Department must confront and understand where there are gaps in the programs and services the Department provides or inequitable obstacles to full participation that the Department could lessen. Departments' practices must be informed by data and the determination to increase equity at every opportunity.⁶

Executive Order No. 612

A Qualitative Approach

In response to the Executive Order, a bespoke equity assessment—one that was far more qualitative than quantitative—was developed to engage the Secretariats and their staff in discussions about equity and how it is experienced by constituents and other stakeholders. A qualitative assessment was deemed to be appropriate approach for the following reasons:

- Equity assessments have been utilized for decades, but far too often do not change mindsets and practices in ways that improve the experience of culture. One of the drawbacks is that quantitative assessments, though seemingly straightforward, do not reveal nuances, which are often the most meaningful results, far more so than a supposedly objective rating.⁷ When building equity into policies and practices, rather than taking a snapshot, it is far more advantageous to use a tool that allows for deeper reflection, greater awareness, meaningful discussion, and an impactful cultural shift.⁸



⁶ Mass.gov, "No. 612: Instituting the Practice of Equity Assessment Government-Wide and Creating the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Increasing Equity Through Data," May 5, 2023.

⁷ Timothy Virtue and Justin Rainey, "[Information Governance and Risk Management](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/quantitative-assessment)," published in HCISPP Study Guide, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/quantitative-assessment>

⁸ Malia C. Lazu, *From Intention to Impact: A Practical Guide to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, Boston: MIT Press, 2024

- Qualitative assessments rely on narrative—that is, the written and spoken words of those being assessed—to dive deeply into nuance. Taking a qualitative approach to assessment fostered deep discussions of what equity means and how it is experienced by different groups in various scenarios and across programs that vastly differ in the types of services, offerings and assistance provided to stakeholders. The tool used open-ended questions that allowed Secretariats and their staff to respond through the lens of their programs and practices and share examples of how the equity principles apply to their work.
- As a first-time exercise in the state, a qualitative approach was inherently engaging, rather than feeling punitive, with the goal of enhancing accountability, increasing transparency, and uncovering best practices. Each Department strengthened its understanding of equity and engaged in reflection of how equity principles can more effectively be put into practice. An additional benefit is the creation of “equity assessment champions” within the Secretariats as the assessment tool is rolled out more broadly across all programs.



The success of the equity assessment and its qualitative approach can be measured by each Department strengthening its understanding of equity and engaging in ongoing reflection of how equity principles can more effectively be put into practice.

THE PROCESS

1. Introspection

Equity assessments are not new, but as with most assessments, it is much harder to find a state or city going beyond a single snapshot to use an ongoing assessment process to drive steady progress toward greater equity in the delivery of state or city services. The Governor's Executive Order was clear that, rather than being a purely quantitative assessment, this process should entail a qualitative survey to better understand the principles of equity, the benefits to all individuals and constituent groups, and the practices that can elevate the experience of equity by all.

Working closely with the Governor's Office and the Secretariats of the Commonwealth, The Lazu Group engaged in facilitating and supporting the assessment process. Co-creation with the Secretariats ensured relevancy to their programs, functions, and desired outcomes. Co-creation was also important to span and connect Departments that can be siloed and to help build relationships across Secretariats. For example, during the process, Secretariat staff commented: "It was great to hear what each Secretary does," and "This helped me understand what we can do better."

The process began with "Bias to Belonging" training in 2023, which was attended by all the Secretaries, as well as the Governor and Lieutenant Governor and their senior staff. The purpose of this training was to center the concepts and best practices of equity and ensure there was a shared understanding and a common language for discussing equity.

Following the training, each Secretary nominated two people within their team to work on designing a rubric (the assessment tool), with these representatives having authority within the Secretariat and access to data. All the Secretariat nominees became a working group that was then trained in the basic principles of equity. The working group representing all the Secretariats came together starting in the fall of 2023 to discuss different ways to think about equity and decide which aspects of equity they would seek to measure in the equity assessment. One of the first exercises was a review of each Secretariat, including its history, mission, and future thinking.

After reviewing many aspects of equity, examining best practices, and talking to experts, the working group settled on five principles to define and measure the experience equity in state programs, policies, and practices.

Guiding Principles for the Equity Rubric

Access - This refers to the quality of being able to be reached or entered. Equal access to social goods is one of the most fundamental principles of social justice, ensuring that resources are equally available to all—across and within diverse communities.

Fairness - Impartial and just treatment or behavior without favoritism or discrimination constitutes fairness. This principle does not mean that everybody gets what they want. Rather it means that everyone within a group has an equal opportunity to benefit. It involves authentic interactions in which individuals feel valued, seen, and heard to foster trust and personal growth.

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Accessibility - In most contexts, accessibility means all individuals have equal access to and are afforded the same opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. Accessibility is measured for a wide range of individuals across race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, economic status, physical and mental abilities, geography, religion, veteran status, and more.

2. Building a Rubric

Rubrics are an effective tool for breaking down concepts into key components and defining success, excellence, or failure for each equity principle. The result is a relevant roadmap for making progress and promoting equity and fairness as part of the assessment process.

In the months following the issuance of Executive Order No. 612, the Governor's office, the Secretariats, and The Lazu Group worked closely to design and implement a rubric for capturing qualitative and quantitative data based on the experiences of, interactions with, and services delivered to people from diverse groups. Importantly, questions were designed to promote reflections on actions, not judgment.

3. A First Assessment

Using the rubric, each office of state government had four weeks to complete a first equity assessment of one program run by their office. Moving forward, Secretaries will be expected to assess additional programs using the rubric.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Each Secretariat was asked to focus on one program as part of this process. Each program was assessed on a spectrum, with more equity principles in practice resulting in a darker color on the scale.

