



Grand Challenges 2021-2026 Strategic Plan - Using Assessment Findings to Increase Equity

Introduction to Challenge and Process

The movement for racial justice has accelerated social and political demands to dismantle structures that institutionalize inequities and to ensure equitable participation and outcomes in education. The racial and socio-economic demographics of students advancing from K-12 to postsecondary education has changed substantially over time. While access to higher education is improving, disparities in educational outcomes persist (Kuh, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). The movement towards actively dismantling structural inequities requires an examination of how we define, measure, and utilize outcomes. The grand challenge of using assessment findings to increase equity addresses one aspect of assessment and equity but leaves unexamined the ways in which assessment processes, practitioners, and compliance culture can uphold or disrupt inequities (Heiser, Turner, & Schnelle, 2021). To address this, workgroup members used a critical standpoint to expand the focus to include intersections of equity in the practice of assessment, practitioner professional development, and examining the structures which guide assessment.

Equity focused perspectives recognize educational outcomes cannot be disconnected from the inequities in higher education. Embedding equity in the practice of assessment and in the professional development of practitioners can begin to address how structural inequities influence outcome attainment. Clear examples exist of how institutions or programs are implementing equity-based assessment, but a broad-based understanding of the extent to which emerging practices are utilized, and are effective, is under-researched. Culture is a shared set of values and behaviors within a group of individuals which can be characterized by demographic variables and systemic factors such as politics and economics. All individuals develop in contexts shaped by culture, which influences what is taught, how learning occurs, how learning is demonstrated, which ways of learning are considered valid, and the tools used to measure learning (Hughes et al., 1993). A majority of assessment professionals (89%) identified as white in a [survey of assessment professionals](#) (Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018). Engaging in professional development which addresses bias and develops culturally competent assessment professionals is vital to advancing equity. Additionally, research in culturally responsive evaluation and measurement on equivalence across groups highlights the fact that quantitative measures were standardized on dominant populations and lack cultural responsiveness and equivalence (Alkon et al., 2001; Bowen & Tillman, 2015; Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014; Janzen et al., 2015; Sy et al., 2015). This plan suggests actions that can be taken by assessment professionals and accrediting organizations to resolve existing inequities.



Plan Structure

Goal 1: Promote existing and create new equitable assessment practices

Objective 1.1: Identify and share equitable assessment practices

Objective 1.2: Benchmark use and efficacy of equity-centered practices in assessment

Objective 1.3: Acknowledge and celebrate equitable practices in assessment nationally and locally

Goal 2: Create professional development to support the practice of equitable assessment

Objective 2.1: Create an accessible online library of professional development resources

Objective 2.2: Develop strategies to empower students to contribute to assessment of learning

Goal 3: Engage with existing structures to increase equity

Objective 3.1: Assess and improve equity and validity in national surveys and datasets

Objective 3.2: Engage with accrediting agencies to create standards that support equity

Objective 3.3: Create tools and guidelines to identify inequities



Objective 1.2: Benchmark use and efficacy of equity-centered practices in assessment

This objective addresses a gap in the literature by developing a comprehensive understanding of how assessment is used to advance equity in higher education. Examples of how individual colleges or programs are implementing equity-based assessment work exists, but a broad-based understanding of *the extent to which emerging practices are utilized and are effective is under-researched.*

Year	National Tactics	Local Tactics
1	Outreach to organizational partners including ACPA and SAAL to develop Implementation Stream 1 (IS1)	Develop a cross-divisional team of DEI, faculty, and assessment partners
2	Create a benchmarking survey and solicit institutional participation via calls on listservs, blogs, etc.	Review local learning outcomes and academic assessment activities for evidence that outcomes reflect diverse learners and experiences
3	Launch the benchmark survey to participating institutions	Make recommendations to institutional leaders to strengthening assessment practices with a centering focus on advancing equity
4	Conduct data analysis and report writing	Reflect on assessment processes - Establish professional development sessions or assessment days for faculty, staff, and students to reflect on assessment processes, data, and the use of data to ensure processes appropriately reflect diverse voices and ways of knowing
5	Publish and present the findings	

Measures: A national survey will be developed and deployed across higher education. At least one publication and conference presentation will be completed.

Performance Outcomes: From the benchmark we will establish a baseline for performance outcomes related to the number of institutions: incorporating students in the assessment process, reporting data disaggregation to close equity gaps, including students in the assessment process, using multiple methods of data collection, faculty using student-engaged assessment methods in courses, etc. Five years after the initial launch of the benchmark and framework, the survey can be relaunched to see the extent to which practices have advanced with benchmarks being that by 2026, 80% of accredited colleges and universities will use disaggregated data to track equity gaps, integrate students into their assessment process as stakeholders, and use multiple methods to collect data and address equity gaps. By 2026, 50% of faculty and co-curricular professionals will report incorporating student engagement into assessment processes.

