Data for Equity and Action Lab
Application Packet

Overview

Having access to valid and nuanced data is an important step in developing targeted strategies to reduce disparities and ensure that young people and families are affirmed in their identities and are served in ways that best meet their needs. Child welfare agencies face challenges in collecting, reporting, and using data to identify populations with disparate needs, and there is a lack of guidance regarding who, what, when, where, and how to gather this information. Though a great deal of data are collected on children, youth, and families, their usefulness is minimal when the collection methods and their usage are inconsistent, insensitive, or exploitative to families, or inflexible to changing needs and fluid identities.

In September 2021, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, released a series of guides for anti-racist data collection for different audiences: caseworkers and frontline staff, system leaders and data administrators, and young people and families who are impacted by child welfare systems. These guides were based on a literature review of best practices for collecting, analyzing, reporting, and using data about race, ethnicity, and other demographic information (including sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, national origin, language spoken, disability, religion, and Tribal affiliation) in child protection agencies nationwide, as well as a series of focus groups with young people with lived experience in foster care, parents, and caregivers with lived experience with the child welfare system, caseworkers, and data administrators. Their perspectives and experiences were invaluable to identifying gaps in policy and practice and guiding the development of the resources. The goal of the project has been to encourage agencies to collect valid, nuanced, and affirming data that can be used to serve families in ways that best meet their needs.

The Data for Equity and Action (D4EA) Lab is an opportunity to work with jurisdictions to operationalize best practice, implement small tests of change, and grow collective capacity to leverage data as a tool to advance equity.

To be clear, accurate data disaggregated by racial subgroups and other identity characteristics—by themselves, and even when accompanied by strategic efforts to address disparities and bias—will not repair the historical and current harm done by child welfare systems to Black, American Indian, Latinx, and other families who have been over surveilled or forcibly separated. However, data can be used to inform actions that address policy, practice and resource allocation changes within child protection agencies that would otherwise be undetected, exacerbated, or ignored.

Center for the Study of Social Policy
Ideas into Action

Over the next 12 months, the D4EA Lab will focus on leveraging valid and affirming demographic data as a tool to advance equity within child welfare systems. Jurisdictions will meet monthly starting July 2022 through July 2023 and will:

- **Grow** capacity to collect, analyze, report, and use demographic information (including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, Tribal affiliation, nationality, among other identify markers);
- **Connect** with peers and experts across the country;
- **Build** collective knowledge in and skills on how to leverage demographic data to advance equity;
- **Engage** in curated learning sessions that highlight best practices; and
- **Center** equity, intersectionality, and anti-racism across strategies.

Theory of Change

The D4EA Lab will be guided by the theory of change described here:
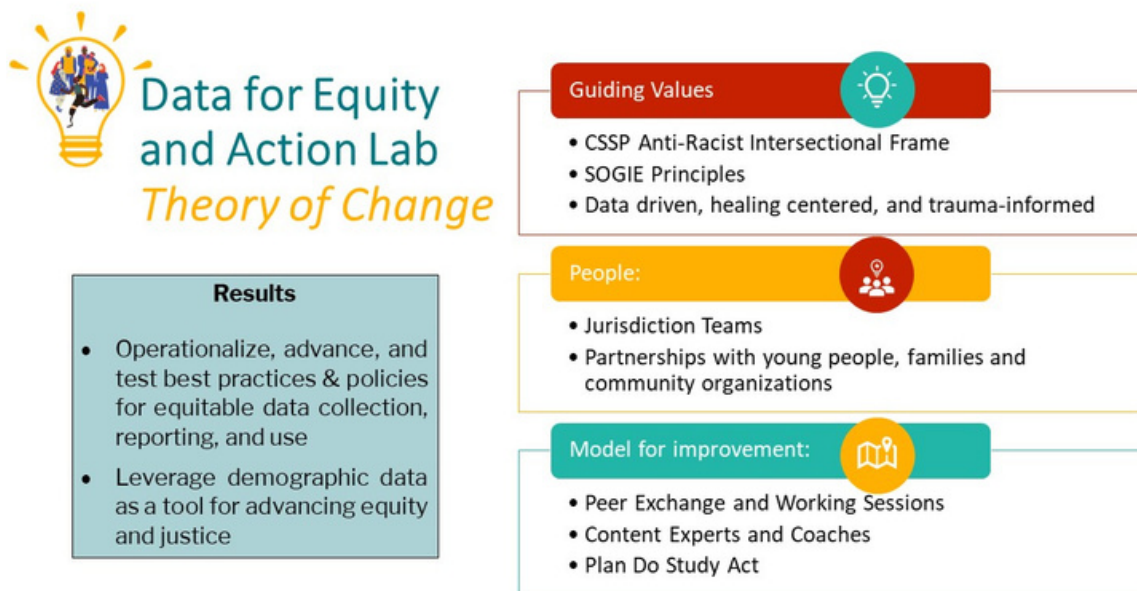
Guiding Values