Adjectival scoring and a rating scale were created to establish a way to gauge how deeply equity is ingrained in a program and how improvements can be made from any point along the spectrum. This assessment was not meant to produce a passing grade, but rather to encourage reflection. This rubric was also designed to be used multiple times by a Secretariat to check on the process made by a program or to share insights with a new program. Therefore, it was important for the evaluation to be a simple way to guide action more than produce a grading curve.

Furthermore, the rubric aims to strike a balance between evaluation and expediency. Going forward, the rubric could be used multiple times a year to chronicle updates within a program or establish a baseline for a new program. Rather than focus exclusively on analysis of quantitative data, we used the rubric to encourage reflection, establish a common lexicon and understanding of equity, and set a foundation. In this way, the rubric can evolve into a tool for taking a qualitative pulse on how services are delivered, while also encouraging Departments and individual programs to apply an equity lens in their ongoing thinking, program development, and engagement with the community, partners, and other stakeholders.

	Great work! This program works and achieves equity in many ways. Reflection Questions: Identify what makes this program equitable and consider how it can be shared with other departments. Are you setting the bar too low? What will you do to continue to push for greater equity?
	Solid! This program extends equity consistently. Reflection Questions: Identify the ways the program extends equity and look for ways to expand those habits. Look at the highest scores to better understand how this program provides equitable services and share internal best practices.
	On the right track! This program can bring equitable practices in its offerings. However, there is more work to do. Reflection Questions: Reflect on what can be strengthened is it structural? Or does it sit in the institution ie; processes to access the program? Does staff need more training or do other implicit barriers exist?
	Getting started. Expanding equity needs to happen on three levels, structural, institutional, and implicit. Reflect on the lowest scores and see what are the barriers preventing the program from extending greater equity throughout the program. Look at the highest scores and find the program's strengths, learn from the strengths to overcome barriers.

Department of Transportation - Secretary Monica Tibbits-Nutt

Program Selected: [Process to Obtain a Massachusetts Passenger Driver's License for Customers Over the Age of 18](#)

All Massachusetts residents (as well as non-residents) must have a valid driver's license to operate a motor vehicle on any public road, highway, or other way permitting access to the public. Through the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV), the Commonwealth of Massachusetts issues five license classes with various privileges and restrictions, including commercial driver's licenses for the operation of large vehicles such as trucks and buses.

Solid

The goal is to issue driver's licenses to individuals who meet identity, residency, medical, and driving history requirements. To ensure safety for all roadway users, operators must have learned the rules of the road and passed both the learner's permit exam and road skills test.

Access	RMV works to keep the program accessible to all eligible individuals. Expanded access includes the RMV Near Me program and online capabilities. The continued relationship with the Driving Family Forward Coalition is an important partnership. The RMV should consider what other insights might be found by further assessing how people are treated during tests or in-person processes. Additionally, navigator stations, which were launched in July 2024 inside several busy centers with bilingual staff on hand, ⁹ promise to be an important way to increase equity. The RMV did a lot of work to prepare for the expansion of eligibility and provided translation services throughout the process, including translating written materials into 15 additional languages, making permit tests available in 35 languages, and making interpreters (phone and in-person) available in more than 100 languages. RMV Contact Center Main Line received 26,691 total calls needing translation services. The number of requests for road test interpreters from July 1, 2023 to July 1, 2024 was 65,955. RMV responded to an influx of people applying for driver licenses including issuing 128,079 new driver's licenses in the first year.
Fairness	RMV continues to expand access to and fairness in its programs and outreach, particularly as a result of a new law allowing people to obtain licenses regardless of citizenship status. Another area to increase fairness includes consideration of a residential address requirement on the application to explore how the program can be more fairly applied to those who do not have homes or cannot afford fees.
Transparency	The RMV works to create strong community relationships. Proactive communication supports relationships with active coalitions. In addition, it offers several ways to access information, both online and in person. The RMV should continue to consider whether there are additional steps it could take or partnerships it could form to better address predatory driver's license schemes targeted at immigrant communities.
Accountability	The RMV identified stakeholder communities and feedback loops. The RMV created tracker reports to identify implementation activities and share ongoing information about progress with stakeholders. Bimonthly meetings with stakeholders and formation of a coalition are other best practices the RMV uses to keep the public and customers informed. The RMV is encouraged to regularly consider what data on failed or missed communications reveal about impacts on individual customers. For example, asking: Who is burdened by failed attempts or missed communication? How often do people have to return to complete the process? Accepting accountability here will go a long way toward building trust.
Accessibility	The RMV appointed a disability coordinator. An outcome of the assessment process is encouragement of the RMV to explore further whether those with disabilities face any additional barriers utilizing the program.

⁹ MassLive.com, "Mass. allowed undocumented immigrants to apply for driver's licenses. Here's what happened," July 1, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.masslive.com/politics/2024/07/mass-allowed-undocumented-immigrants-to-apply-for-drivers-licenses-heres-what-happened.html>

Executive Office of Economic Development - Secretary Yvonne Hao

Program Selected: [MassWorks Infrastructure Program](#)

The MassWorks Infrastructure Program is a capital grant program, administered by the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), and a flexible source of grant funds to municipalities and other eligible public entities. The program supports and accelerates housing and job growth throughout the Commonwealth, specifically by providing funding for improvements to public infrastructure. Grants are competitively awarded with a focus on shovel-ready projects that support imminent private investments. MassWorks receives applications through the Community One Stop for Growth.

