



An Introduction to Administrative Equity

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What is Administrative Equity?

Administrative Equity includes the small and large steps taken to reduce or eliminate barriers to accessing information and financial resources and ensuring that organizational structures and practices support inclusion, belonging, and equitable opportunity for people who hold marginalized identities in the workplace. These steps serve to make administrative systems more just and responsive to employees and community, while also fortifying the mission and impact of agencies and organizations. We firmly believe that by addressing administrative equity we will bring our communities closer to the broader vision of health equity through intentional efforts to bolster communities with greater autonomy, decision-making power, and access to financial resources, and expanding diversity in the workplace.

There has been a strong and necessary push across health fields to take actions toward justice and equity. As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, health equity “is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Achieving this requires focused and ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices; overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare; and eliminate preventable health disparities¹.” To fulfill this vision, state and local public health agencies and other health organizations aim to partner with communities, community members, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as well as ensure they recruit and retain their own staff from within these communities.

In partnerships, due to factors like administrative requirements, political power, or lack of required infrastructure, larger organizations tend to take on the bulk of the work and the bulk of the funding and resources. This leaves engaged communities and CBOs to cobble together several funding sources to do the work they want to do, often leaving them over-worked, under-compensated, and under-valued as solution-builders who are best suited to identify and respond to their communities’ needs. Nonprofit AF, a leading nonprofit blog, describes this as “[Trickle-Down Community Engagement \(TDCE\)](#).” This is the assertion that nonprofits often bypass those who are most affected by issues. Further, it is often larger organizations that are funded to tackle community issues, as they are the ones who have the ability to cultivate and leverage relationships with funders and decision-makers.

Oftentimes, this leads to communities, CBOs, and consultants from underrepresented groups undertaking this work for minimal or no payment because they are among those who are directly affected by the outcomes of health inequities.



¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/healthequity/index.html>

As local and state public health agencies and other employers take necessary steps to engage with communities and CBOs, they need to ensure their own administrative structures and systems are updated or overhauled with equity outcomes in mind. In addition to updating and changing their own administrative practices, agencies can explore how these practices help build relationships and center collaboration with communities and CBOs in ways that build collective power to challenge the underfunded, undervalued need for public health.

In order to address these inequities, this document will provide guidance for local and state public health agencies to work toward advancing administrative equity.

Purpose

The purpose of this Introduction is to share the framework of administrative equity and support local and state public health agencies in reflecting where reform is needed to help reduce barriers to access in finance, contracts and procurements, and human resources. While these resources are centered around the needs of local and state public health departments, the long-term vision of this project is to re-imagine ‘business as usual’ and consider innovations in administrative practices that place equity and justice at the center of systems design and decision-making.

The Model: Three Focus Areas

This resource is an introduction to practices, procedures, and considerations for public health organizations to implement equitable administrative operations. The resources and examples shared within this Introduction are not exhaustive - rather, they set the stage for identifying additional means of infusing equity into organizational design and decision-making. Furthermore, the focus areas are only a few of the major areas of consideration for administrative equity. These focus areas provide specific examples and actions for agencies to consider as they structure their work and the systems to meet current and future needs.

The three focus areas include:



1. Ensure the field of public health recruits and retains a diverse workforce through equitable **Human Resource** practices, policies, and procedures.



2. Build and sustain equitable partnerships across communities through clear and accessible **Procurement and Contracting** practices and processes.



3. Provide clear and transparent **Finance** support and engagement including structures and systems that are open and engaging to partners and staff.

Each of the three focus areas will provide innovations, best practices and examples that center around the following 4 Ps, through which administrative equity is practiced:

- **Philosophies**
- **Policies**
- **Processes***
- **Procedures***

*Processes and Procedures may sometimes be combined.

Within each of the 4 Ps, examples and/or descriptions are provided to capture how state and local agencies can review their administrative work with an equity lens.