In order to begin implementing these best practices in more concrete ways within the local context of each jurisdiction, CSSP will use the guiding values of its antiracist intersectional frame, which entails:

1. Recognizing historical context of different races and cultural groups, geographic communities, and social issues that affect cultural groups and communities.
2. Appreciating the holistic human experience and using intersectionality as an analytical tool to understand both human identities and social issues.
3. Rejecting pathological explanations of behaviors and outcomes, because such explanations that focus on individual behavior mask the role of institutional structures in affecting outcomes.

The Whole Youth Model, which has been focused on collecting data on LGBTQ+ young people, particularly those involved with juvenile justice systems, conveys similar principles to CSSP's frame. These guiding principles include a recognition that:

1. Variations in sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression are part of the normal spectrum of human diversity, and viewing families holistically and with an intersectional lens will help improve relationships with families and enable staff to better meet their needs.
2. Negative outcomes experienced by those who are LGBTQ+ or gender non-conforming are not inherent to their identities, but rather caused by systems of oppression that harm them; these individuals will be able to thrive when their families, schools, and communities support their identities.
3. Staff are ethically required to serve LGBTQ+ people equitably and respectfully, which includes respecting their privacy in terms of to whom their identity should be disclosed, and never attempting to influence a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

People

Jurisdictional teams should consist of at least seven and no more than 12 people. These roles can be a mix of practice, policy, data, decision makers, as well as at least one frontline staff member, parent, young person with lived experience in foster care, and community service provider partner. More information on the suggested make-up of the jurisdictional teams is below.

Partnership with young people, families and communities are vital so that data collected is used to capture strengths and needs of particular groups and help both systems and advocates on the ground understand and pursue effective interventions based on a diversity of experiences. That process is impossible without the input and active participation of young people, their families, and community partners.

Models for Improvement

Peer learning and exchange
Throughout the 12 sessions, jurisdictional teams will have opportunities to report out on progress and lessons learned from testing and operationalizing their chosen project, as well as provide feedback on other jurisdictions' work. Jurisdictions should meet internally at least once monthly to continue working toward their goals between sessions.

Content experts and coaches
For many of the 12 sessions, we will have guest speakers who are subject matter experts in topics related to racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation and gender identity, indigeneity and sovereignty, child welfare data systems, and engagement with constituents with lived experience with child welfare involvement.

The [Plan, Do, Study, Act](#) model for improvement is a useful tool for documenting small tests of change. The model for improvement entails asking several sets of questions: What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know that a change is an improvement? What change can we make that will result in improvement? After answering those questions, each step is broken into further sets of questions:

- Plan: What do you want to test? What outcome do you hope to achieve? What will be the steps to take in the first cycle of testing and in what time period?
- Do: After setting your steps in motion, what do you observe? Did the testing go as planned? How might the plan be modified?
- Study: What did you learn? Did you meet your measurement goal?
- Act: What did you conclude from this cycle? What did you come away from this implementation, and what can you do differently in your next cycle to address any concerns?

Below are the focus areas from which jurisdictions can implement small tests of change:

Focus Areas	Description
Partnering with families, young people and local community-based organizations	Collaborate to inform data collection and analysis methods as well as local needs and how the data can inform decision making
Policy and guidance	Protocols to communicate with staff, explain the "why," gain buy-in and establish standards of practice
Training protocols and tools	Training on the "how" and "how much," practice and role-play asking questions and gathering information
Updating data systems	Ensuring data systems match what what questions are being asked and what data points can be easily used for decision-making at an aggregate level
Translating data into action	Using the data for decision-making in workforce, programs, services, budget

D4EA Team Requirements and Guidelines

Child welfare agencies within the United States are eligible to apply. Each agency must establish a team as part of its application following the guidance below. As agencies are often unique in administrative structure and professional roles, team composition requirements are outlined by role with suggested personnel types that can fulfill those roles.