Great Work

MassWorks is one of the largest resources for municipalities to help unlock private investment in land that is underdeveloped or undeveloped due to a lack of local public infrastructure. Local capital investments must be planned many years in advance. However, market-based opportunities for private investment in housing and commercial developments often arise before municipalities can secure new bonds and other local financing options for major infrastructure investments. With funding available every year, usually available within six months of submitting an application, a municipality can gain access to funds for critical infrastructure as private developers take advantage of market opportunities when they become available. Private investments associated with the most recent (FY24) MassWorks funded projects are expected to create more than 4,000 permanent full-time jobs, 9,800 construction jobs, 4,500 units of housing, and more than 4,000,000 square feet of new commercial and office space.

Access	The program is accessible to all municipalities; however, MassWorks has identified the need to support smaller municipalities that do not have capacity to go through the process. For example, it has created a small grants program as a response. Greater accessibility may come from understanding who these jobs and housing go to and to what extent local engineers, architects, builders, etc., are included.
Fairness	This program works to be fair across municipalities by offering in-person assistance and denial reviews, if necessary. Going forward, EOED is encouraged to consider whether asking applicants to undertake commitments to promote equity as a condition for receiving a grant agreement might help promote greater equity in municipalities. As of FY24, 20.8% of total awards were made to Gateway communities, and 26.2% of the total amount awarded benefited Gateway municipalities.
Transparency	The program has an online portal and shares information with municipalities through office hours. Municipalities that did not receive funds also have an opportunity to review the denial of an application. Areas of improvement could include greater transparency for residents on whether their municipality has applied for these funds. There could be an opportunity to encourage residents to understand the importance of the program and its impact on the local economy (e.g., through community meetings and conversations with partners).
Accountability	MassWorks is very conscious of its relationships and accountability. A next step is to explore with municipalities how they can hold themselves accountable to their residents with regard to the execution of these grants.
Accessibility	Disability coordinator is in place and trained. Understanding how the disability community is positively impacted by this program could increase equity.

Executive Office of Health and Human Services - Secretary Kate Walsh

Program Selected: [MassHealth Doula Services](#)

MassHealth covers doula services for MassHealth members during pregnancy, labor and delivery, and through 12 months postpartum. Doulas provide non-medical emotional, informational, and physical support to individuals and families. The doula program is part of MassHealth's efforts to improve the health outcomes of diverse pregnant and birthing members and their infants through equitable access to high-quality healthcare services and supports during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Great Work

Evidence shows that doulas can improve several maternal, perinatal, and infant health outcomes (in comparison to those without doula care), including decreased likelihood of having a cesarean delivery, preterm birth, or low birthweight infant; increased likelihood of reporting a positive birth experience; shorter labor; and ability to initiate breastfeeding. Doulas can also play an important role in reducing disparities and inequities, as some research shows that doulas are particularly impactful for both low-income families and families of color.

Access	This program can be accessed in many different ways and is broadly accessible. The quantitative data show that, as of July 2024, out of 365 patients served, 68 users identified as Black. Underrepresented communities include 32 Asian, 2 Latino, and 2 Indigenous patients; in addition, 59 users identified as some other race. For 130 others members, race is unknown. The Department is encouraged to consider ways it could increase access by further raising awareness of the program through relevant networks. For example, could the program take steps to further educate doctors and traditional medicine practitioners about the value of the role of doulas in the delivery process?
Fairness	This very program is an example of equitable services. It acknowledges that doulas have a positive effect on low-income and communities of color. Fairness in this program also includes the medical community and its support of the program by taking a holistic approach to providing culturally relevant services to a person having a child.
Transparency	Information and outreach about the program are shared through a variety of ways. This allows diverse populations to learn about the program and become comfortable with accessing the services. Areas of improvement may include better understanding of how outreach can grow the pipelines of pregnant people trusting and accessing the program.
Accountability	The program has a strong feedback loop with its partners including Health Care For All and the doulas they work with—all of which helps create accountability. The Department is encouraged to consider whether implementing a dashboard to track member engagement or other data could be worthwhile to better track pipelines and relationships. Because this program is new, a deeper understanding of how to build bridges with potential clients and communities is important.
Accessibility	Disability coordinator has been hired and trained. There is also ADA inclusion in outreach.

Executive Office of Education - Secretary Patrick Tutwiler

Program Selected: [Social Emotional Learning Grant Program](#)

The purpose of the Social Emotional Learning Grant Program is to adapt, expand, or strengthen multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to respond to the social-emotional and behavioral health needs of elementary and secondary students, families, and educators. The grant aims to build capacity of school districts, charter schools, and educational collaboratives to develop comprehensive, integrated multi-tiered systems for student, family, and educator social-emotional and/or mental health supports, as well as to build sustainable infrastructure to facilitate integrated coordination among students, families, school staff, and community-based services and/or providers. In order to further prioritize high-needs students, DESE will give competitive priority to districts where proportion of high-needs students enrolled in school year 2023-2024 was at or above the statewide average.

Solid

Creating safe and supportive learning environments is crucial to students with high needs, high-needs students are students who belong to one or more of the following student groups: students with disabilities, English learners (ELs) and former ELs, and students from low income families. To thrive, these students require social and emotional, mental health and behavioral health, and wellness resources and services. Further, comprehensive, integrated multi-tiered systems of support for social and emotional learning, behavioral health, and mental health are essential for enabling schools and districts to effectively support students—helping to ensure that they are known and valued and feel a sense of belonging, which supports positive, healthy outcomes for all.

