## Equity in Implementation Practice

The ICTP projects adopt the definition of equity as “the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair” [26, p. 3]. Implementation science is an evolving field that aims to close gaps—in both quality and outcome—between research and practice in health and human services. However, we still have work to do as a field to advance equity, particularly for historically underserved populations. We must also critically assess the gaps between the intentions and the impact of our work.

Equitable implementation requires us to engage in social justice inquiry of our work and pursue fair, restorative, and equitable outcomes. Through such inquiry, we believe that all ICTP supports and accompanying implementation strategies used at state and local levels must address social determinants of health (SDOH)—the broad range of social, economic, political, and psychosocial factors that directly or indirectly shape health outcomes and contribute to health disparities. In this section we discuss various aspects of our work that must be considered regarding equity in implementation.

### Where We Have Control in Our Work

When applying an equity lens to implementation support practice, ICTP ISPs should work actively to identify inequities both internally, in institutional and project teaming environments, and externally, in the system, organizational, and partnership environments. When working in this way, ISPs must consider three practice elements that are in their control:

* how they show up with support participants and system partners,
* their commitment to ongoing equity-focused professional development, and
* the degree to which an equity focus is embedded into ICTP implementation tools and resources.

We explore each of these elements below.

#### How We Show Up With Support Participants & System Partners

In the context of equity in implementation support practice, *showing up* requires explicitly attending to equity (1) during the provision of ICTP implementation support and (2) in broader interactions about Triple P system implementation and scale-up. This includes—but is not limited to—having conversations about identifying and sharing power, addressing SDOH, identifying process and outcome disparities, facilitating root cause analysis when needed, “leaning in” and “leaning out” of elements of the work as appropriate, using culturally appropriate language, demonstrating allyship, and engaging in personal and professional development around equity and inclusion in implementation. To engender accountability for these expectations from our funders, system partners, and each other, the projects have embedded equity-focused terminology in our language and emphasized a focus on equity in our grant and contract proposals.

#### Our Commitment to Ongoing Equity-Focused Professional Development

The ICTP projects include resources in our grants and contracts to help us stretch and grow in equity-focused directions as a team of ISPs. For example, recent grant funds have included resources for training, coaching, and facilitation of equity-focused learning and application within our internal projects team and in our external facing project work. From 2021 to 2023, the ICTP projects team worked closely with [Race Matters Institute](https://www.mdcinc.org/projects/race-matters-institute/) and [Educational Equity Institute](https://educationalequityinstitute.com/) in these ways, including hosting a three-day racial equity training, participating in ongoing coaching sessions at leadership and team levels, and facilitating an organizational document review of this *ICTP Implementation Support Practice Compendium*.

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Broadly, ICTP projects team members are expected, and provided support, to participate in ongoing professional development opportunities focusing on equity generally and equity in implementation. Historical and current examples include:

* Impact Center at FPG Foundational and Ongoing Professional Development sessions focusing on equity in implementation
* Training and coaching sessions facilitated by ICTP racial equity and inclusion consultants (e.g., [Race Matters Institute](https://www.mdcinc.org/projects/race-matters-institute/), Educational Equity Institute)
* Equity-focused sessions at professional conferences relevant to the ICTP projects, such as:
	+ - * + the [Society for Prevention Research](https://www.preventionresearch.org/)
				+ the [Society for Implementation Research Collaboration](https://societyforimplementationresearchcollaboration.org/)
				+ the [Global Implementation Conference](https://gic.globalimplementation.org/)
				+ the [International Congress on Evidence-based Parenting Support](https://www.i-ceps.pafra.org/)
				+ the [PCANC Learning & Leadership Summit](https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/what-you-can-do/events/learning-leadership-summit/)
				+ the [Building Hope for Children Conference](https://scchildren.org/prevention-training/building-hope-for-children-conference-2022/)
		- Equity-focused sessions led by colleagues in the field in other organizations and collaboratives, such as:
* [The Center for Implementation](https://thecenterforimplementation.com/)

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For a detailed look for ICTP project team members, refer to [FPG’s Employee Resource Network](https://fern.fpg.unc.edu/) (FERN, https://fern.fpg.unc.edu)

* [The UNC School of Social Work Collaborative for Implementation Practice](https://implementationpractice.org/events/)
* [The Collaborative for Anti-Racist Dissemination & Implementation Science](https://www.cardis.info/)
* Professional development opportunities, events, and affinity groups sponsored by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute
* The [UNC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Research Certificate Program](https://research.unc.edu/about/diversity/deir/) and events and opportunities sponsored by the [UNC University Office for Diversity & Inclusion](https://diversity.unc.edu/)

The expectation to participate in these ongoing professional development opportunities is written annually into ICTP projects team members’ UNC performance development plans, alongside expectations to meet annual performance goals in ways that embed equity and inclusion practices.