- ▶ **Philosophies:** Are conceptual ideas and considerations that organizations can use to ensure policies, processes and procedures are in line with the values, mission and structure of the organization.
- ▶ **Policy:** List of rules that are adopted by an organization that govern the practices, processes, and procedures. Policies are typically high level and do not provide detail on how the policy is carried out. Policies without processes and procedures can be open to interpretation and therefore can be inequitable.
- ▶ **Processes:** Are a sequence or layers of procedures that consists of materials and methods that are used all together to deliver work. Processes can be simple, including minimal steps and personal resources and processes can also be complex, bringing together multiple procedures and policies.
- ▶ **Procedures:** Are a series of steps documented and taken to achieve a consistent result. Procedures are often used to provide detail and implementation steps for policies.

The 4 Ps are meant as a framework for agencies to consider where they can use an equity lens. It is not meant to be a stepwise process by which organizations start with philosophies and move linearly to policies, processes and procedures. Oftentimes public health agencies exist within a greater governmental (county, territory or state) structure. This structure makes the updating and changing of policies based on equitable philosophies more difficult. These agencies are encouraged to create the equitable philosophies they would like to perform within and consider how they practice that philosophy through the process and procedures under the overarching policies.



Focus Area 1: Human Resources



Strengthen access and minimize barriers to ensure the field of public health recruits and retains a diverse workforce through equitable Human Resource practices, policies, and procedures.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant exit of the public health workforce across the country, reinforcing a need to both attract new and more diverse and qualified applicants to the field as well as retain the talent that exists. There must be a clear understanding of what the field of public health is and what it brings to the health of communities in order to attract and retain new and existing talent.

Data from the 2021 Public Health Workforce Interest and Needs Survey (PH WINS) found that nearly 1/3 of the current workforce was considering leaving in the next year, and that was after significant loss during the pandemic was already realized. In order to curb this potential additional loss and ensure the field attracts diverse talent, state and local public health agencies should assure equitable recruitment, pay, promotion, and development of public health employees.

Examples that support equitable Human Resources within an agency or organization:

Philosophies:

- Include an **Employment Philosophy** in your Employee Handbook that highlights how your agency values employees and how the health of the agency is interconnected with employee engagement.
- Explore guiding frameworks (e.g. [nRhythm's Regenerative Framework](#)) for designing, operating, and resourcing your organization using a holistic, living systems-based approach to improve organizational outcomes and employee well-being.

Policies

- Support authentic community engagement by offering employees **paid time each year to volunteer**.
- Ensure your **Employee Handbook** is both compliant and employee-centered. Adapt policies to reflect the small, but powerful, needs of your team (e.g. 12-week paid parental leave, add domestic partners to bereavement leave, include mental health needs within sick leave, etc.)
- Develop a **Compensation Policy** that conveys an agency's compensation goals to develop an equitable pay plan that reflects mutualism, that is, one of benefit to the employee and to the sustainable viability of the agency.

² PH Wins is released every other year; at this time, the 2023 survey results are not available.



Processes/Procedures

- Provide **Office Hours** to job applicants considering a position with your agency prior to submitting an application. This allows for the hiring manager to answer any questions an applicant may have about the position, agency work culture, and other key criteria they may have when searching for their next job.
- Co-create **Group Agreements** that specify how best to ensure all voices are heard, and normalize speaking up when something harmful happens. Group Agreements can serve as a way to practice an organization's policies, such as an anti-violence policy that states that microaggressions are not tolerated in the workplace
- Co-create team-generated **Agency Values** that reflect the importance of an agency's mission and vision, and are meant to be embraced and lived.
- Build and sustain momentum for becoming an anti-racist/anti-oppressive agency through the practice of **Affinity Groups** for staff based on their racial identity. This is one way to create an intentional, reflective and skillfully facilitated space for employees to put equity into practice.
- Adopt an **Ethical Communication**³ practice that aligns your organizational values with your everyday interactions with partners and colleagues. Ethical communication should promote a healthy culture of clear and direct communication, seeking and providing feedback, and resolving conflict.
- Include **pronouns** in introductions, Zoom screens, email signatures, etc., to promote a welcome and inclusive workplace that values diversity and honors identity.
- Reassess **job announcement templates** to bring intention around educational and experience requirements. Veterans, for example, have a wealth of transferable experience but may not have a traditional public health degree.
- Limit the use of **background checks** unless required for the role (e.g. the position includes work with youth and/or vulnerable populations, and/or fiscal management).
- Utilize resources such as the **action planning tool** in the [Colorado Blueprint for Innovative Public Health Workforce Development](#) providing steps to restore and advance the public health workforce with organization-appropriate strategies.



