

## Equity Action Plan Digest: Department of Education

*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 Education's equity action plan is available at <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/equity/2022-equity-plan.pdf> (PDF).

### Overview

<b>What problem is the agency trying to solve?</b>	Lack of access to financial aid programs and services (pp. 5–14)
<b>Priority groups</b>	Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American people; LGBTQI+ people; children with disabilities; rural communities
<b>Historic harm mentioned?</b>	Yes (p. 10)
<b>Partners in implementation</b>	BIPOC voices (no specifics) (p. 4), other federal agencies (p. 9), schools and districts (pp. 5–14), states (pp. 5–14)
<b>Equity defined as</b>	Not defined beyond executive order

### Pillars and Principles of Equity

<b>Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers</b>	Black and Hispanic adults face tougher challenges when seeking access to a college education (p. 5); there are inequities in postsecondary access, completion, and affordability (p. 5); selectivity/exclusivity has been put first (p. 10); barriers to accessing technology for instruction and learning (p. 14)
<b>Impact goals</b>	Improve access to loans (p. 5) and Pell grant funds (p. 8); increase funding and technical assistance to minority-serving institutions (p. 9); provide technical assistance to states and school districts (pp. 9–13); ensure the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funding is meeting students' needs (pp. 11–14); hold quarterly equity roundtable discussions with representatives of underserved communities (p. 16)
<b>Actions and activities</b>	Implementation of 2020 Free Application for Federal Student Aid Simplification Act (p. 7); Office of Federal Student Aid collecting race, ethnicity, and gender data on applicants (p. 7); deadlines given for restoring access to Pell grants for incarcerated students (p. 8); Office of Civil Rights conducting civil rights data collection (p. 14); improving civil rights data collection (p. 14), administration of civil rights data collection to identify inequities in schools, and procurement process (p. 15); developing a tracking system to measure peer reviewer experience and diversity for research grants (p. 18)
<b>Accountability measures and approaches</b>	Tracking filing statistics for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (p. 8)

**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](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf).

## Types of Equity and Related Activities

<b>Procedural</b> (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Increase funding and technical assistance to minority-serving institutions (p. 9); social media messaging to highlight values of different types of postsecondary programs (p. 11); required engagement of diverse groups in state educational agencies' plan creation (p. 12); state educational agencies and local educational agencies completing public plans for their use of funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (p. 12); improving civil rights data collection via Office of Civil Rights (p. 14); procurement: adding equity-based guidelines, minimizing barriers (p. 16)
<b>Distributional</b> (example: creating new procurement program)	Refocusing financial investments on underresourced public institutions (p. 5); new technical assistance strategy including webinars and continuous outreach (p. 13); technical assistance to states and districts (p. 13); launched American Rescue Plan's Partnership, Assistance, Transformation, and Heightened Support resource to support state self-assessments of American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds (p. 13)
<b>Structural</b> (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Collecting race, ethnicity, and gender data on filings for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (p. 7); implementation of 2020 Free Application for Federal Student Aid Simplification Act (p. 7); Pell Grant expansion to incarcerated students (p. 8); reinstated Office of Enforcement of Federal Student Aid (p. 10); Office of Civil Rights tracking race, ethnicity, and sex data for teachers (p. 15); increase diversity in peer-review panels for grants (p. 17); increase staff awareness of small business contracting (p. 17)

## Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Free Application for Federal Student Aid filing rates, disaggregated by demographics (p. 8)</li> <li>■ key performance indicators to track the equitable impact of American Rescue Plan funding for K-12 Students (p. 11)</li> <li>■ building peer reviewer tracking system (with cross-agency insight) (p. 18)</li> <li>■ building equity dashboard for grantmaking processes (p. 19)</li> </ul>
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## Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Using disaggregated data to inform decisions (pp. 7, 14); Pell Grant expansion (p. 8); incorporating actions through agency strategic plan and agency priority goals (p. 11); updated agency priority goals develop internal timelines, identify stakeholders, and quantify success metrics
Areas for future investment and growth	Acknowledgment of the Department of Education's role in historical and current inequities; prioritization or identification of partners; capacity-building strategies; utilizing the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity to infuse equity into the work of accrediting bodies for higher education; engagement with Education Research Grants Program run by the Institute of Education Sciences; ensuring data collection allows for the ability to disaggregate key outcomes data