### Embedding Equity Factors & Considerations into ICTP Implementation Tools & Resources

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Refer to Brief #3: [ICTP Integrated Theory of Change](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/ictp-integrated-theory-of-change.docx) for more information.

Efforts to advance equity in implementation practice within the ICTP projects have led to additional considerations within the ICTP integrated theory of change—the project’s primary framework for implementation learning and application with all co-creation partners—and related ICTP tools and resources. Although efforts will remain ongoing, here we describe where the ICTP projects are headed as we continue to advance project tools and resources with a focus on equity in Triple P system scale-up.

Tools and other resources for implementation learning, application, communications, and measurement are crucial to support collective efforts to scale evidence-based interventions like Triple P. However, limited systematic processes exist for developing such tools with an equity lens. Therefore, the ICTP projects developed the ICTP Tools and Resource Equity Impact Assessment (EIA), a protocol to guide ICTP tool development that embeds equity best practices. The EIA protocol engages tool developers in three phases: (1) planning, (2) tool development, and (3) dissemination and ongoing assessment of the tool. Phase 1 includes identifying the scope of the tool or resource. Phase 2 focuses on assessing the tool or resource for usability and equity. This includes checking for accessibility and bias-free language and refining the tool or resource based on community feedback. Phase 3 consists of identifying equitable dissemination strategies and creating a plan to ensure the tool is being used as intended and is adapted and updated appropriately.

To examine the usability and feasibility of the EIA, EIA developers conducted a focus group with five members of the ICTP projects team who had used the EIA protocol. Developers asked focus group members to retrospectively reflect on facilitators and barriers to using EIA equity best practices in their prior tool development processes. Focus group participants were also asked to respond to questions about what works well when the EIA is put into practice and future improvements that may be beneficial.

Focus group participants reported that the EIA was a useful driver to incorporate more equity best practices in future ICTP tool development processes. They also provided feedback on how to make the EIA easier to use, such as shortening the assessment and making it available in a digital format. More broadly, the focus group recommended cultivating an internal culture around the use of equity best practices and advocating for the incorporation of equity best practices into the planning and scoping phases of projects to ensure adequate time, talent, and resources for effective implementation support practice. EIA developers shared a summary of themes and recommendations from the focus group with the broader ICTP projects team.

To ensure that the ICTP projects have funds to compensate community and system partners to participate in the EIA process, the projects team has included community consultant funds in recent grant proposals for system, community, and field partners to work closely with ICTP tool and resource developers. The goal of collaborating with community consultants is to ensure more inclusive development of and a stronger equity lens in ICTP practice strategies, tools, and resources.

### Where We Must Advocate & Exert Influence Through Our Work

ICTP ISPs do not have the ability to control equity-related efforts in all areas of implementation practice. Three environments in which ICTP ISPs lack control and must maintain disciplined advocacy and influence are

* the broader systems in which community Triple P partners are operating;
* the individual organizational or agency environments in which community Triple P partners are operating; and
* the institutional environments in which ICTP ISPs are, themselves, operating.

In the broader systems environments in which community Triple P partners are operating, system leaders, funders, and policymakers have control over Triple P-related and broader systems strategy and resource allocation. In several cases, even some Partnership for Strategy and Governance (PSG) members may not have approval for decision making to move forward with certain strategies or resources. Triple P developers control Triple P program development. Relatedly, Triple P America controls rights related to the acquisition and use of Triple P program materials. These realities can present a host of challenges to community Triple P partners and ICTP ISPs when trying to advance equity in implementation, for example, when advocating

* incentives and reimbursements for Triple P practitioners and providers to deliver Triple P programs,
* culturally- and trauma-informed services and case management for parents of color mandated to attend Triple P because of their interaction with the justice or child welfare systems,
* more equitable pay and system supports for regional Triple P coordinators,
* more flexible use of Triple P materials in program delivery, and
* more accessible pricing for Triple P training and materials.

