

**MINNESOTA  
PRESCHOOL  
DEVELOPMENT  
GRANT**

**Equity  
Focused  
Review  
Brief**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# THE OPPORTUNITY

Minnesota is focused on supporting families with young children who are experiencing racial, geographic, and economic inequities so children can be born healthy and thrive within their families and community. Through the Minnesota Preschool Development Grant (MN PDG), a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Children’s Cabinet, the state is working to align care and education systems to meet the needs of all children and families.

The grant enables the state to fulfill its mission of partnering with families, communities, and government agencies to mitigate the impacts of structural racism and inequities and create a more equitable system that supports families who are expecting and parenting young children. Addressing inequities is key, as data show that Minnesota holds one of the lowest ratings nationally in terms of racial equity in employment and economic outcomes, especially impacting Black and Indigenous people. Systemic racial and economic injustice within state systems has contributed to poor child outcomes—including some of the lowest literacy rates in the country—for Minnesota children who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).<sup>1</sup>



## **The Preschool Development Grant seeks to address and reduce these inequities by CENTERING EQUITY AND EQUITABLE PRACTICES through an approach to systems change that supports whole family and community solutions.**

To that end, the state has partnered with School Readiness Consulting to develop an equity-focused rubric and process for reviewing PDG-related documents. The equity rubric, designed under the Minnesota PDG Guiding Principles, assesses indicators of best practices for advancing equity within each document that focus on the experiences of children, families, and communities facing racial, geographic, and economic inequities.

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<sup>1</sup> Leibert, A. (2021). How the deck is stacked: Racial and ethnic disparities in earnings following high school graduation in Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. <https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/march-2021/deck-is-stacked.jsp>

# ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The goal of this brief is to highlight key findings of an equity-focused review of documents and other materials shared by Minnesota Preschool Development Grant staff. The goal of the document review is to understand how a commitment to equity is prioritized and made explicit in the work of the PDG and how inequities experienced by Minnesota families are being addressed. We hope the MN PDG grant and partners can use this information as they continue to pursue a more equitable early childhood system benefitting children and families across the state.











# KEY AREAS OF INTEREST

The rubric has been designed with the guidance of a set of key questions that consider the depth of the equity content and focus found in the data and documents provided by the MN PDG team and community partners. These are the key questions we sought to answer:

KEY AREA OF INTEREST	KEY QUESTIONS
<p><b>LANGUAGE USE</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What language is being used to represent/include various populations throughout the state? Is this language consistent with guidance provided by Minnesota’s Community Resiliency and Recovery Work Group? Is there language that consistently illustrates equity-related concepts?</li> </ul>
<p><b>NARRATIVE APPROACH</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is context provided to highlight strengths and assets of specific communities? Does the description, proposal or program being described explain disparities within communities or a specific population without placing blame on the community or population?</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are strategies to address racial, linguistic, and other structural inequities described in the document? Were the strategies led and developed by communities, with multiple community actors involved, including those who will be most impacted by the program or policy? Are the strategies proposed to address inequities focused on changes to systems and structures that reinforce inequities?</li> </ul>
<p><b>DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the document represent or overrepresent the populations of focus, and in ways that are non-stereotypical? Is the document accessible for those who are most comfortable reading in a language other than English or those who have lower levels of literacy? Is the document accessible to those individuals who have a disability?</li> </ul>

# THE DOCUMENTS

The Minnesota PDG staff shared the documents listed below with School Readiness Consulting to be included in the Minnesota PDG equity-focused document review.

- PDG activity planning documents
- PDG documents made available for the public
- Monthly memos
- Meeting notes
- Community Solutions grantee documents (evaluation plans, logic models, and progress reports)
- Documents from Hubs and Communities of Practice
- Grant reports and presentations
- Documents distributed to the public



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### TAKEAWAY 1

The majority of documents demonstrate an awareness and knowledge of equity-related concepts and use people-first, culturally sensitive language.

AROUND

84%

of all documents reviewed include some level of equity-related concepts and language.