Costs: Work time of assessment professionals to do benchmark survey, conference travel and publication fees, approximately \$5,000

Sources of Funding: Anthology has a vested interest in this work and may be willing to sponsor the survey and conference attendance.

Pilot Programs: Gavin Henning, Anne Lundquist, and Ciji Heiser conducted a similar survey in 2018-2019 for the Social Justice Assessment Project. These individuals, partnered with individuals at non-PWI institutions, would be valuable partners.



Objective 1.3: Acknowledge and celebrate equitable practices in assessment nationally and locally

Year	National Tactics	Local Tactics
1	Outreach to organizational partners including NASPA and SAAL to develop Implementation Stream 1 (IS1)	Develop cross-divisional team of DEI and assessment partners with charge of defining, acknowledging, and celebrating equitable assessment practices
2	Secure funding for award(s) and/or grant(s)	Identify criteria for sharing awards - Develop a set of institutional opportunities or strategies to recognize individuals and programs using data to advance equity
3	Determine criteria for award, identify selection team, and publicize award/grant through conferences and listservs	
4	Develop excellence in equity-centered assessment designation	
5	Identify a virtual location to apply for awards and showcase award winners. Develop a team to evaluate submissions using a rubric	

Measures: An award, application, and reward process will be established to recognize excellence in equity-centered assessment work in higher education.

Performance outcomes: In year one, 3-5 institutions will apply, or be encouraged to apply, for award. In subsequent years, a 10% increase in applicants.

Costs: Human capital is largest cost followed by location (virtual/digital) for sharing award nomination process, collecting nominations, and showcasing winners. Additional costs could be for financial awards to those practicing equity-based assessment.

Sources of Funding: Potential national organization such as NILOA, AAHLE, ACPA

Pilot Programs: NILOA has an excellence in assessment designation that will be used as a template.



Goal 2: Create professional development to support the practice of equitable assessment

This goal creates accessible professional development opportunities for professionals to understand, engage with and utilize equitable assessment practices and encourages the use of students as co-creators in their own learning and assessment. A centralized warehouse of resources related to professional development, assessment and equity, and diversity, equity, and inclusion work will serve as a catalyst to propel this work forward in consistent and meaningful ways.

Objective 2.1: Create an accessible online library of professional development resources

Year	National Tactics	Local Tactics
1	Outreach to organizational partners including SAAL, AALHE, and NILOA to develop Implementation Stream 1 (IS1)	Develop a cross-divisional team of DEI and assessment partners
2	Research what practices inform effective use of an equity lens in professional development for assessment	Evaluate departmental and institutional needs for professional development related to assessment to advance equity
3	Establish and market a website that guides national discussions and posts user-submitted material on effective practices	Evaluate how chairs’ retreats and faculty orientation establish assessment norms
	Organize and post resources and modules, case studies, and frameworks submitted by assessment professionals. Special focus on identifying material from Minority Serving Institutions and two-year colleges	Form small working groups across disciplines or units to host critical dialogues around how assessment is done and how faculty and staff are expected to participate in assessment practices that advance equity
4	Post original material on how to advance professional development for equity-centered assessment. Begin outreach and marketing to champion new research agendas that make use of the available resources	Use the online resource repository to create a curriculum or framework to meet the professional development needs of faculty and staff
5	Review content and establish permanent home for online resources -Identify areas left unaddressed by existing offerings and fill gaps by partnering with organizations such as AAHLE, SAAL, NILOA, ACPA, and NASPA	

Measures: Web traffic metrics (including downloads) and the number of resources created and shared; number of publications, presentations, and resources which fill gaps in literature and practices

Performance Outcomes: A website will be available with a library of resources. The library will contain resources related to professional development of equity and assessment such as webinars, conference presentations, blog posts, and podcasts. Web traffic and number of schools who submit practices or frameworks will show a national and engaged audience.



Costs: Requires web presence and funding to pay professionals or graduate students to data mine and collect existing equity and assessment resources. The resource library could be hosted on an organization’s or institution’s page at no cost.

Sources of Funding: A NILOA, AALHE, or ACPA grant could support this work, particularly if it is linked to their resources. Additional support may come from professional development organizations as the framework developed here could be applied elsewhere. A group of assessment professionals could write a grant to fund the identification, collection, and consolidation of equity in assessment professional development resources.

