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Framework for Applying DEI Principles to the National Child Welfare Research Agenda Project¹

Introduction and Definitions

This document serves as a tool and guide for the *National Child Welfare Research Agenda Project* workgroup members. Evaluating our efforts in constructing a 21st century research agenda requires attention to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). As defined below, DEI respects diverse voices and perspectives including but not limited to identity and ability, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, class, religion, and lived experience. DEI also involves equity, social justice, and inclusion.

Diversity: Diversity put simply, means variety or difference. Human difference has historically and contemporarily been used to other individuals and create persistent inequities. These differences and their intersections include, but are not limited to, identities and attributes of ability/functioning/neurodiversity, race/ethnicity, culture, citizenship, immigration, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience.

Equity: Equity is about social justice. Social justice is about addressing ableism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, heteronormativity, xenophobia, classism, and structural and systemic oppression. Social justice and equity include an end goal of social inclusion and ongoing processes and intentional efforts, such as thoughtful decision-making among those with power and correcting for past and present injustices. “An equity approach acknowledges that there are differences between people and differences in what they need to succeed.”²

Inclusion: Inclusion is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic, meaningful, and empowered participation, which leads to a true sense of belonging.³ Each of the three workgroups has been tasked with identifying and prioritizing evidence gaps and related research questions across three service delivery contexts: (1) Community-based prevention of child maltreatment; (2) Child protective services and prevention of foster care; and (3) Out of home care. Eight cross-cutting design components merit consideration as the research gaps are identified.⁴ DEI is one of these components.

¹ Prepared by Kristine Andrews, Jessica Elm, Marla McDaniel, and Peter J. Pecora for the national child welfare research agenda project.

² See also <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/unseen-and-unheard/201903/inequality-equality-and-equity>

³ <https://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide/>

⁴ The Eight Cross-Cutting Design Components are these: (1) Constituent Voice, (2) Cross-Systems Work, (3) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, (4) Human-Centered Design, (5) Policy reform, (6) Technology, (7) Tools and Measures and (8) Workforce.

All workgroup members are tasked with utilizing the DEI lens as follows:⁵

- To ensure DEI is incorporated into the assessment of research gaps and related research questions
- To ensure that relevant and appropriate data and evidence informs the National Child Welfare Research Agenda
- To challenge one another to prevent a slide into normative ways of thinking

Before presenting guidance on how to apply suggested DEI principles to research questions, we provide background about why a DEI approach is vital to the development of a research agenda.

Context: The Need for Transformation

Many experts and people with lived child welfare experience believe that the current child welfare system is broken and needs total redesign – not refinement.⁶ To do so ethically, the malfunctioning child welfare system must be understood within the historical context of colonialization, genocide, and slavery -- which included the forced labor of Africans to work on stolen land. This was the beginning of inequity in the United States (U.S.).⁷ Oppressive norms that reflect and uphold white, Christian, middle class, heteronormative attitudes became embedded in institutions, including the child welfare system. For example, child welfare institutions participated in the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples⁸ and couched discrimination and biased actions within a ‘child saving practices’ approach.⁹

To address the grand challenge of transforming the child welfare system we, as researchers and supporters, need to responsibly approach our work using a critical lens that acknowledges oppressive history and current conditions. We must recognize the overall burden that marginalized families and communities experience such as disproportionate police contact and monitoring, health and financial

⁵ Note this memo focuses on the *research gaps refinement phase* in which each workgroup looks for ways to ensure the list of research gaps is as complete as possible *and* incorporates DEI in how we frame the research gaps. In the *RFP building phase*, workgroups will consider *how* the research should be conducted so it illuminates varied perspectives, and how planning will be inclusive of a diverse set of stakeholders. This is presented in a separate document.

⁶ See for example:

- Brewsaugh, K., McDaniel, M. & Richardson, A. (2020). What would it take to create the child welfare system families say they need? *Urban Wire*, Washington, D.C. Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/what-would-it-take-create-child-welfare-system-families-say-they-need>
- Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities. (2016). *Within our reach: A national strategy to eliminate child abuse and neglect fatalities*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. The report can be found online at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/cecanf-final-report>
- Dettlaff, A.J., Weber, K., Pendleton, M., Boyd, R., Bettencourt, B. & Burton, L. (2020): It is not a broken system, it is a system that needs to be broken: The upEND movement to abolish the child welfare system, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2020.1814542

⁷ Elm, J. H. L., Walls, M. L., & Aronson, B. D. (2019). Sources of stress among Midwest American Indian adults with type 2 diabetes. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research (Online)*, 26(1), 33–62. <https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.2601.2019.33>

⁸ 1977 Hearing on SB 1214 <https://narf.org/nill/documents/icwa/federal/lh/hear080477/hear080477.pdf>

⁹ Costin, L., Karger, H., and Stoesz, D. (1996). *The politics of child abuse in America*. New York: Oxford University Press; Gordon, L. (1988) *Heroes of their own lives: The politics and history of family violence: Boston 1880-1960*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc.

challenges, and discrimination in housing, education, and healthcare.¹⁰ Furthermore, we must remain cognizant that these issues of inequity are not independent of those within the child welfare system.