Access	This grant program is an equity response to health needs. It seeks to strengthen MTSS in their response to the social-emotional and behavioral health needs of students. The grant program is offered to public school districts and includes charters and educational collaboratives. Priority is given to high-need districts, which helps build equity. Areas to think about for improvement include having more translations in the submissions, which may help more communities participate in the process. A question to consider: Is 30 days enough time for districts that lack resources to complete an application that could be burdensome?
Fairness	This program works to fairly distribute funds in response to requests, including funding all requests last year. Additional support was provided to any district that needed it. In FY24, districts receiving these funds served a total of 279,000 high-needs students. This represents 55% of the total number of high-needs students in the state. The Executive Office of Education is encouraged to also consider how equitably budget amounts are distributed across schools, based on different school characteristics; for example, if schools with greater needs get more funding. Measuring whether there are inequities between public, charter and education collaboratives may result in a more equitable way to share dollars.
Transparency	This program works to be transparent about the granting process with grantees and applicants. More transparency around the outcomes for students could, in turn, help build more transparency between the districts and the state. Having a clearer understanding of how these grants lead to healthier students who have better education outcomes could lead to the development of replicable models.
Accountability	This program works hard to be accountable to districts, including with technical assistance offerings and grant feedback. Lessening the burden on the grantees by allowing more time or a more streamlined application may result in better relations between the state and districts, thus improving accountability. As this program understands how the state could create bridges over structural barriers for young people needing mental/behavioral health support, this could also positively impact all legs of the multi-tiered system.
Accessibility	A trained disability coordinator is in the Department. The program also centers students with mental health issues. An area to explore could be learning about how ADA can be the foundation for providing equitable services to all students.

Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) - Secretary Lauren Jones

Program Selected: [MassHire System - Department of Career Services](#)

MassHire Department of Career Services oversees the MassHire system that creates and sustains connections between businesses and job seekers through a statewide network of employment professionals. The program provides resources—online and through physical locations known as career centers—to help Massachusetts businesses fill jobs with skilled talent and to assist Massachusetts residents in connecting with job opportunities across a range of industries and with employers of all sizes statewide. In FY2023, MassHire career services reached 21,288 businesses and 102,734 job seekers in coordination with 29 career centers and 16 regional workforce boards, each managed locally. As of FY2025, there are 28 career centers in Massachusetts, including 19 in gateway cities and 9 within proximity to a gateway city.

Solid

Success is measured in satisfied businesses and job seekers, as well as improved economic mobility for individuals and a well-prepared workforce for businesses. Through regional planning processes, strategic sectors and priority occupations are identified to highlight areas of opportunity for the state and local economies. As a federally funded system, the MassHire Department of Career Services works with the U.S. Department of Labor to establish state performance goals, which are then negotiated annually at the local level. These goals set targets for low-income adults, dislocated workers, out-of-school youth, and other specific populations.

Access	This program connects businesses to people looking for jobs. They offer job training and services along with posting. They offer multiple languages and work with communities that tend to be overrepresented in unemployment, including Black and Brown communities. The program has also been able to assist immigrants in our shelter system by increasing access. Out of 888 shelter job referrals, 8% are Latino and 88% Black and 53% female. Further enhancing access to veterans, lower income, high school education, and Asian communities could increase equity. Building upon the expanding scope of services provided, other areas include increasing partnerships with reentry programs, out-of-school and youth.
Fairness	This program takes into account the ongoing bias in the economy and works to reach communities that are most likely to experience job loss. This is a nuance in fairness because the program responds to broader employment trends. EOLWD is encouraged to consider whether there are steps to be taken to address inequities in federal regulations by fill the resulting gaps; for example, whether Commonwealth programs could be made available with less burdensome reporting or without a requirement to meet federal selective service requirements as a means to increase fairness.
Transparency	This program works to be transparent about the process and ongoing support. Partnerships with several organizations help get the word out about the program. Understanding how people are guided equitably in the career centers and consistently receive the same information throughout the process could extend help to more people and build deeper relationships.
Accountability	This program gets feedback from customers and partners. They also have several in-person sites that allow local residents to come in and get their questions answered. This allows for greater in-person relationship building and stronger accountability between the state and participants.
Accessibility	This program has a disability coordinator who has received training in accessibility. People with disabilities are also active in this program.

Executive Office of Technology Services and Security - Secretary Jason Snyder

Program Selected: [Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov)

Mass.gov is the state's primary public website used by over 100 state organizations. The goal is to give constituents the fastest and easiest path to services and information offered by the Massachusetts State Government.

Solid

As the entryway to state government online, Mass.gov allows residents to access virtually all state government information and services from the site.

Access	Mass.gov is a platform for any community in Massachusetts to access services and government organizations. The platform can be used on any device, including mobile and tablets. The site is accessed millions of times a month. EOTSS is encouraged to consider whether an equity lens is being applied by the organizations that provide content, and whether there are steps EOTSS could take to ensure more consistent standards of access across organizations. Making that determination will require further reflection.
Fairness	The web platform by design is an agnostic platform and, therefore, "fair" in its offerings. Questions about the authors of content and how they are selected, and their cultural competence, are important to consider; this will help ensure diverse voices are participating in creating the narrative on government services and resources. It is also important to ensure features on the site that promote usability are fully functional.
Transparency	This platform is transparent about what it offers and how it sources content. Being more transparent with equity guidelines for content creation can help support those creating and publishing high-quality content for this portal.
Accountability	Mass.gov maintains accountability through feedback from partners and from users through conversations and surveys. There is an opportunity through the evolution of "e-government" in Massachusetts for Mass.gov to become an important platform for greater accountability between the state and constituents.
Accessibility	This program has a disability coordinator and works diligently to ensure the site is as accessible as possible. EOTSS is encouraged to consider what opportunities exist for people with disabilities to participate in creating content outside of disability offerings. EOTSS can also continue to improve equity by focusing on how accessibility improvements are implemented across organizations.

Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities - Secretary Edward Augustus

Program Selected: [Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#)

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federal grant program that helps keep eligible households safe and healthy by paying a portion of their winter home heating bills. LIHEAP provides federally funded assistance in managing costs associated with home energy bills, helps participants stay warm in the winter, reduces the risk of health and safety problems that arise from unsafe heating methods, and helps avoid eviction.