This is often evident through authors' use of equity-related terms and phrases, such as *equity*, *culturally responsive* or *proficient*, *inclusive*, *structural inequity*, *health disparity*, and *cultural competencies*. An awareness of equity-related concepts is also shown through language and messaging that emphasizes partnerships with families and communities rather than language that demonstrates paternalistic messaging or approaches. For example, a Help Me Connect

planning document emphasizes the partnership between families and communities by highlighting that the platform, which was created based on suggestions from parents and providers, encourages continuous input from the community for improvements.

Most of the documents reviewed demonstrate at least some use of culturally sensitive and people-first language, such as the use of the terms *people with disabilities* or *people living in poverty* rather than the terms *disabled* or *impoverished people*. Documents also consistently capitalize terms used to describe communities, such as *Black* and *Latinx*. Additionally, documents that mention communities and groups from Indigenous populations often use specific tribal affiliations or terms such as *Tribal Nations* or *Indigenous*.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The use of culturally sensitive and people-first language shows awareness and respect for the mentioned community, especially those that historically have been erased or mis-represented in research and literature. The authors of these documents demonstrate efforts to utilize currently accepted terminology to represent specific demographic groups and communities in Minnesota. Furthermore, the explicit mention of equity throughout many of the documents demonstrates the state's intention to integrate a commitment to equity across the full range of PDG and other initiatives.

## TAKEAWAY 2

Documents are limited in their description of communities' strengths and assets.

52%

of all documents reviewed lack information or context about the strengths and assets of the specific communities and populations discussed.

However, some of the documents reviewed include some level of a strength-based narrative approach. Documents that include evidence of a strength-based narrative identify strengths within the community and provide some context about the disparities that exist and reasons for these disparities. For instance, in an evaluation plan from a Community Solutions grantee, the authors feature the benefits of an Ojibwe language and immersion program and focus on the impact of immersing infants and toddlers in their own language and culture rather than the white dominant culture being imposed on them. The authors also describe the ways in which Western approaches to evaluation have been used to oppress Indigenous peoples and the implications of that history for developing an evaluation of the work in the Ojibwe community for this grant.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> According to the equity-focused rubric, a demonstration of strength-based narratives indicates that documents provide context that highlights strengths and assets of the referenced communities and populations, explains why disparities may exist within communities or a specific population, and/or describes these disparities without placing blame on the community or population.



Many of the documents in the sample that do not include strength-based narratives share characteristics such as containing limited written content, following a pre-set template or being written for an internal rather than external audience. Some examples of these types of documents within the reviewed sample include:

- Report templates completed by grantees such as progress reports from Community Solutions grantees
- Memos or meeting notes that are used to brief internal teams, such as the PDG monthly memos
- Presentations and/or PowerPoint slides that outline key points
- Outreach documents that are solely used to present an opportunity or resource to the public, such as a call to join the Communities of Practice
- Reports that objectively report survey results

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The use of a strength-based framework allows the audience to understand a community through its contributions rather than through its deficits and to learn about the community's history, practices, and accomplishments. When discussing the challenges that communities face, it is important to lend voice to how the community has historically and continuously experienced inequities imposed by colonialism and systemic racism rather than plainly stating the disparate outcomes.

## TAKEAWAY 3

**Most documents provide some context to demonstrate or propose solutions that engage communities and/or are designed in partnership with communities, particularly documents developed by Community Solutions (CS) grantees.**

**88%**

**of documents provide some context to demonstrate or propose solutions that engage communities**

CS grantee documents often highlight how grantees intend to seek out the leadership and expertise of targeted communities and families to inform decision-making in their communities. For example, in a logic model developed by one CS grantee, the grantee illustrates community participatory equity solutions that rely on the knowledge and experiences of community leaders, elders, and knowledge keepers. This approach seeks to address inequities by developing tools that benefit the community as a whole. The CS grantee notes that listening and engaging with elders and community members has allowed the grantee to adequately identify the resources and supports needed to make equitable changes in the community. In this example, the grantee seeks out solutions that are in partnership with community members to ensure equitable and accessible solutions are designed for and led by the target community.

