

Equity Action Plan Digest: Department of Commerce

Summarized by Travis Reginal

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Department of Commerce's equity action plan is available at <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/DOC-Equity-Action-Plan.pdf> (PDF).

Overview

What <i>problem</i> is the agency trying to solve?	Some communities are not able to fully participate in the 21st-century economy (p.2).
Priority groups	Underserved communities
Historic harm mentioned?	No
Partners in implementation	Hispanic-serving institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions
Equity defined as	"Create the conditions for economic growth and opportunity for all communities" (p. 2)

Pillars and Principles of Equity

Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers	Women and people of color are often left behind (p. 2)
Impact goals	Close the digital divide (p. 2), advance racial equity through community development funds (p. 2), grow minority business enterprises (p. 2), strengthen small businesses (p. 3), increase access to US patent system (p. 3), make data more accessible (p. 3)
Actions and activities	Collaborate on Census Bureau's Data for Equity website with Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, and Federal Emergency Management Agency (p. 5)
Accountability measures and approaches	Submitting quarterly reports to the secretary of commerce; obtaining feedback from communities of color (p. 8); sharing progress on goals online (p. 13)

Note: For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf.

Types of Equity and Related Activities

Procedural (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Investing community-development dollars for racial equity and underserved communities (p. 2); allowing minority business enterprises to access the Department of the Treasury’s State Small Business Credit Initiative (p. 11); Minority Business Development Agency will support procurement with minority business enterprises (p. 11); offering one-on-one counseling and technical assistance to minority business enterprises (p. 11); using inclusive language to reach multilingual people, focusing on underserved Spanish-speaking communities (p. 18)
Distributional (example: creating new procurement program)	Additional \$2 billion to support the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (p. 7); US Patent and Trademark Office pilot program for national organizations (p. 14); Stakeholder Application Readiness Training program (p. 14); US Patent and Trademark Office paid internship program for high-school and college students (p. 14); Expanding Innovation Portal Program and Expanding Innovation Laptop Program (p. 15); Pro Bono Clearinghouse Program (p. 15); creation of Community Engagement Program (p. 17)
Structural (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Creating the Minority Business Development Agency through the Minority Business Development Act (p. 2); launched the Commerce Equity Council (p. 3); launched the Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives (p. 4); launched the Council for Inclusive Innovation (p. 4); economic impact analysis (p. 8)

Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

- number of small businesses in underserved communities assisted (p. 3)
- number of homes or locations passed by broadband, number of households receiving subsidized or free broadband services, number of training hours provided (p. 8)
- number of firms served and number of firms successfully applying for State Small Business Credit Initiative program (p. 12)
- dollars awarded related to capital and contracts, firms reporting an increase in profit and number of jobs created and retained (p. 12)
- number of organizations that agree to collaborate with engagement efforts, level of event participation (p. 15)
- number of students from historically underserved communities who express newfound interest in pursuing careers in intellectual property or becoming inventors (p. 15)
- number of patent applicants who represent themselves and complete application process (p. 15)
- number of preloaded laptops distributed (p. 16)
- number of educational programs initiated across historically underserved communities and increases in number of attendees (p. 16)
- increases in practitioner participation (p. 16)
- percentage of participants from historically underserved communities with the citizen science program, number of Weather Ready National Ambassadors focused on service equity, number of injuries and/or fatalities in historically underserved and socially vulnerable communities after hazardous weather events (p. 18)
- number of new partnerships as part of Joint Venture Partnership Program that help drive participation among underserved communities (p. 19)
- number of export control inquiries received after production of bilingual supporting documents (p. 19)

Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Closing the digital divide (p. 2); internal advancement of equity (p. 3); broadband connectivity programs (pp. 4, 7); Census Bureau providing critical disaggregated data for equity analyses at individual and community levels (p. 5); targeting resources to underserved communities (p. 7); program accessibility (p. 18); third-party evaluation (p. 10); supporting minority business enterprises (p. 11); several metrics for evaluating progress (pp. 12, 15); reinstating the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships for community outreach (p. 17)
Areas for future investment and growth	Acknowledgment of the Department of Commerce’s role in historical and current inequities; ensuring data collection allows for the ability to disaggregate key information by race and ethnicity; working with multilingual populations (p. 17); clarifying the role of the Census Bureau in prior data collection, distribution, analysis, and reporting that used harmful language, misreported or erased identities, and the role for Census Bureau in collaborating with communities to do more accurate collection and reporting