³ For more information about designing an Ethical Communication practice for your agency, please contact TrailheadHR@Trailhead.Institute.

Focus Area 2: Procurement and Contracting



Build and sustain equitable partnerships across communities through clear and accessible Procurement and Contracting practices and processes.

While funders recognize the importance of directly supporting communities and CBOs, long-standing institutional expectations initially designed for larger governmental or academic organizations can serve as significant barriers to supporting community-funded efforts. These expectations often fall within the processes to select funded organizations (procurement) and determine how the funds will flow and the relationship will be managed (contracts).

The processes and requirements behind procurement and contracting have historically been steeped in bias based on ability to write a good proposal and have legal representation to negotiate. The intention of this focus area is to provide tools and ideas around naming the historic bias and providing ways to address them at state and local public health agencies.

Examples that build and sustain equitable partnership through accessible procurement and contracting:

Philosophies:

- Philosophy on **Procurement and Regranting**: Outline the values and goals for equitable procurement and regranting, including a commitment to the blend of compliance and funder requirements while also building in nimble responsiveness to the evolving needs of the community.
- Discuss your agency's role in **holding funders accountable** to ensure that your community partners are able to engage in funding decisions that affect them.
- As an agency who passes through or administers funds, utilize **Trust-Based Philanthropy principles** to guide or inform your funding processes to ensure equitable engagement with communities and fund recipients.

Policies

- A **Gift Acceptance Policy** that is in alignment with your organizational and agency values provides guidance on the type of gifts, donations, and grants that can be received. Inform staff, board, and other key stakeholders about critical issues associated with certain types of gifts, grants and donations. This can diversify and educate both your staff and your donor base, and make resources more accessible.
- A **Healthy Meetings Policy** highlights the physical and mental health of participants while simultaneously prioritizes support for minority, veteran, and female-owned business in food procurement for meetings and events.
- A **Procurement Policy** provides an understanding of how an agency approaches procurement and ensures clear standards so that exceptions to the rule or preferential treatment are not supported.



Processes/Procedures

- Design a **Regranting Contract Procurement Procedure** that includes the start-to-finish steps of the regranting process, including development and dissemination of RFP, recruitment and training of independent reviewers, facilitating the development of a slate, and contracting and monitoring subawardees through close communications with the prime funder.
- Provide **Office Hours** to contractors considering work with your agency prior to submitting their RFP.
- Clarify **Intellectual Property Contract Language** options when the standard intellectual property language is not sufficient for the agreement. This allows some flexibility with how the rights of information are managed with partners and contractors. This tool provides a lot of freedom for entities to determine how work done collaboratively is framed and disseminated to stakeholders.
- For grant/award reviewers, have a clear process for **Disclosure of Conflicts**. This guards against preferential treatment and ensures that entities' privacy and information is kept confidential.
- An **Application Eligibility Checklist** helps ensure that reviewers' time is respected and protected. It ensures that only eligible entities are being reviewed for awards/grants, such that reviewers are able to dedicate more time to those that are viable for the given opportunity.
- Clarify the distinction between **Independent Contractors vs. Employees**. This tool helps ensure effective and legally compliant decisions are made regarding how people are brought into and working within a project. This is essential to understand the level of autonomy, oversight, and costs associated to engage in work that includes others.
- A template for the **Master Services/ Independent Contractor Agreement** makes it easier to contract and understand the boundaries that are maintained for legal compliance as both a business and a 501c3. The template format provides a clear understanding of what we can and can't customize with a contractor.