Solid

LIHEAP is funded and regulated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the corresponding federal program regulations and policies. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) contracts with and provides guidance and training to authorized eligible local administering agencies (LAAs), which administer the program in their designated local service areas.

Access	LIHEAP is a program that pays a portion of heating bills for low-income residents. This program tracks data on who applies, is eligible, and is denied, and with every program they partner with. Because any low-income resident is eligible, further research to identify additional barriers to access such as race or ability would increase access for those communities not currently using the program. Looking at the numeric data, 18% of recipients are Latino, 8% are Black, and 37% are people with disabilities. The process is accessible through a web portal. EOHLC is encouraged to consider how burdensome participants may find the application process, including uploading paperwork. Reducing application barriers, such as by providing more offline support, and further reflection on how to increase outreach could improve access.
Fairness	In reviewing the data collected, it is clear that this program works to keep people in the program. The percentage of people denied remains consistently small. Although on the surface this program appears to be equitable, it's important to ensure there is fairness in the offering. Having a better understanding of who actually engages in the program beyond the federal requirements or defining communities by other poverty programs may increase fairness in this program.
Transparency	This program is transparent regarding who is eligible and shares how to access the program online. EOHLC is encouraged to consider whether there are additional steps the program could take to be more transparent about its partners or about the individuals who are successfully participating in the program.
Accountability	This program is compliant and accountable through federal guidelines. They are encouraged to look beyond the standards to see what more transformative ideas of accountability could increase equity throughout the program. The result could be a model across state programs offering critical services to low-income people.
Accessibility	This program has a trained coordinator and relationships with the disability community. A majority of people with disabilities live below the poverty line and increasing coalition partners in outreach to these communities could be a means to improve equity.

Executive Office of Public Safety & Security - Secretary Terrence Reidy

Program Selected: [Commonwealth Nonprofit Security Grant Program \(CNSGP\)](#)

The Commonwealth Nonprofit Security Grant Program (CNSGP) is a state-funded grant program available to eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, such as faith-based institutions, medical and health care facilities, and other human service entities. It is a one-time funding opportunity based on legislative allocation of funds in a given state fiscal year and is available through a competitive grant application process. Each completed application is reviewed by a panel of three reviewers (both staff and external reviewers) and scored according to set criteria. Priority is given to applicants who demonstrate the greatest need, propose cost-effective solutions, and have not previously received CNSGP or similar funding from the Office of Grants and Research (OGR). This program has been in place since 2018.

Solid

This program works with nonprofit organizations, such as houses of worship and health and social service providers, that are deemed at greatest risk of terrorist attacks or hate crimes. The funding can be used to establish and enhance physical and critical infrastructure or technological safety measures, much of which would be otherwise unattainable within the nonprofit organization's existing budget.

Access	Hate crimes traumatize a whole community. The mission of the CNSGP is crucial for helping promote an overall feeling of belonging within a community. Grants are offered to any 501c3. Their recent move to online grant submissions has also helped improve access. Areas of improvement are expanding language access for submissions and expanding networks beyond churches and health services. It's important to note that the LGBTQIA community is a current target for hate and can also be shunned by churches. EOPSS is encouraged to consider whether additional outreach to seek applications from entities that serve the LGBTQIA community could further improve access equity for the program.
Fairness	This program works to be fair through its offerings with a feedback loop extending to participants of the program. Some nonprofits have worked to change the language in the policy to be more inclusive. This grant program is successful in promoting the physical safety of spaces that are common targets for hate. Exploring how to further educate targeted communities on the trends of hate crimes could give them vital information on protection and safety. Another suggestion to increase fairness can be through broadening relationships beyond religious groups.
Transparency	This program works to support partners and strives to remain transparent about the amount of funding available each year to grant recipients. It's important to be transparent about the annual budgeting process as it will fluctuate from year to year.
Accountability	This program works to be accountable to the grantees. However, with the rise of hate crimes, it's important for this program to expand into more partnerships beyond the faith community and encourage grant applications from programs that can protect communities who live in intersectionality; e.g., Black trans lives.
Accessibility	This program has a trained disability coordinator. Centering people with disabilities may be a way to expand the commitment through the mission.

Executive Office of Veterans' Services - Secretary Jon Santiago

Program Selected: [Veterans Home at Chelsea and Holyoke](#)

Established in 1882, the Veterans Home at Chelsea, formerly the Soldiers' Home at Chelsea, is a healthcare complex that offers quality care, residential accommodations, and long-term care programs to eligible Massachusetts veterans. Established in 1952, the Veterans Home at Holyoke, formerly the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, is a state-funded, fully accredited long-term health care facility that offers eligible veterans quality health care, hospice care, including full-time residential accommodations, and an on-site dental clinic.

On the Right Track

The goal of these facilities is to provide specialized care and support services to veterans, particularly those who may require skilled and long-term care, rehabilitation or assistance with activities of daily living. Ultimately the goal is to honor the sacrifices of veterans by providing them with the highest quality of care and support, with dignity, honor, and respect.