A research agenda for the 21st Century must include the role of bias (e.g., overt and unconscious racial discrimination), voices of those most affected by injustice, and problematic institutional practices – all of which have been undervalued or ignored by past research. As we infuse our knowledge about historically-rooted, societal and institutional oppression into the construction of a 21st Century Research Agenda, we explicitly acknowledge and include diverse perspectives – especially perspectives traditionally missing from the decision-making table - and focus on social justice and equity. Coinciding with these recognitions, we also acknowledge that lack of data, statistical complexities, and conflicting findings and opinions exist.¹¹ Yet, rising above standard practice requires new approaches, as reflected in this call for action:

“If, as researchers, we aim to build knowledge that helps shape and advance solutions to the challenges of blocked mobility and widening inequality, we must do better at explicitly examining the structural and systemic forces at work. For many established research organizations, this is more easily said than done. It requires scholars to learn things about our history and its lasting implications that they may not already know. It requires changes to familiar ways of working. And it requires fresh approaches to communicating findings to our intended audiences.”¹²

As workgroups, we aim to promote equity and to do something different: transform the child welfare system into one that supports diverse families, cares for all children, and values, seeks, upholds, embraces, and celebrates difference. The current social unrest resulting from the police killings of unarmed Black people, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and other recent injustices, calls

¹⁰See for example:

- Matthew, D.B., Rodrigue, E. & Reeves, R. V. (2016). *Time for justice: Tackling race inequalities in health and housing*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/time-for-justice-tackling-race-inequalities-in-health-and-housing/>
- Perry, A.M. (2020). *Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America’s Black Cities*. Washington, D.C. Brookings Institution Press.

¹¹See for example:

- Barth, R. P., Melissa Jonson-Reid, M. Johanna K.P. Greeson, J.K., Drake, B., Duerr Berrick, J., Garcia, A.R., Shaw, T.V. & Gyourko, J. (2020). Outcomes following child welfare services: What are they and do they differ for black children? *Journal of Public Child Welfare* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2020.1814541>
- Dettlaff, A.J., Weber, K., Pendleton, M. Reiko Boyd, M., Bettencourt, B., & Burton, L. (2020): It is not a broken system, it is a system that needs to be broken: The upEND movement to abolish the child welfare system, *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/15548732.2020.1814542
- Drake, B., Jolley, J.M., Lanier, P., Fluke, J., Barth, R.P., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2011). Racial bias in child protection? A comparison of competing explanations using national data. *Pediatrics*, 127(3), 471–478. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2010-1710>
- Lorthridge, J., McCroskey, J., Pecora, P. J., Chambers, R., & Fatemi, M. (2011). Strategies for improving child welfare services for families of color: First findings of a community-based initiative in Los Angeles. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 34, 281-288.
- Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York City: Basic Books.

¹²Brown, K.S., Kijakazi, K., Runes, C., & Turner, M.A. (2020). *Confronting structural racism in research and policy analysis: Charting a course for policy research institutions*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, p.1. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99852/confronting_structural_racism_in_research_and_policy_analysis_0.pdf

attention to long-standing problems and provides us with momentum for driving systemic changes in child welfare. The DEI experts of the National Child Welfare Research Agenda Project propose a set of definitions and principles as a working document to use as a tool for scrutinizing research questions and methods.

Applying DEI Principles for Action: A Tool for Assessing Research Gaps

When thinking about DEI, the three workgroups should maintain equity as the end goal, and the consequences and implications for those who have long been at the mercy and hands of those who have traditionally held power. Diversity and inclusion are the necessary components to get to equity, so ensuring diverse people and perspectives have the power and voice to define, interpret, decide, and change should drive what we see as gaps, how we name problems, and who and what is needed to address those problems.

Principles¹³

Researchers strive to be neutral and objective; nevertheless, they have biases, values, backgrounds, and experiences that may affect the way they conduct research.¹⁴ We offer these guiding principles to challenge those blind spots by identifying where inequities exist, examining our own biases, contextualizing findings, and guarding against implicit or explicit assumptions.

Principle 1: Recognize, assess, reassess, and respond to our internal biases, assumptions and privileges that we bring to identification of research questions.

- Are we considering how we define constructs such as family, community, child maltreatment, and risk factors?¹⁵
- Are we assuming common knowledge about these definitions? Have we explored culturally and economically diverse and inclusive definitions? (E.g., how comprehensively are we considering who's in the 'community'? Leadership in community-based organizations doesn't always look like the communities they serve. How might a question be reworded to ensure focus on actual community - as defined by the people who make up the community?)
- How are we shifting ourselves from bringing traditional middle-class/white normative assumptions to this question? (E.g., Does "family" imply white heteronormativity?)
- Does our proposed question rely on exclusionary definition of terms? (E.g., Does the question leave room for all types of "families" without judgment?)
- If we broaden or modify a construct, does it change how we ask our proposed research question?
- Do these questions leave room for more inclusive input on constructs to be measured? (E.g., 'engagement', for program practices around recruitment and enrollment, and needs assessment)

¹³ Note that not all of these questions will apply to all the workgroups or to each individual question.