Team Guidelines

- Consist of at least seven but no more than 12 people
- Be composed of roles listed below
- Commit to participating in all the sessions
- Include a team manager/lead/coordinator
- Be tailored to the selected focus area and results

Benefits of Participating

- **Collaboration and knowledge exchange with other agencies across the country**
- **Access to content experts**
- **Technical assistance and coaching support through monthly office hours**
- **Increased knowledge and skills related to leveraging demographic data to advance equity**
- **Have small tests of change spotlighted nationally**

Expectations for Participation

- **Team members must commit to:**
  - Attending all 12, 60-minute monthly sessions; complete assigned readings; make headway on tasks and assignments in between meetings; and meet internally as a team at least once monthly in order to test changes and brainstorm opportunities.
  - Sharing successes and learnings with other jurisdictions during monthly meetings.
- **Jurisdictional leaders must:**
  - Support all team members with time (i.e. allowing sufficient coverage) so that they are able to fully participate.
  - Support for family, youth, and community members (i.e. with stipends or gift cards) so that they are prepared to fully participate
  - Commit to implementing and sustaining changes tested during the 12-month period of the D4EA Lab.

Team Member's Role	Definition of Role	Personnel Types (examples)	Ideal Number on Team
Frontline/Direct Service Staff	Staff who are in positions that interact and work directly with children, youth, and families daily, providing services, support, and/or case management	Case workers and managers and social workers	1-2
Supervisors	Staff who have responsibility for the direct supervision of direct service staff.	Supervisor, Program Manager	1
Senior Leader	Agency leaders who have the authority to ensure that changes and progress can be spread and sustained over time.	Agency Director, Commissioner, Executive Team Member	1
Data Administrators	Staff who have responsibility for analyzing administrative data and modifying the jurisdiction's SACWIS system.	Data Manager, Research, and Evaluation Administrator	1
Young People	Young people who are between 18 and 26 years old and currently in or have previously transitioned from foster care.	Young People with lived experience	1-2
Birth Parents/Kin	Birth parents who have been involved with the child welfare system.	Birth parents/Kin caregivers with lived experience	1-2
Community Providers	Members of a partner agency working in collaboration with the child welfare agency who serve children, youth, and families.	Community service providers and community leaders	1-2

Specific Tasks and Time Commitments

1. Form a team. This must done at the application stage and can be updated before orientation.
2. The D4EA is a 12-month action commitment starting July 2022 and ending in June 2023, including:
   a. A 90-minute orientation session
   b. Monthly D4EA meeting with all participating jurisdictions
   c. Monthly internal jurisdictional team meetings
   d. Monthly voluntary open office hours for tailored coaching and support
   e. Work in between monthly sessions toward PDSA goals
3. Test changes
4. Track and share successes and lessons learned

Key Dates

Event	Date & Time	Notes
Application	Opens May 10, 2022 Closes June 1, 2022	Access the Google form here
Information Session	May 10, 2022 3:00-4:00 PM ET 2:00-3:00 PM CT 12:00-1:00 PM ET	Register here
Selection Notification	By June 30, 2022	This person completing the application will be notified via email.
Orientation	July 21, 2022 3:00-4:30 PM ET 2:00-3:30 PM CT 12:00-1:30 PM PT	All team members are expected to attend the orientation

Application Considerations

The following characteristics outline qualities that successful D4EA Lab teams will embody:

1. Have leadership, team, and organizational infrastructure needed to make practice and policy changes.
2. Display a commitment to equity, intersectionality, and anti-racism across strategies.
3. Have a willingness to test rapid changes and share learning.
4. Display a commitment to partnering with young people, families, and community members in the process of implementing small tests of change.

Additional Information

If you have any questions about the D4EA Lab, or the application, please feel free to contact Lisa Mishraky-Javier, at lisa.mishrakyjavier@cssp.org.

Download a PDF of the Google Form application [here](#).