Access	Veterans' homes are healthcare facilities that offer quality health care, hospice, and other services. All veterans are eligible, but the process may be less accessible to veterans who are in need of care and may be unable to meet requirements and access services with ease. VSOs are trained to understand what is offered and how to support vets in accessing the program. Increasing access for diverse veterans is important and should be targeted through expanded outreach. Ensuring equitable access is important, especially with communities not represented. In Holyoke, there are 114 residents and only four are Black; none are Latino or Asian Pacific Islander. In Chelsea, the numbers tell a slightly better story: out of 114 residents, 19 are Black and six are Latino; American Indian and Asian Pacific Islander have one resident, respectively. While access is broad, diverse communities could be encouraged to access the program more. Such steps need to be addressed in consideration of what communities are not being served. Through reflection, the program acknowledges it could benefit from focused outreach.
Fairness	This program works to be fair in offering services and resources. To be more equitable it is important to understand why underrepresented communities are not accessing or able to get through the process. It's important for these homes to be prioritized to rebuild trust after Covid.
Transparency	There are many ways this program works for transparency including town halls, veterans' forums, etc. More assessment should explore how to increase trust and deepen relationships. Stronger feedback loops with veterans and vet advocacy groups could help increase feelings of belonging for those who believe the system is failing them. A listening tour may help establish this feedback loop.
Accountability	This program works to be accountable to veterans and their families. They have received national recognition for strong customer satisfaction. Being accountable to those veterans who are not accessing services is also important. Who can access the program is an area of improvement, as is responding to complaints from diverse communities (e.g., Hispanic, Black, and Asian).
Accessibility	The program works to stay compliant with ADA; however, a disability coordinator should be appointed and trained. Vets are overrepresented in the disability community, and understanding how to reach and better serve this community is vital to increasing impact.

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs - Secretary Rebecca Tepper

Program Selected: [Massachusetts Offers Rebates for Electric Vehicles \(MOR-EV\) Program](#)

The Massachusetts Offers Rebates for Electric Vehicles (MOR-EV) Program offers rebates for electric vehicles at the point of sale or post-purchase, with offerings for eligible and qualified consumers. The program helps reduce the cost of electric vehicles, which can be one of the biggest barriers to adoption.

On the Right Track

MOR-EV is dedicated to making electric vehicles (EVs) more affordable for residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and other entities in the Commonwealth to help achieve clean transportation goals and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide more equitable access to EVs.

Access	This program offers rebates on electric vehicles for people who meet income requirements. Exemptions are limited by regulations. This program is also open to nonprofits, education institutions, and MA governments and departments. The process to apply depends on the specific rebate. Applicants can access support through the website or phone call. This program partners with community groups. Understanding the barriers facing diverse communities, including those with low incomes, in being able to reasonably own an EV is important to building a diverse pipeline of applicants. Expanded translation should be a priority.
Fairness	This program is aimed at communities that may be more vulnerable to climate change in helping them purchase cleaner vehicles. A barrier to the fairness of the program is overcoming the misconceptions communities have about EVs and the real infrastructure limitations that may exist. Understanding the needs of communities that are the most affected by environmental factors (e.g., unhealthy air and asthma rates) can increase buy-in to the program. Outreach to diverse communities can be strengthened through education to overcome concerns about EVs, especially access to charging stations. Such education about EVs could meaningfully expand the conversation around who thinks they belong in an EV.
Transparency	The program's commitments are determined by federal regulations. It has a dashboard that allows tracking the number of rebates and analyzes who accesses the program. The program also has a process for public comments, submitted online and in person. It also partners with community programs and hosts in-person events.
Accountability	The program does have some relationships that allow for some accountability. To expand accountability beyond federal compliance requires a shared understanding of what success looks like. Additional focus on expanding access in environmental communities is recommended.
Accessibility	Disability inclusion can be greatly improved in this program. Having a disability coordinator trained to more deeply understand the needs of the disability driving community would increase understanding of equity in accessibility.

Executive Office for Administration and Finance - Secretary Matthew Gorzkowicz

Program Selected: [Certification process by which contractors apply for certification in categories of work to bid on vertical construction projects under c.149](#)

This is the process by which contractors apply for certification in categories of work to bid on vertical construction projects under c.149. This program certifies the largest pool of eligible and responsible bidders to bid on public construction projects, both prime and filed sub-bidder certifications.

Solid

The goal is to maximize competition, obtain good value/pricing, and provide assurance to awarding authorities that bidders meet basic standards. Review is based on a contractors' track record, wage integrity, health and safety protocols, business and financial practices, and so forth. The program is designed to help smaller entities (e.g. small prime program for emerging businesses).

Access	This certification is open to any contractor who meets the eligibility threshold requirements. This is done to ensure bidders are "responsible and qualified bidders" to win state contracts. The process may be more burdensome to small and new businesses due to requirements, including prepared financial documents. The program has strong outreach, but it may not overcome the barriers—from a lack of trust to inability to meet financial minimums—which may be by design and part of the definition of "responsible bidders." Continuing to support a pipeline for eligibility will increase access. In-person organizing may be necessary to truly invite all marginalized businesses into the process. Expanded language access is suggested.
Fairness	The program should consider whether there are more fair and equitable ways to determine which entities meet the requirements of a "responsible and qualified" bidder. It should also continue to seek ways to promote diversity in the construction industry and help expand the pipeline of WBEs and MBEs that are qualified to bid. Lowering financial barriers and offering technical assistance are examples of how to bring greater empathy to the process. Understanding and addressing system barriers and overcoming perceptions of unfairness are important to building a stronger, more diverse pipeline.
Transparency	The program stays in touch with contractors and networks to gather and respond to feedback, including through in-person meetings to discuss complaints. The website clearly explains who is eligible before the process starts. Being more transparent about the structural barriers will increase trust in transparency.
Accountability	There is consistent communication with diverse communities, and being proactive is prioritized. Determining who gets to develop big projects in the state is an enormous responsibility. Getting clear about who this program is responsible to should go beyond hopeful diverse developers and the residents who would like to see more equity in who builds in their neighborhoods and towns. Such expanded accountability could increase the feeling of belonging among marginalized communities and grow relationships. DCAMM promotes its work through outreach in business fairs and promotional flyers.
Accessibility	There is a trained disability coordinator, and the program has relationships with disability organizations. Deepening the disability contractor pipeline is suggested. Working to make more information ADA compliant is suggested.

