

State of Vermont Impact Assessment Tool

Introduction

The Impact Assessment Tool is designed to systematically evaluate and enhance the effectiveness and equity of policies, processes, programs, and initiatives within our organization. This tool serves as a comprehensive framework to identify, measure, and communicate the impacts of various initiatives, ensuring they achieve their intended goals, avoid any unintended consequences, and address the needs of our diverse target populations effectively.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Impact Assessment Tool is to provide a structured approach to understanding and improving the equitable outcomes of our initiatives. By clearly defining problems, approaches, stakeholders, and performance measures, we can ensure that our efforts are data-driven, transparent, and inclusive. This tool helps us to:

- **Identify and Define Problems:** Clearly articulate the specific problems or gaps that our initiatives aim to address, supported by relevant data and evidence, with a focus on disparities affecting marginalized communities.
- **Design and Evaluate Approaches:** Outline and assess the proposed or existing strategies, services, or products to address these problems, ensuring they are culturally appropriate and accessible.
- **Engage and Consider Stakeholders:** Identify and involve relevant stakeholders, particularly those from underrepresented or underserved communities, ensuring their perspectives and needs are incorporated into the planning and implementation processes.
- **Measure Performance and Outcomes:** Establish performance measures to track the quantity, quality, and equitable impact of our services, ensuring continuous improvement and accountability.

Benefits

The Impact Assessment Tool offers several key benefits:

- **Enhanced Decision-Making:** By providing a clear and structured analysis of initiatives, the tool aids in making informed decisions based on evidence, stakeholder input, and a commitment to equity.
- **Improved Accountability and Transparency:** Detailed documentation and performance measurement promote transparency and accountability to all stakeholders, including community members from a diverse pool/set/range of backgrounds as well as funding entities.

- **Targeted Improvements:** Identifying specific problems and tracking performance measures allows for targeted improvements, particularly in addressing inequities and enhancing the effectiveness of our initiatives.
- **Equity and Inclusivity:** The tool emphasizes the importance of considering the impacts on underrepresented and underserved communities, ensuring that our initiatives deliver equity, inclusivity, and social justice.

Intended Use Cases

The Impact Assessment Tool is versatile and can be applied to both new proposals and existing initiatives:

- **New Proposals:** When planning a new policy, process, program, or initiative, this tool helps to define the problem, design an effective and equitable approach, engage stakeholders, and establish performance measures from the outset. This proactive approach ensures that new initiatives are well-thought-out, inclusive, and aligned with organizational goals.
- **Existing Initiatives:** For ongoing policies, processes, programs, or initiatives, the tool provides a framework for periodic review and evaluation. It helps to identify areas for improvement, measure progress, and adjust strategies to enhance outcomes, with a focus on reducing disparities and promoting equity.

In summary, the Impact Assessment Tool is an essential resource for ensuring that our initiatives are effective and equitable. By systematically assessing and improving our efforts, we can better serve our diverse communities and meet the needs of Vermonters.

3. For whom does this problem/gap exist? Please include geographic and demographic information such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, and disability status.

Approach

4. Please describe the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative. What services or products will be/are produced?

5. What results is the policy, process, program, or initiative intended to achieve?

6. Why do you think you will achieve these results? What data or evidence supports your approach?

7. What might hinder your ability to achieve your desired results? Also consider act eligibility, access to services, geographic distribution, and any other factors relevant to the specific problem/gap.

8. What assumptions are being made about your approach?

9. How will you collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organizations to achieve these results?

Impacted Parties

10. Who is the target population of this policy, process, program, or initiative?

11. How was/is the target population consulted in the design, implementation, or improvement of the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative? For example, discuss how you included or plan to include individuals with lived experience or advocacy organizations representing them. Refer to the resources at the end of the document for further information on equitable outreach and communication.

12. What underrepresented or underserved populations are/would be impacted by the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative? How would they each be impacted?

13. How does the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative seek to enhance services and/or reduce disparities to underrepresented or underserved communities?

14. Are there differences in levels of access to benefits and services across groups? Are there administrative requirements that result in disparities in ability to complete applications or meet eligibility criteria?

15. How do you intend to reach universal levels of service?

Delivery

16. How does the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative incorporate cultural concerns of specific groups? Consider use of traditional healing practices, culturally appropriate diagnostic tools, and other cultural practices that may be impacted by the proposed or existing policy, process, program or initiative.

17. Does the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative encourage or prioritize contractors led by members of marginalized populations? This may include, but is not limited to, vendors designated as Minority- or Women-Owned Business Enterprises or Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

18. Do public written materials need to be [translated for the target population](#)? Why or why not?

19. Will you need to update your organization's websites or their contents? If so, how will you ensure compliance with the updated [2024 Americans with Disabilities Act website accessibility standards](#)?

20. Are products and services associated with this policy, process, program, or initiative accessible to people with disabilities? Be sure to think about all areas where people experience barriers to participation, including physical barriers and barriers resulting from differences in cognitive functioning or sensory processing ("sensory" meaning vision, hearing, and other ways we perceive the world).

Performance Measurement & Improvement

21. What performance measures will you use to track the quantity and quality of work performed by the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative?

Performance Measure	Target

22. What performance measures will you use to track the short-, medium-, and long-term results of the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative? Consider changes in knowledge, skill, ability, circumstance, or status for the impacted entities.