Pilot Programs: One organization currently doing this work well is the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders who have a repository for assessment resources

Objective 2.2: Develop strategies to empower students to contribute to assessment of learning

This objective will identify, develop, and evaluate student-engaged assessment practices, examples, and frameworks that 1) prioritize assets (rather than deficits) and support social justice within learning outcomes assessment and 2) intentionally involve diverse student populations, particularly those differentially impacted by traditional assessment practices.

Year	National Tactics	Local Tactics
1	Outreach to organizational partners including SAAL to develop Implementation Stream 1 (IS1)	Develop a cross-divisional team of DEI, students, and assessment partners
2	Identify pilot institutions who engage minoritized students in the assessment process; Encourage pilot institutions to share practices and to develop case studies to share their experiences engaging students	Identify academic and student support programs that effectively engaged minoritized students in the assessment process - Create spaces for these units to share their work with the larger campus community
3	Develop workshops and dialogue activities for department leaders and program chairs as critical partners to engage with and take diverse students’ needs and the institution’s culture into consideration	Empower students to contribute to development or co-development of learning outcomes, measures of success, and measures of their learning; Invite students to participate in collaborative sensemaking of data
4	Share aggregate picture of how to include students in assessment process - Conduct thematic analysis of case studies; Using findings, host dialogues at regional accreditation meetings and conferences to identify strategies for engaging students as critical stakeholders; Add examples of student-engaged assessment practices to online repository	Host assessment days , inviting students, staff, and faculty to review and interpret institutional data related to student learning outcomes and national surveys data and make recommendations for action items which advance equity
5	Offer equity initiative workshops to Provosts, Associate Provosts, Deans, Co-Curricular Directors, and Assessment Leaders on how to launch initiatives	



Measures: Published strategies for engaging students in assessment work to advance equity in the repository and at regional accreditation conferences; The publication and presentation of thematic analysis of case studies; Metrics from website downloads and attendance at workshops

Performance Outcomes: At least one robust case study from each pilot institution, preferably two (one curricular and one co-curricular). At pilot institutions: 20% of department chairs/administrators participate in training, representing academic and co-curricular units (e.g., science, social science, humanities, professional programs) and an annual symposium on student involvement in assessment to provide opportunities for students to present locally

Costs: Financial support for hosting, recording, and transcribing virtual meetings and in-person meetings as well as a Graduate Research Assistantship to support the working group's research and activities (~\$20,000 [monthly award + benefits])

Sources of Funding: A NILOA, AALHE, or ACPA grant could support this work. Additional support may come from professional development organizations as the framework developed here could be applied elsewhere.

Pilot Programs: The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Association has conducted similar work with case studies related to equity-centered and culturally responsive assessment and could serve as a model and partner for advancing this work.



Objective 3.3: Create tools and guidelines to identify inequities

This objective focuses on collaborating with assessment organizations and those focused on data privacy in higher education to develop protocols for displaying, representing, and sharing assessment results in ways that will speed improvement that support equity. The protocols will particularly focus on how to disaggregate findings for affected subject populations and entities in a way that is transparent but also protects subject privacy.

Year	National Tactics	Local Tactics
1	Outreach to organizational partners including ACPA and SAAL to develop Implementation Stream 2 (IS2)	Develop a cross-divisional team of diversity, equity, inclusion, and assessment partners, including students
2	Identify national organizations that can provide guidance and training around disaggregation while being mindful of local (e.g., CCPA) and international (e.g., GDPR) privacy regulations	Develop templates and guides to display and share assessment results that use data to advance equity on programmatic, divisional, and university level
3	Develop equity protocols for sharing assessment results , especially those that involve disaggregation, in conjunction with partner organizations	Evaluate how templates are used and if they are effective
4	Advocate for training in and application of developed equity protocols through opportunities such as assessment conferences; partner organizations; Partner with team working on objective 3.2 to advocate for inclusion of developed protocols in accreditation standards	Audit assessment activities for balance of direct/indirect and qualitative/quantitative data that incorporates diverse voices and safely considers learning experiences
5	Provide progress report on dissemination of the protocols	

Measures: The successful creation of templates and guidance, and successful implementation of training on protocols will serve as measures of progress

Performance Outcomes: All accredited colleges and universities will use disaggregated data to assess and track equity gaps by 2028

Costs: External (or internal) consultation to develop tools and build expertise within the culture of colleges. Administrative personnel and faculty must include assessment protocols and results in reports, agendas, evaluations for promotion, resource allocation, tenure, etc. to build both importance of the work and a culture that expects equity to be a considered part of every decision of import.

Sources of Funding: College and university budgets; DOE, NIH, NEH, NSF; foundations might contribute given anticipated increase in transparency

Pilot Programs: Assessment directors and IR offices might lead, but deans and provost offices and presidents and their boards must be visible in supporting work



Appendix A - The Equity Working Group Members

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