Community-led and equity-focused solutions also show up in some of the MN PDG grant-specific documents (e.g., the Preschool Development Grant mid-grant report and the MN PDG fourth-quarter report). These documents include context about policies that have been led by community efforts and often explicitly name and acknowledge community organizations. The documents also describe how various grant efforts were collaborating with community organizations or leaders to make systems-level changes in communities.



It should be noted that, unlike many of the other documents, the CS grantee documents include quarterly and monthly progress reports, evaluation plans, and logic models and are typically focused on a targeted community or population with which grantees are in partnership. With this intentional focus on community partnerships, evaluation, and outcomes, CS grantee documents demonstrate clear pathways for highlighting community-led solutions that are not as evident in some other document types.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Leveraging community-developed solutions allows systems leaders to recognize the efforts of communities to protect, defend, and sustain their identity and existence despite a history of systemic inequities. Focusing on community-led solutions also ensures that those closest to the issues and inequities are empowered and seen as trusted partners and experts.



## TAKEAWAY 4

Existing documents tend to lack visual representation of the communities that are the focus of the document and typically do not meet the linguistic and accessibility needs of all members of the community.

AROUND

84%

of the documents reviewed do not include images or visuals to represent the communities and populations that are the focus of the document.

Of the documents that do use images and/or visuals to represent the identified populations, all but two of the documents are MN PDG-specific documents. One example is the PDG mid-grant report presentation deck, which incorporates several visual representations of people of differing skin tones and cultures. Another example is an overview document that describes the Preschool Development Grant's approach to collaboration with Indigenous populations and Tribal Nations. This document includes images to represent the community of focus in a variety of family settings.

Few documents ensure that people who primarily speak languages other than English can access the information contained in the documents. For example, the Preschool Development Grant mid-grant report presentation deck is available only in English. However, the document references a recording that is available on the MN PDG website.



The video recording of the presentation includes an option for the audience to view with Spanish-translated captions and an option to read the transcript of the presentation. This access, however, is still limited to those who can access the presentation through the website and those with high enough literacy levels to utilize captions. Additionally, no documents in the sample provide resources or links to other formats for audiences to access the information in the documents, such as options to view information in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

As noted in the MN PDG Guiding Principles, experiencing feelings of belonging and inclusion can determine how community members interact with the initiatives and resources available in their communities and are correlated with opportunities for educational and economic success. Providing accurate representation and access to information to all members of the community can reinforce a sense of belonging and allow individuals to feel seen and valued.



# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

## TAKEAWAY 1

The majority of documents demonstrate an awareness and knowledge of equity-related concepts and use people-first, culturally sensitive language.



### AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- The grant should continue to emphasize and support consistent messaging around equity and inclusion and their importance for expecting and parenting families in all Minnesota communities, as well as expand on its use of guidance provided by Minnesota’s Community Resiliency and Recovery Work Group.
- There is also an opportunity to create space for ongoing dialogue and professional learning to ensure consistency across agencies/initiatives, as well as responsiveness to changes in populations and how language is used to discuss specific populations across the state. For example, documents such as *Communicating with a Racial Equity Lens* can be beneficial for ensuring consistency across agencies. Such resources could also be disseminated more broadly to other key stakeholders in the grant, such as grantees.

## TAKEAWAY 2

Documents are limited in their description of communities’ strengths and assets.

### AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- The state has the opportunity to commit to, model, and provide accountability to its partners to ensure strength-based narratives and communications surrounding historically marginalized communities. This allows audiences to see a more equitable and realistic perspective, and alternatives to the kinds of “top-down” solutions that often fail and further disenfranchise communities.
- Continuous professional learning opportunities focused on community partnership, cultural awareness, and anti-bias can support grant participants and community and state leadership in identifying opportunities to use strength-based frameworks to discuss and collaborate with specific communities.



## TAKEAWAY 3

The majority of the documents developed by Community Solutions grantees demonstrate a focus on community-led and equity-focused solutions in their work within their communities.



### AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- The grant should continue to emphasize and promote opportunities at the state and grantee level to leverage community-led and organized efforts. The grant's demonstration of this focus highlights and reiterates the importance of supporting and resourcing people from the communities who are closest to the issues and have the most nuanced perspectives on what is working and what is potentially causing challenges within the community. Historically, these are the same voices that have been overlooked and underrepresented in conversations about solutions and including them is a way of redistributing power and resources.