Performance Measure	Target

23. What population-level indicators will you use to monitor outcomes of the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative?

Indicators

24. How are you disaggregating data? Disaggregation means collecting and reporting data on sub-populations, such as by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability status.

25. How (e.g., PDF report, dashboards) and how often (i.e., quarterly, annually) will you communicate your performance on this the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative to relevant stakeholders?

26. What is/will be your process for monitoring and responding to trends in performance measures and indicators?

Frequently Asked Questions

What should we do if we identify a racial disparity after using this tool?

Next steps will vary on a case case-by-case basis. At one extreme, it may be wise to withdraw the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative altogether. More realistically, it may just require tweaks to make the proposed or existing policy, process, program, or initiative more equitable or efficient in design or delivery. This might mean more money is needed to reach more people or specific people. Other times, this means lengthening the timeline to complete translations *before* launch, not after. There are many ways to improve upon our policy ideas in ways that make our work more effective and more inclusive—contact the [Office of Racial Equity](#) with questions or concerns.

What should we do if we are not sure how to develop performance measures?

Please check out the [Developing Performance Measures Training](#) and [Performance Measurement Guide](#) developed by the Chief Performance Office. You can also contact the [Chief Performance Office](#) for help developing measures.

For questions related to demographic or other data, what if there are no data on point?

In Vermont, we face challenges with demographic data collection, especially on race and ethnicity. You may struggle to find recent or accurate data to answer the questions in this tool—do your best, cite your sources as needed, and thoroughly explain what we know and what we don't know. If there are gaps in data that are relevant to the proposal, consider using the proposal as a vehicle to capture those data—this helps our colleagues across state government who will rely on these data in the future.

For questions related to demographic or other data, should we only provide quantitative data? Or should we provide qualitative data too?

Anecdotal and qualitative data are important to policymaking. They provide policymakers and analysts a glimpse into the reality “on the ground,” and provide a line of communication for people with lived experience to provide meaningful insight into programs and policies that impact their lives. That said, use these sorts of data judiciously: have a plan for how, when, where, and why to collect it. Create spaces where respondents know they are safe to share their feedback, and return to the community to show them how their feedback impacted our work. Data, time, and feedback are valuable, so consider compensating people for their participation. For more information on considerations for equitable community outreach and engagement, refer to the [2023 Office of Racial Equity Recommendations for State Advisory Bodies guidance report](#) and the [May 2024 SOV-Continuous Improvement Network Equity Series presentation on equitable community outreach](#).

Frequent misconception about the impact assessment process: “This change will impact everyone equally because it is a change that applies uniform standards to everyone in Vermont.”

If this is your answer to an impact assessment question, you need to think more specifically about whether a certain group of people will experience different impacts of a supposedly uniform policy. For example, imagine your agency/organization is planning to require all clients to submit an online form instead of a paper form. The requirement to submit the form online is uniform, but the impacts of that requirement are likely not uniform. You need to consider which populations may experience disproportionate negative impacts of the change. Here are three examples of the potential disparate impacts of this theoretical example of changing a form submission process:

1. Disproportionate exclusion based on differential access to computers: a [2021 Pew Research Center survey](#) found that that Black and non-White Hispanic households in the US are more likely to access the internet using smartphones or tablets compared to White non-Hispanic households. If the theoretical online form is not formatted for mobile and tablet devices, it will likely have the disproportionate negative impact of making it more difficult for Black and non-White Hispanic households to complete the form. Note that the differences in access to computers noted in the Pew Research Center study are not an inherent characteristic of Black or non-White Hispanic people. They are more likely a result of systemic economic discrimination, among other factors.
2. Disproportionate exclusion based on website accessibility features: clients who use assistive technology to access websites would experience more difficulty filling out the form if the form is not properly formatted to meet web accessibility standards. If the agency/organization does not format the online form to meet accessibility standards, it will negatively impact people with disabilities.
3. Disproportionate exclusion based on language use: consider how people who use a language other than English will be able to understand the information presented to them. If an online form is only available in English, people may not be able to understand and submit the form without additional assistance. Read the [2023 Office of Racial Equity Language Access Report](#) for more information on formatting websites to make them accessible to people with language access needs.

All these are examples of how underserved populations may experience disproportionate negative impacts of the decision to change from a paper form to an online submission process. There are likely many positive impacts of the decision to change to an online form, but the negative impacts need to be addressed to ensure universal accessibility. **If your answer that the proposed change is going to impact everyone equally, you likely have not sufficiently considered the systemic barriers to accessing resources resulting from a history of systemic bias in policymaking.**

Further Learning and Additional Resources

Publicly Available

- [Equity Toolkit](#)
- [2023 Language Access Report](#)
- [Creating Accessible Communications](#)
- [Fact Sheet: New Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Governments](#)
- [Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps Provided by State and Local Government Entities: A Small Entity Compliance Guide](#)
- [Inclusive Design Principles](#) and [Resources](#)
- [The Curb Cut Effect](#)

For State of Vermont Employees

- [State of Vermont Racial Equity Team](#)
- [Inclusion and Accessibility SharePoint Site](#)
- [State of Vermont Continuous Improvement Network](#)
- [Continuous Improvement SharePoint Site](#)
- [Accessibility Community of Practice Meeting Sign Up Form](#)