



Implementing an Equity Lens¹

1. Define equity and differentiate it from equality and diversity.

“An equity focus in policy recognizes the need to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes of students from underserved and underrepresented populations. It is deliberately color-conscious, and seeks specifically to eliminate the widening postsecondary gaps for Native American, African American, and Latino students. It prioritizes institutional accountability rather than student deficits, and monitors the impact of all policy on marginalized groups.”

2. Conduct an equity-minded analysis of postsecondary outcomes and employment statistics and establish an economic and demographic context.

Questions:

- Which populations have the lowest rates of postsecondary attainment historically?
- What are the demographic projections of each racial population in the region?
- What career fields and occupations in the state have strong labor market demand currently? In 5, 10, 15 years? What are the levels of educational attainment required for those jobs? What are the projected shortfalls of adults with those credentials?
- At current rates of educational attainment, will some populations in the region be disproportionately excluded from opportunities in high-wage, high-demand jobs?
- What is the potential return-on-investment – in terms of economic growth, increased tax revenue, and other measures – of increasing postsecondary access and success for underserved populations?

Data sources:

- WICHE, Knocking at the College Door
- Lumina, Stronger Nation
- PolicyLink National Equity Atlas
- Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

3. Identify the equity goal of the Employability Commission.

Proposed: To close the “employability gap” between students based on race/ethnicity and socio-economic status by increasing opportunities for students to build social capital and engage in meaningful work-integrated learning. The “employability gap” is the differences -- in skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and professional success -- between groups, which result in poorer employment and socio-economic outcomes for underserved and underrepresented populations. The “employability gap” can also refer to differing amounts of social capital to which individuals have access.

4. Implement active learning and dedicate conversation and resources to the equity goal.

Potential Activities:

¹ Source: [Equity, Attainment and State Policy](#), Center for Urban Education, University of Southern California, 2017

- Create structured time for group learning around state needs, particularly around analysis and interpretation of disaggregated data
- Seek outside experts to speak and provide guidance on equity challenges
- Convene a taskforce to further develop a plan to close the “employability gap”

5. Identify state or institutional policies or programs that are effective at closing the “employability gap” in order to define and share best practices.

6. Assess recommendations of the Employability Commission according to equity-minded indicators.

Recommendations should:

- Recognize the existence of discriminatory practices
- Treat equity as a comprehensive strategy with broad impact
- Call out institutional and systemic barriers that limit access
- Recognize the growing enrollment of first-generation, low-income students, and students from communities “historically underserved” by higher education

Addressing the Employability Gap: Postsecondary Attainment Rates

Postsecondary Attainment Rates in New England by Race/Ethnicity & Geography, 2015

	State Average	African-American	Hispanic	White	Asian & Pacific Islander	American Indian	Most Populated County	Least Populated County
Connecticut	48.5	31.5	22.8	54.2	72.0	34.7	54.6	33.5
Maine	41.0	25.4	50.1	41.3	55.9	22.9	55.0	29.3
Massachusetts	52.2	33.9	24.1	56.5	65.7	27.7	62.2	48.1 (not including Cape Cod)
New Hampshire	47.5	42.2	30.8	47.3	70.1	17.2	48.0	32.4
Rhode Island	43.8	28.9	20.3	47.2	55.4	23.8	37.6	58.4
Vermont	46.6	59.5	52.2	45.2	52.4	22.9	59.5	27.7

Source: *A Stronger Nation*, Lumina Foundation, 2017

Note: Postsecondary attainment includes a college degree, workforce certificate, industry certification or other high-quality credential beyond high school.

Demographic Trends²:

- Overall, the number of new high school graduates in New England is projected to decline by 14% by 2032.
- The number of white high school graduates is projected to fall by 25%.
- Over that same time period, the number of minority graduates will increase significantly – by 46% among Hispanics, 7% among blacks, 2% among American Indian/Alaska Natives and 37% among Asian/Pacific Islanders.
- For every 10 white students lost, just 4 minority graduates are gained.

Credential Attainment:

- By 2020, 69% of jobs in New England will require some postsecondary education.³
- However, only 47% of New Englanders currently have some postsecondary credential and there is great variance in postsecondary attainment by race/ethnicity, geographic location and income-level.⁴
- African-Americans in New England experience postsecondary attainment rates 10 percentage points lower (37%) than the region's average (47%), while only 33% of Hispanics have some postsecondary credential.⁵
- 53% of New Englanders who live in their state's most populous county have a postsecondary credential while 36% of New Englanders who live in their state's least populated county do.⁶
- Nationally, among students in the bottom socioeconomic quartile, 15% had earned a bachelor's degree within eight years of their expected high school graduation, compared with 22% in the second quartile, 37% in the third quartile, and 60% in the top quartile.⁷

² *Knocking at the College Door*, WICHE, 2016

³ *Recovery, Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2010*, Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, 2014.

⁴ *A Stronger Nation*, Lumina Foundation, 2017

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the U.S.*, AAC&U, 2016

Conclusion:

- For our region to keep pace with economic growth and employer needs and to increase the wellbeing of New Englanders, underrepresented and underserved populations will need greater access to higher education and support to complete a credential that will translate into long-term employability.