Focus Area 3: Finance



Provide clear and transparent Finance support and engagement, including structures and systems that are open and engaging to partners and staff.

How and from where organizations receive funds and how they use that funding once received are two of the clearest ways to determine where the organization's values are practiced. As partners and staff within agencies more fully integrate Administrative Equity practices, a clear and transparent understanding of the revenues and expenditures are key to building trust and ensuring equity in action.

The tools and resources provided in this section will help agencies clarify their financial practices and ensure they align with their equity goals.

Examples that establish clear and transparent finance support and engagement:

Philosophies:

- Create an **Accounts Payable** Through put philosophy for Finance and Program Managers. By taking into consideration the individuals who will be affected by the policy and prioritizing inclusivity, we can strive to create policies and procedures that are as fair and equitable as possible, and takes a nuanced approach to compensating community members in a timely fashion. It is essential to recognize the diverse groups that may be impacted and actively work towards ensuring their representation and involvement in the policy-making process. By promoting inclusivity, we can increase the chances of implementing policies that address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, fostering a more just and inclusive society.
- Honor engagement through a **Community Compensation** philosophy that establishes clear expectations and channels for participant compensation, allowing individuals to make informed decisions about their participation. By reducing the financial burden associated with community engagement, this tool promotes administrative equity and enables broader participation in decision-making. It prioritizes transparency and open communication to establish trust and enhance inclusivity. It also communicates the value of community engagement and fosters inclusivity by providing transparency around payment methods enhancing overall accessibility and promoting administrative equity.

Policies

- Create a **Reserves & Reimbursables** policy. By prioritizing intentional and purposeful resource utilization, this policy outlines an agency's plan for programming continuity even in the face of funding challenges. The policy can reflect strategy for program sustainability, and underscores the importance of managing cash flow to prevent disruptions to programs, employees, and community members, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable decision-making process.
- **Fiscal Policies** help identify the boundaries an agency must maintain to remain in compliance for internal and external audits. While these policies don't typically promote administrative equity as a standalone document, they are necessary to maintain equity in other functional areas within an agency.





Processes/Procedures

- Create an **Accounts Payable Approval Process** to ensure there is adequate review of invoices without delays in payment, and to maintain consistency across different accounts payable.
- Outline a **Methods of Payment** flow, such as an **easy to read** chart, to be used when considering which methods to pay vendors and partners. This tool promotes administrative equity and enables ease of selecting the proper payment method to encourage broader participation to vendors and partners. It prioritizes transparency and open communication to establish trust and enhance inclusivity.
- Build **Open Communication with Finance** by creating a clear guide of who to contact for Financial resources within your agency. Having an easy to access document provides a bridge to the agency's resources, contracts and up to date policies. **Go further:** host regular Finance Drop-In Hours for different audiences (e.g. grantees/subgrantees; community partners; employees) to build trust and transparency in the agency's financial practices.
- Clarify **W-9 Requirements**, in that they are not required for payments under \$600.




Showcase: The 4 Ps in Action

An example from Human Resources

In an ideal scenario, organizations promote equity through policies, processes and procedures that reflect the philosophical commitments. Realistically, we know that philosophies, policies, processes, and procedures are not always clearly identified, and sometimes they may conflict with the desired outcomes of an organization's stated values. Thus, this resource aims to serve as a tool for organizations to reflect on and consider the beliefs, practices, and structures that guide their administrative functions, serving as an opportunity to identify where gaps exist across the 4 Ps, and identify where better alignment is needed to ensure that organizational values are operationalized with equity in mind.

Provided below is an example of an organizational philosophy embodied within Trailhead Institute's Human Resources practice that is supported by policies, processes, and procedures that further equity in the workplace.