In the individual organizational or agency environments in which community Triple P partners are operating, organizational leaders may have control of Triple P-related and broader decision making. Moreover, when organizational leaders are not regularly involved with Triple P activities or ICTP implementation support activities, this can hinder or even paralyze the organization’s Triple P implementation efforts. This presents a host of challenges to community Triple P partners and ICTP ISPs when trying to advance equity in implementation, for example, when advocating

* interorganizational partnerships to expand funding opportunities or ensure broader community representation,
* the acknowledgment and addressing of organizational policies and practices that may be perpetuating disparities,
* the collection and use of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity or other sociodemographic characteristics, and
* more authentic co-creation processes with community members and families.

In the institutional environments in which ICTP ISPs, themselves, are operating, state legislative, university, and institutional leaders and funders have control over multiple aspects of strategy, resource allocation, and decision making. Additionally, university culture and priorities may not prioritize community engagement or outreach activities in the same way as they do more traditional academic pursuits. This can create a challenging work environment for ISPs, for example, when advocating for

* the equitable involvement of community and system partners in the development of project activities and related resources,
* equity-focused training and coaching to help assess their personal beliefs and commit to more equitable practices,
* promotion or salary adjustments, and
* mentoring focused on engaged scholarship or community-engaged practice work.

### Equitable Implementation Capacities

The values and practice principles embedded within the ICTP practice model guide ICTP ISPs to advance equitable implementation processes across the NC Triple P System. The ICTP projects team continues to gather case examples and formulate high-level conceptualizations about what this requires and looks like in practice. Initial descriptions of system processes, resources, and abilities to support equitable implementation are presented below, focusing, for now, on two areas of the [ICTP integrated theory of change](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/ictp-integrated-theory-of-change.docx). As with all areas of the ICTP practice compendium, this section will be updated as our learning continues.

#### Quality & Outcome Monitoring Systems

To be universally impactful *and* equitable, community Triple P scale-up must focus on improved population-level outcomes (e.g., reduced rates of child maltreatment, increased family well-being) *and* the reduction or elimination of disparities related to SDOH [27, 28]. This latter effort requires NC Triple P System resources and abilities at all levels to disaggregate data, or break down data by subcategories such as race and ethnicity, geographic regions (e.g., urban/rural, neighborhoods), family characteristics (e.g., single parents, family members who identify as LGBTQ+), or other demographic and social constructs. Disaggregated data allow system partners to identify disparities in implementation, program, and population-level outcomes. Once disparities are identified, system partners may engage in activities to identify current and historical inequities that may be perpetuating them, and program and implementation strategies that may be helpful in addressing them. Ongoing data monitoring ensures collective accountability for achieving intended disparity reductions.

Partners in several NC Triple P regions, including the Wake (now merged with Durham), Albemarle, and Mecklenburg Triple P regions have engaged in efforts to disaggregate data to identify inequities and gaps in services. ICTP ISPs have worked with these regions to improve their abilities to disaggregate data and select implementation strategies that may improve Triple P implementation outcomes such as accessibility, reach, and acceptability.

Reducing disparities in population-level outcomes within complex systems requires *all levels* of the NC Triple P System to adjust. For example, the Partnership for Strategy and Governance (PSG) and the North Carolina Learning Collaborative (NCLC) need to continue efforts to advance data collection, evaluation, reporting, and analysis methods to better identify the impacts of Triple P on population-level outcomes and the presence of disparate outcomes among racial/ethnic, geographical, and other demographic subgroups in the population. Likewise, Support System partners need to continue developing implementation support strategies that contribute to system partners’ resources, abilities, and opportunities to engage in efforts to reduce outcome disparities.

#### Co-creation Partners & Processes

Metz and Bartley [21] defined co-creation for public services as

the active involvement of stakeholders in all stages of the production process resulting in a shared body of usable knowledge across scientific, governance, and local practice boundaries. From this perspective, the use of evidence is often a result of iterative, messy, and dynamic interactions among public agencies, policymakers, researchers, intervention developers, practitioners, communities, and families. (p. 117)

NC Triple P system co-creation partners (i.e., community members, families, and partners; community service provider leadership, staff, and practitioners; state and local funders and policymakers; Triple P America and intermediaries, including ICTP ISPs; and Triple P developers and researchers) must work together in these ways to create the resources and abilities needed to ensure equity in community and statewide Triple P systems.