¹⁴ <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/five-guiding-principles-for-integrating-racial-and-ethnic-equity-in-research>

¹⁵ We are defining "child maltreatment" as a broader umbrella term that can take many forms including physical, psychological/emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect.

Principle 2: Avoid further harm, marginalization, and oppression.

- Are we considering and reconsidering how our proposed research might further marginalize oppressed groups? Are there potential unintended consequences related to this research?
- Does the research question risk perpetuating negative stereotypes about child welfare involved children and families instead of building on the strengths of the population?
 - Who might be left out? Are we inadvertently promoting invisibility? (E.g., does this question explicitly say what we mean or are we using proxies or euphemisms? Are we using umbrella terms like “people of color” when we mean Black or Latino populations?)
 - Are we able to name who is most at risk, who is burdened, whose voice is missing, whose voice is amplified?

Principle 3: Contextualize differences across groups when analyzing data

- Are we contextualizing/discussing/highlighting differences while using a critical/social justice/historical lens? If we compare groups, does this reinforce notions such as white supremacy and ableism? For example, when comparing non-whites to whites, or individuals with difficulty functioning with highly functioning individuals, does this imply that white outcomes are the standard or that certain body types are superior, respectively?
 - Are we recognizing the structural factors and root causes that lead to disparities? Does this question afford space to introduce context and squarely address systemic influences that have manifested as racism, privilege and discrimination?
 - Are we approaching our assessment with cultural humility?

Principle 4: Scrutinize programing and services through a DEI lens

- Are we considering how difference can translate to needs for alternative or additional services?
- Have evaluations of programs and services considered how well the programs themselves incorporate DEI principles/goals, rather than simply effects on child welfare outcomes but as part of the evaluation?
- As mentioned above, does the evaluation approach or the research question risk perpetuating negative stereotypes about child welfare involved children and families instead of building on the strengths of the population?

Applying the Principles¹⁶

Workgroup members should review each question on their list and consider what principle or principles are reflected. In an exercise with the full workgroup on November 3, 2020, the DEI leads created and shared a presentation (see attachment) that asked workgroup members to consider which principles were reflected in an example question about ethnic-racial patterns in out-of-home care (e.g., type, quality, restrictiveness).

¹⁶ Note that not all of these questions will apply to all the workgroups or to each individual question.

The DEI principles also appear in a rubric workgroups used to review questions (see Appendix A for an example of a rubric used by Workgroup 2). Each workgroup has its own set of questions, and if no DEI principles are reflected in the question, workgroups should consider ways to revise or enhance it to inform diversity, equity, and inclusion. If a question still has no obvious connection to DEI, workgroup members should consider flagging and re-evaluating its priority for this work. However, some questions -- whether explicitly DEI-focused or not -- may be appropriate for the *RFP building phase* to illuminate varied perspectives and to ensure that planning includes a diverse set of stakeholders. Questions with promising implications for the *RFP building phase* should be flagged as well.

Appendix A: Work Group No. 2 Rubric for Research Gap Review

Building a 21st Century Research Agenda

Research Gap Review Template: Workgroup 2

Instructions: This document is meant to guide your review of the Research Gaps. Please complete this template for each Research Gap you are assigned.

After completing this template, please document all the modifications or changes you make to the Research Gap in the **NAME DOCUMENT** that you received by email from Alli. At the end of today's call, we'll ask that one member of your small group volunteer to send **NAME DOCUMENT** to Alli Schisler (aschisler@casey.org) and Liz Parker (eparker@casey.org).

Research Gap:	
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DEI Principles

Think about this Research Gap through a DEI lens. Does this Research Gap apply one or more of the principles from the DEI Framework?

Principle 1: Recognize, assess, reassess, and respond to our internal biases assumptions, and privileges that we bring to identification of research questions.

Yes No

Principle 2: Avoid further harm, marginalization, and oppression.

Yes No

Principle 3: Contextualize differences across groups when analyzing data.

Yes No

Principle 4: Scrutinize programming and services through DEI lens.

Yes No

If the Research Gap does not apply any principles from the DEI framework, how can it be modified to **include one or more of the DEI principles**? Use the box below to explain.

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Transformation, Boldness, and Equity

Does this research gap reflect systems- or policy-level changes?

Yes No

Does this research gap reflect clinical- or practice-level changes?

Yes No

Does this Research Gap advance a new and transformative approach? In other words, would filling this gap lead to better outcomes for children, families, and communities in the future?

Yes No

Does this Research Gap incorporate the voices and perspectives of families?

Yes No

Does this Research Gap focus on prevention?

Yes No

General Thoughts / Observations

How does this Research Gap advance our understanding of the field?

Is this Research Gap feasible? By feasible, we're asking whether a research study can be designed and carried out to answer the question posed in this Research Gap?

New Research Gap

Does this Research Gap reflect the boldness that children, families and communities deserve?

Yes No

If it does not, how can this Research Gap be modified to be more transformative, bold, and focused on **equity**? *Use the box below to explain.*