

Equity Action Plan Digest: Department of the Interior

Summarized by Madeline Baxter

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 the Interior's equity action plan is available at <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/eo13985-02-10-2022-doi-equity-action-plan-final-with-cover.pdf> (PDF).

Overview

What problem is the agency trying to solve?	Improve access to equity-related data, public lands, waters (p. 2); access to and awareness of discretionary grant funding; address structural barriers within DOI processes that hinder participation
Priority groups	People with disabilities (pp. 18–20); Tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (p. 1)
Historic harm mentioned?	Yes
Partners in implementation	Department of Energy (p. 2), Department of Health and Human Services (p. 7), Department of Transportation (p. 19); Office of Federal Procurement Policy (p. 2); outfitters/concessions/commercial services (pp. 19–20); Small Business Administration (p. 8)
Equity defined as	"Equitable treatment of all individuals, regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), religion, or disability" (p. 1)

Pillars and Principles of Equity

Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers	Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Initiative (p. 5); Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative (p. 6); lack of data for identifying equity barriers (p. 8); difficult to locate contracting opportunities, vendor communication issues, process complexity (pp. 10–11, 15); limited capacity (p. 15)
Impact goals	Values mapping in regional ecosystems (p. 4); improving equity-related data collection (p. 7); improving access to and awareness of tribal discretionary grant funding (p. 14)
Actions and activities	Tribal consultation (p. 4); modify contract writing system to collect quantitative vendor information, expand collection of demographic/geographic data on visitors (p. 8); incorporate additional equity considerations into the existing departmentwide data strategy (p. 9); hire equity analytics experts (p. 9); addressing structural barriers within the department that hinder underserved communities' participation (p. 10); listening sessions, surveys, crowd-sourcing (p. 11); expand digital services and develop small business toolkit (pp. 12–13)
Accountability measures and approaches	Chief diversity officer, in collaboration with the department's chief data officer and the DOI Data Governance Board, leads data strategy and submits progress reports to the DOI's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Council (p. 9); develop Indian Small Business Economic Enterprise procurement goals (p. 11); Contracting Equity Working Group will provide progress reports to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Council

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)	Collecting customer feedback (p. 8); modifying contract writing system to collect quantitative vendor information, expand demographic/geographic data collection on visitors (p. 8); developing official database/mapping tool for tribal name variation (p. 9); changes to acquisition processes and policies (p. 14); improving access to and awareness of discretionary grant funding (p. 14); providing feedback (upon request) when grants are not awarded (p. 16); partner with tribal colleges and universities to provide technical assistance (p. 16); increase access to public lands (p. 18)
Distributional (example: creating new procurement program)	Listening sessions with 1,700 participants (p. 2); Justice40 Initiative (p. 6)
Structural (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Buy Indian Act implementation (p. 3); leadership interviews and workforce focus groups (p. 3); establishment of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Council (p. 4); hiring 2-3 experts in equity analytics (p. 9); creating a team of subject-matter experts to develop innovative acquisition strategies (p. 11); DOI-specific acquisition data visualization (p. 12); expanding digital services and developing small-business toolkit (pp. 12-13); satisfaction survey on DOI Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (p. 14); increasing grants staff (p. 16); creating Contracting Equity Working Group (p. 14) and Recreation Equity Working Group (p. 21); internal programs to provide free or low-expense disability-inclusive facilitated experiences to outdoor recreation activities (p. 20)

Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ catalogue and track identified equity barriers (p. 9) ■ Buy Indian contracting performance and workforce awareness (p. 13) ■ Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization’s small-business website traffic, use of small-business counseling and education toolkit (p. 13) ■ “use of Indian-owned businesses as subcontractors” (p. 14) ■ further evaluation of opportunities to enhance grants program systems and structural design (p. 16) ■ new tracking of unmet needs of tribes applying for discretionary grants alongside number and amounts of tribal grants awarded (p. 17) ■ outcomes with tribal universities (p. 17) ■ Land and Water Conservation Fund grant awards to underserved communities; number of partnerships with outfitters, concessions, and commercial services; number of partnerships with nonprofits to provide free or low-expense and disability-inclusive facilitated-experience programs (p. 20)

Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Quantitative and qualitative data analyzed to inform goals; acknowledges how lack of demographic/intersectional data hinders department’s ability to address equity barriers; equity action plan is aligned with draft strategic plan; equity action plan highlights plans to coordinate improvements with other federal agencies
Areas for future investment and growth	Include more diverse mechanisms in engagement process (e.g., expanding non-internet-based interventions, improving language access)