Authentic co-creation processes center choice, context, lived experienced, brave conversations, and power sharing in interactions and decision making. Community members and families, in particular, must be empowered and supported to speak about system characteristics, the potential impact of policies and practices, and community values and needs. Partnership formation with historically oppressed and marginalized communities often requires the acknowledgment of historical injustices and current inequities. Efforts to atone may be required to engender trust and renew collaborative relationships.

ICTP ISPs advocate and help create the conditions for co-creation partnerships and processes. In a unique example beyond typical support activities, several ICTP ISPs worked together to submit a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) grant proposal to convene NC Triple P System partners and center community voice in the design of statewide Triple P evaluation efforts.

For more information and discussion of co-creation partnership and processes, see the corresponding section in Brief 3 of the ICTP practice compendium, “[ICTP Integrated Theory of Change](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/ictp-integrated-theory-of-change.docx).”

### How the Broader Field Is Informing ICTP Efforts Toward Equity in Implementation

Within implementation science, the focus on equity is still relatively young. The inclusion of equity best practices in the ICTP practice model has been guided by frameworks and strategies from implementation science and other fields that focus on human-centered design, community engagement, community participatory research, social justice, and more. These frameworks all emphasize the importance of building relationships, developing mutual trust, and engaging in two-way communication with local communities impacted by the practices, programs, and policies being implemented.

The following strategies, identified within implementation science and related fields, have informed ICTP equity work to date:

developing a shared language and common definitions [29]; seeICTP equity-related definitions in the [Glossary](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Glossary_Compendium.docx));

* engaging communities in the selection of interventions and development of tools, resources, strategies, and practices [30];
* sharing segments of data through “data walks,” community participatory research, and other strategies with the goal of including communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and initiatives;
* adapting programs and practices for the local context;
* encouraging the analysis of root causes of structural inequities; and
* creating multisector/multilevel partnerships to address SDOH.

Other strategies informing ICTP equity work to date come from justice-oriented work and have sought to change system-level barriers, structural paradigms, policies, and practices. These efforts have been aimed at challenging and developing new ways of thinking to address institutional racism or structural inequalities [31, 32]. Some of these strategies include

* shifting power dynamics through funding to ensure local partners and consultants are paid fairly,
* ensuring partners’ representation in journals and peer-reviewed journal committees, and
* modifying hiring and promotion practices to ensure equitable representation on project teams and in leadership roles.

### The ICTP DEI Leadership Team & Related Efforts

The ICTP DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Leadership Team was formed in the fall of 2021 to advance equity in ICTP. Effectively, it is responsible for scientific and project-related leadership related to equity in implementation practice as detailed in this section, “Equity in Implementation Practice.” The ICTP DEI Leadership Team keeps abreast of the continued evolution of equity in the broader implementation science field.

The ICTP DEI Leadership Team prioritizes ensuring an equitable and inclusive climate and culture within the ICTP projects team. This includes a focus on professional development to improve how we individually show up in our work with each other and our partners, how we develop ICTP tools and resources, and how we influence and advocate more equitable and inclusive environments in broader collaborative, institutional, and systems environments in which we operate. Only when this work is well underway can we authentically, effectively, and sustainably explore ways to advance equity in ICTP implementation support practice with regional and community Triple P partners.

The ICTP DEI Leadership Team and several other ICTP projects team members and leaders have advanced the incorporation of equity in ICTP projects infrastructure. These efforts have resulted in the development of a shared vision, goals, and language as well as improved teaming and staffing practices. Efforts have also focused on hiring and onboarding projects team members and interns with skills and experience applying equitable and inclusive practices in implementation support, as well as increasing racial diversity within the team. Although our efforts to advance a shared vision and goals for this work continue to evolve, initial outcomes of this work have been meaningful.

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Explicit funding for further embedding equity within the ICTP projects has resulted in new practice coaching priorities, advancing equity within the ICTP implementation support practice model and related tools and resources, and supporting team and professional development priorities that enable equity-focused support and teaming activities. Examples include

* the expansion of ICTP implementation learning and application resources focused on increasing community member participation within their local Triple P efforts (i.e., see the ICTP Equitable Family Voice Content Framework and related tools and resources in [Appendix E](https://ictp.fpg.unc.edu/template-compendium/appendix-e-catalogue-of-ictp-content-frameworks/));
* improvements to our tool and resource development process to (a) increase accessibility, readability, and usability and (b) improve our engagement of support recipients in the design and development of tools and resources; and
* regular data-driven reviews and reflections on our implementation support activities to inform improvements and practice approaches that better integrate equity considerations.