## TAKEAWAY 4

Existing documents tend to lack visual representation of the communities that are the focus of the document and typically do not meet the linguistic and accessibility needs of all members of the community.

### AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Since more examples of visual representation can be observed in PDG-specific documents, such as external communication and public documents available via the grant website, the grant can serve as a model to grantees and other grant partners in offering visual representation of the varying communities in Minnesota. And, as a broader effort, the grant should create clear guidance for state and community level partners surrounding visual representation in documents. This could potentially extend beyond PDG related efforts and exist as a state-wide commitment for how documents are presented.
- Building on the MN PDG's focus and guiding principle concerning belonging and inclusion, grant leadership can utilize resources such as the ADA guidelines to support development of documents that are accessible to those who have differing abilities.



The Minnesota Preschool Development Grant’s commitment to equity is demonstrated through ongoing efforts to engage communities in decision-making, to use human-centered approaches to increase access to resources, and to fulfill a mission to eliminate structural inequities and create an equitable system for families who are expecting and parenting children. As the grant continues into subsequent years, the findings of this equity-focused review can be used as a starting point to continuously improve the implementation of grant activities and ensure all young children in Minnesota are able to thrive in their families and communities.

# APPENDIX A

## Equity-Focused Review Process

### Training/Reliability

Following the development of the rubric, a team of reviewers participated in training and alignment workshops for two days to familiarize themselves with the rubric terminology, build a firm understanding of the rating system, and ensure assessment alignment across reviewers.

### Document Collection

The documents included in this review were shared with the analysis team at School Readiness Consulting via an electronic and secure shared folder. The analysis team screened, reviewed, and organized all shared documents and determined whether documents would be included in the review. Documents included in this review were tracked internally by the analysis team using identification numbers to track review progress and to keep notes on relevant documents.

### Review Process

The analysis team used the equity-focused document review rubric (which can be found in Appendix B) to review and rate all documents. Reviewers submitted results of their review through an online form, and those data populated a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was later used to perform an overview analysis of the document review data. The analysis team met periodically throughout the review window to discuss findings and troubleshoot. A small number of documents were reviewed by two team members, or double-coded, to ensure inter-rater reliability.



## Equity-Focused Document Review Rubric

The purpose of the equity-focused review rubric is to provide a lens with which to examine multiple sources of qualitative data (documents) with a focus on equity. For the evaluation of the Preschool Development Grant, the SRC team conducted an equity-focused review of data and documents to understand the extent to which equity is being centered in PDG activities and how inequities experienced by Minnesota families are being discussed and addressed in documents such as written plans, proposals, and reports. Categorized by the four key inquiry areas, the analysis team used the following prompts to review and rate each document:<sup>3</sup>

- Currently accepted, people-first, and culturally sensitive terminology is consistently used to address or reference specific demographics.
- Language illustrating equity-related concepts is included.
- The document provides context to highlight strengths and assets of specific communities, to explain disparities within communities or a specific population without placing blame on the community or population, and to explain why described disparities may exist.
- The document proposes community-led, equity-focused, systemic solutions.
- The document uses images and visuals that represent the populations in the identified community or communities.
- The document ensures accessibility for individuals who use multiple languages.
- The document ensures accessibility for individuals who have disabilities that would impact access.

To evaluate how each indicator and prompt shows up within each reviewed document, School Readiness Consulting created a three-point, nonnumeric rating system, supported by defining statements used as indicators.

**Ample Evidence:** indicates the document meets and/or exceeds the equity standard, by displaying all the evidence listed below each key question or more than enough evidence

**Partial Evidence:** indicates the document meets the equity standard, by displaying half or less of the evidence listed below each key question

**No Evidence:** indicates the document does not meet the equity standard, by lacking evidence or displaying none of the evidence listed below each key question

<sup>3</sup> In the equity-focused document review rubric, each prompt is followed by a list of indicators that describe and provide examples of what documents can include to meet the criteria.