Philosophy

Since 2019, Trailhead Institute has utilized [nRhythm's Regenerative Framework](#) as a guiding philosophy for designing and operating as a regenerative organization, which nRhythm defines as, "A living, evolving and naturally functioning organization where abundance and resilience are recurring outcomes of its underlying health." Through this philosophy, Trailhead understands that the health of the organization - and capacity for impact - is intrinsic to the well-being of its members. Therefore, Trailhead continues to evolve policies, processes, and procedures that promote both personal, and interpersonal well-being in the workplace. Examples of these include:

Policies

- **The Employee Handbook.** Conventional Employee Handbooks can prioritize legal liability over readability and usefulness to the Employee, who is expected to confirm receipt and then use the Handbook as needed throughout the course of their employment. As a policy document, the Handbook should clearly outline policies and also reflect an agency's commitment to equity through their policies. Highlighting an agency's Employment Philosophy in the Handbook is an affirmative way to open the Handbook. Review at least every other year with a staff and board committee to reflect legal and agency updates, as state employment laws change regularly. The following are examples of policies that may be included in an Employee Handbook:
 - Include chosen families and pets in a Bereavement Leave policy.
 - Provide time off to vote.
 - Implement an anti-violence policy that explicitly defines microaggressions in the workplace.
 - Provide comprehensive medical, dental, vision, and retirement benefits.
 - Promote the use of paid sick leave for both physical and mental health. Create additional sick leave dedicated to supporting employees during exceptional public health crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Offer a "Floating Holiday" to support all staff in celebrating holidays or periods of significance that are not institutionalized in the United States.



Processes/Procedures

- Actively use an **Ethical Communication** practice that is shared with new employees during on-boarding and is routinely practiced with all staff throughout the year and during the bi-annual reflections (review) period.
- Provide staff with a monthly drop-in space for **“Virtual Support”** to address emergent needs, foster connectedness, and support emotionally intelligent leadership across all roles.
- Co-create agency **Group Agreements** that establish expectations for treating one another and partners with accountability and respect at all times.
- Share **pronouns** in in-person and virtual spaces to promote a culture of inclusivity and belonging.



What's next?

This Introduction invites public health leaders to reflect on opportunities that exist within their agencies to build on and create Administrative Equity within their core functional areas. The following reflection questions can be used to assess where opportunities for improvement exist across the 4 Ps:

1. How can we make it easier to learn about and apply for employment with my agency?
2. How are we gathering input about the applicant's experience?
3. What financial systems, like requiring W-9s, are more open to nuance and revision than we may have initially thought?
4. What administrative barriers or challenges do CBOs experience in their work with you, or within the larger public health system?
5. What processes might help make the contracting process easier and more efficient?
6. What about your work gives you energy? How can you do more of that, and encourage the same of all your employees?
7. What about your work drains your energy? How can you do less of that, and encourage the same of all your employees?
8. What policies, processes, or procedures support employee well-being in the workplace?

This Introductory document was designed to set the framework for administrative equity, with hopes that a next step would include the compilation of 4P examples and resources for Human Resources, Procurement and Contracting, and Finance that reflect the great work and small and large efforts being made by local public health agencies and public health institutes across the country.

Administrative Equity Worksheets

Action Planning Worksheet

In order for public health agencies to take meaningful steps and actions toward administrative equity within their departments, they should take small and large steps to ensure their administrative practices can be equitable. The worksheet provided here will help local public health agencies take those small and large steps. It is encouraged that agencies engage with staff, partners and communities to complete these steps as well as creating the final products.

First you will select which area you will focus your work. Examples include Finance, Contracting, Procurement and Human Resources. Respond to the following questions to help answer these questions. Consider asking your community partners and grantees these questions as well.

AREA OF FOCUS

Where are our administrative systems limiting community access? *Take time to talk with community partners about where they are feeling limited access to your systems and how that limits their ability to engage.*

Where are our partners and community struggling to engage with us? Or what areas or departments do not engage with partners and/or communities directly to receive direct feedback? *Talk with staff and partners about where there is a struggle to engage or where there is tension when engagement happens.*

What are the administrative systems that create barriers to performing our best to support the public's health? *Consider marginalized communities, they have been marginalized by our systems for a long time, what about these systems actually impact their health if not changed?*

Given the responses above, what area would we like to focus? *Select a focus area that is broad enough for systems change and specific enough to experience marked change.*

Draft a problem statement of how this focus area is currently inequitable. Using the information above and feedback from partners, staff and communities determine the who, what, where, when and why of the issues within the focus area and draft that into a problem statement.