ANALYSIS: THE RUBRIC RESULTS

The Governor's Executive Order No. 612 set the tone for how to review each assessment. It acknowledged that each program is different, but that the drive for equity excellence can become a uniform practice. This involved:

- Gathering and analyzing data to glean insights and envision improvements;
- Identifying both positive and negative effects of policies, programs, actions, and decisions to further reveal the potential for alternative steps to advance equity and avoid perpetuating inequity; and
- Gauging how the services provided ultimately enrich the lives of people in Massachusetts.

The Lazu Group's analysis of rubric responses set out to:

- Examine trends broadly, across the Healey-Driscoll Administration
- Determine equitability within programs, as guided by the five principles (listed earlier in this report);
- Evaluate the experience of equity defined and described particularly with qualitative and reflected in quantitative data;
- Spotlight obvious inequities in the data;
- Identify areas for improvement;
- Enable the identification of lessons learned; and
- Chart a course toward better impact and a vision for greater equity.

After a review of the data, each program was given feedback, outlining strengths, areas of improvement, and questions to seek greater clarity.

In examining the data, programs were also grouped and evaluated according to how they function and deliver services. Interesting highlights include:

- Programs that work with municipalities are aware of the additional support smaller and less resourced municipalities need and the necessity of providing additional support to those communities.
- Programs that provide direct services are working with community organizations, thus prompting discussions of how quality control can be made uniform.
- Programs that are direct service providers also expressed a desire to ensure better quality control in how, where, and to whom they provide such services.

The following is a summary of the performance of the Secretariats with regard to the five principles for defining equity: access, fairness, transparency, accountability, and accessibility.

Access

Secretariats, in general, are doing well to ensure that people who need access to programs, services, and offerings are able to do so. Greater online capabilities, more satellite offices, and expanding networks within communities appear to be opening the door to more constituents and in many ways (e.g., online and in person).

The assessment highlighted opportunities for improving access. Although these vary from program to program, depending on the nature of the offerings and the access needed, improvements can be categorized as:

- Making people feel more welcomed and that they belong
- Expanding networks in diverse communities
 - Most programs have community partners. Continuing to deepen and expand those relationships will help underrepresented communities learn about the program and trust it.
- Lifting barriers for people who have limitations on their access, from transportation to language.
 - Specific opportunities include engaging more partners in the community, adding more points of contact, and deliberate outreach to diverse/underserved groups and communities, including veterans, recent immigrants, lower-income individuals, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals and families who communicate primarily in a language other than English.
- Ongoing assessment
 - Program staff must have the resources to identify what communities do not have adequate access and find authentic ways to invite them in.

Fairness

Fairness is another name for equity. The objective is to ensure that, once people access a program, service, or other offering, they are treated the same. Programs do work to build greater fairness, including working with communities to expand services and enact more policies. Many programs highlighted new policies and additional outreach to expand eligibility, particularly among marginalized groups (such as individuals without documentation and those who are experiencing homelessness), as well as to address systemic bias and mistrust in the system.

That said, fairness tends to be discussed as an aspiration, with ongoing goals to increase fairness in the way people access a program and receive services/benefits. Areas for improvement include:

- Ensuring fairness across municipalities (e.g. improving access for smaller communities)
- Strengthening the feedback loop to hear from constituents about their experiences
- Increasing education about programs and services
- Building trust and empathy, especially among those who feel marginalized and traumatized
- Examining practices to determine if inadvertent barriers exist that reduce fairness
 - An example is uploading required paperwork, which can be difficult for some people and raises the issue of computer/online access
- Expanding cultural sensitivity, such as by understanding the needs and experiences of diverse individuals and groups who access programs and services
- Uncovering systemic barriers that result in unfair/unequal delivery of services
 - This may be due to certain groups facing challenges in participation and/or to feelings of exclusion because of certain requirements (e.g. particular documentation, eligibility, or cost)

Transparency

The analysis shows a high level of transparency because of compliance and policy that require public disclosure. When information is gathered from or disseminated to municipalities, communities, neighborhoods, and constituents, the objective is to do so with transparency. Too often, though, transparency is approached as satisfying the letter of the law. Improving transparency requires more than “checking boxes” about holding public meetings or posting information online.

To be more effective, transparency must involve proactive communication to broaden dissemination, engagement, and understanding. Other improvements to transparency include:

- Strengthening relationships with coalitions, community groups, and other organizations to help disseminate information and support proactive communication
- Expanding outreach through community organizations and agencies to reach individuals, families, and groups who would benefit from knowing more about a particular program, offering, or initiative
- Greater emphasis on outcomes achieved through programs. This includes inspirational success stories that could encourage others to participate
- Better explanations/directions for policies, procedures, and eligibility
- Supporting the likelihood of individuals, groups, and communities/municipalities experiencing success as they access programs and offerings

Accountability

Programs publicly provide reports, hold regular meetings, and establish feedback loops with customers/constituents, partners, and other stakeholders—all of which provides at least some assurance of accountability. In-person interactions also facilitate accountability in service and satisfaction.

The assessment asked a question about how promises are kept. This served as a reminder that commitments made are social promises and should be honored in that way. This shift in thinking needs to take root and strengthen behaviors for accountability.