PHILOSOPHY

Now that you have selected where you would like to focus and drafted a problem statement, start digging into the root cause of the area you are focusing but asking "Why?" 5 times. Each next "Why?" should be responsive to the answer given in the "Why" above. By the last "Why?", you should be getting into what is the root cause of why this focus area is inequitable.

Problem statement:
Why?
Why?
Why?
Why?
Why?

With this root cause in mind, draft a Philosophy statement for this focus area. *This statement is something we will come back to time and again to ensure our policies, procedures and practices are in line with this philosophy. See examples in the overview document above. You are encouraged to share this philosophy with staff, partners and communities to ensure they agree with it and are able to provide feedback.*

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POLICIES, PROCESSES, PROCEDURES

Once you have a philosophy in place, review your policies, processes and procedure with this philosophy in mind. You are encouraged to talk with your partners, communities and employees to gather input on their experience and how they do or do not align with this philosophy. Select an existing policy, process or procedure and list it below. If you are creating a new policy, process or procedure based on a clear gap, add that into the option below.

With that policy, process or procedure in mind, complete the following table:

<div>Plus (+) (What about this policy/process/ procedure aligns with the philosophy?)</div>	<div>Delta (Δ) (What about this policy/process/ procedure needs to change in order to align with the philosophy? If creating new, what are the unintended consequences?)</div>
---	--

What are we able to change? Taking the items listed in the Delta column above, what is within our organizational control and purpose to change?

What are we not able to change? Consider this critically. Are you truly not able to change this or is this simply ‘how it’s always been done’? Responding with this is how it has always been done is rooted in inequitable systems and should be followed with considerable curiosity.



Ideate

Draft a policy/process/procedure idea. Use the worksheet and the next page to support the drafting. Based on what you are able to change, draft what you would like to put into place. Consider reaching out to staff, partners and communities about the idea as well as talk with other public health agencies about innovative ideas they have done.

Once you have drafted your idea, work through your organizational channels to put the steps and details into place to make it happen!

Policy, Process, Procedure Overview Worksheet

1. Brief Description:

For: [Title of Source Document*]

a. What It's For
b. Who It's For
c. When to Use
d. How to Use (Add clear language about how your agency should enact the policy, process, or procedure being developed or revised. Ensure these instructions provide intentional and actionable guidance for each resource in order to support organizational and operational change).

2. Brief Administrative Equity statement (2-4 sentences): How does this tool help reduce and/or dismantle barriers to access? How can this tool be used to promote administrative equity?

3. References (optional). This may include links to organization websites.

Contact Information

Name:
Title:
Organization:
E-mail Address:

*"Source Document" refers to the specific Philosophy, Policy, Process and/or Procedure.

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Regenerative Design Patterns: <https://www.nrhythm.co/approach>

White Supremacy Culture: <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>

Colorado Blueprint for Innovative Public Health Workforce Development: <https://trailhead.institute/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Trailhead-CO-Blueprint-Report-Final-Web.pdf>

Sample Policies on Values-Aligned Philanthropy, Council on Foundations (audience is foundations for this resource however, the examples are still helpful and can be modified for LPHAs): <https://cof.org/content/sample-policies-values-aligned-philanthropy>

Four Ways to Advance Equity with Strong Gift Acceptance Policies, CCS Fundraising: <https://www.ccsfundraising.com/insights/advance-equity-with-strong-gift-acceptance-policies/>

Broad Sweeping Non-Discrimination Policy, Iowa Community Foundation: <https://www.cfneia.org/who-we-are/about-us/nondiscrimination>

WHO Foundation Gift Acceptance Policy Examples: https://who.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WHOF_Gift_Acceptance_Policy_17-03-21.pdf

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