As with transparency, there is more to accountability than merely checking the box on whether a meeting was held or feedback was solicited and received. Rather, the question to consider is: to whom are the Secretariats accountable? Further assessment and reflection will pinpoint areas for ongoing improvement in accountability to multiple stakeholders. Examples include:

- Identifying missed opportunities for greater communication
- Supporting municipalities in increasing their accountability to residents
- Creating tools (e.g., dashboards and trackers) to track and assess engagement
- Partnering with more organizations to create greater intersectionality with related issues/causes
- Moving from transactional to personal, with more “humanity” in interactions to understand people’s expectations about programming and accountability

Accessibility

Accessibility relates directly to eligibility and the application/approval processes, and outreach into the communities being served. In pursuing these goals, several Secretariats highlighted the hiring of specific staff (e.g., “coordinators”) to improve accessibility within programs. In addition, Secretariats also stated compliance with state/federal regulations as a measure of accessibility.

People with disabilities are the largest of all marginalized communities and they encompass many other groups (by race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, religion, economic status, veteran status, etc.) in the Commonwealth. The State has an opportunity to lead here by expanding accessibility beyond tactics to visibility and relationships.

However, accessibility is about more than compliance, which the Secretariats appear to acknowledge in the ratings. Looking forward, the Secretariats seek to widen their reach to ensure that more people know about programming and services, and that they are guided and supported through the process. As such, accessibility will likely increase with improvements in other areas, particularly transparency and accountability. To reiterate, these efforts include:

- Engaging in proactive communication
- Extending community outreach
- Partnering with more community organizations
- Gathering feedback from stakeholders

PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS ON THE ASSESSMENT

Those who participated in the equity assessment spoke favorably of the experience. Many described how the process allowed them to move beyond their comfort zones and explore equity in new ways. Representative comments include:

“One very important takeaway from the equity assessment exercise was learning the terminology around fairness, transparency, accountability, access and accessibility. Completing this assessment retroactively, and defining our program in these terms after the fact, makes it abundantly clear this should be a proactive exercise when faced with a new program or project.”

“Our biggest takeaway was that, although we were mindful of equity when implementing this program, there are even more perspectives to consider. It is critical to have continual application of an equity lens that considers the various perspectives. We understand the need to have structured and consistent feedback collection to identify opportunities for improvement.”

Takeaways gleaned from the group's reflections also showcase several areas of learning and the desire to explore further:

- Understanding limitations within policy.
 - No policy is perfect, and there are also federal limitations that may be barriers to equity, transparency being one of them. Barriers to equity will always exist and the Commonwealth will work to identify ways to support underrepresented communities through any barriers outside of the Commonwealth's control.
- Strengthen authentic relationships with people in the Commonwealth to build trust.
 - Build deeper relationships with people who access programs. Create communities of practice to have stronger relationships with community network leaders.
 - Strengthen feedback loops to ensure comments and insights can be incorporated.
 - Maintain quality control when and where services are provided by partners.
- Take the tactical, or measurable steps, that will allow Departments to increase equity.
 - Strengthen policy where possible.
 - Increase access by expanding relationships, e.g. with disability advocates and with disability coordinators within organizations.
 - Streamline applications and clarify the process.
 - Increase translation (both access to these services and the languages offered).



REFLECTIONS FROM THE LAZU GROUP

Through the Equity Assessment Rubric, the Secretariats and their staff engaged in a process that we, at The Lazu Group, call the 3 Ls: Listen, Learn, Loving Action.

The first step of **listening** has already been completed. It involved gathering qualitative and quantitative data, engaging in discussions, and seeking input from across the Secretariats. Given the insightful input received from the rubric, the listening stage of this exercise was a success.

The second step is **learning**. It involves the articulation and dissemination of lessons learned. Some learning undoubtedly has already occurred within the Secretariats as staff examined outcomes and milestones, as well as missed opportunities and other needs. This important step lays the groundwork for additional learning to occur across the Secretariats.

The third step is **loving action**. This is a commitment to deliver more services to individuals, groups, and communities, and to do so in ways that are fair and transparent, with greater accountability and accessibility.

Through the 3 Ls process, programs can transform from discrete offerings into a vision of greater equity in accessing state programs and other offerings. As a result, the state's relationships with constituents and communities deepen, and policymaking is informed for the future.

TAKEAWAYS AND KEY LEARNINGS

Here are takeaways and key learnings from the equity assessment process:

1. Tools should be applicable in any Department to measure any programs.

Tools should measure equity in any Department across state governments, with specificity that allows state government officials and staff to think broadly about culture. Moreover, using the same tool in all Departments facilitates the assessment process and allows for discussions and shared learning across Departments.

2. Gather quantitative and qualitative data to set goals.

Paramount to the success of the equity assessment process is the quality of the data, both qualitative and quantitative. The better the data points, the more they can be used to set actionable goals for achieving desired outcomes.

3. Co-creating and learning with each Secretariat reduces silos and provides shared language across Departments.

This ensures that discussions support a cohesive vision and facilitate learning that leads to a comprehensive outcome.

In conclusion, the equity assessment was successful in moving beyond checking the boxes and allowing the Secretariats to reflect on the experience of equity in their programs and Departments without shame. It fostered the understanding that equity is a process perfected through practice, if it can ever be perfected at all. Each member of the working group allowed themselves to be challenged and think differently. This is key to going beyond the theory or the exercise of defining equity and, instead, to explore the tactics and principles that can become behaviors. Further, there is a nuance to equity work undertaken genuinely because principles like fairness are subjective. The Executive Order captured those nuances which then informed the assessment.

Moving forward, the Governor's office will support each Department in their recommendations and continue to assess programs through this equity lens. Rather than being a one-time exercise, the equity assessment is an iterative tool that becomes part of the ongoing culture and best practices used by the Secretariats and their Departments to examine all aspects of programs, services, and partnerships. Programs are the building blocks of government services and making them more equitable will result in Massachusetts government, its programs, and policies becoming more equitable.



Massachusetts Equity Assessment Report

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