DATA FOR EQUITY

ABOUT EVIDENT CHANGE

Evident Change is a national nonprofit organization that uses data and research to improve social systems. We believe systems should help people achieve their greatest potential, not create barriers to their success.

Many agencies and organizations champion systems reform through legislative action, grassroots mobilization, or policy change. Achieving long-term, equitable systems change also requires collaboration with the people who work within the systems as well as the communities that are affected by them. These groups have firsthand knowledge of what is working well and what is not, and their collective input is crucial for creating lasting and meaningful improvements.

Foundation leaders, executive directors, program directors, and caseworkers rely on data and technology to inform decisions about their processes, policies, and the people they serve. While these tools and information are integral to advancing social services and the justice system, they often do not take into account the human implications of using data in this way, resulting in decisions and actions that are potentially harmful to communities already disproportionately affected by our systems. Research and data analytics need to be transparent, equitable, and fair and must be informed by those whose lives are directly affected. The social services and justice fields need an honest, knowledgeable partner who has the expertise to balance the best of what scientific methodology offers with a lens of ethics, equity, and accountability.

IMPROVING SYSTEMS

Evident Change knows that the human services and justice systems are, in many ways, broken. Black/African American, Latinx/Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native youth are affected by these inequitable systems at significantly higher rates. Despite glaring racial disparities in almost all realms of human services, many agencies are only beginning to examine their program practices, policies, and outcomes with an equity lens. Implicit bias training and racial sensitivity courses gained popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s; however, simply training frontline staff on racial bias does nothing to
address systemic inequities that may be woven into a program’s practices.

Effectively using data to understand target populations, intended and unintended outcomes, and implementation challenges can help decipher questions about equitable access and outcomes. However, many social service programs are not collecting the right data or asking the right research questions to address equity. Evident Change can help agencies face the challenges of basing programs and goals on evaluative data to influence program practices, goals, and outcomes. For example, in a 2016 study, the vast majority (82%) of nonprofits agreed that they need evaluation, yet nearly half (48%) said that “limited staff knowledge, skills, and/or tools” stopped them from effectively evaluating programs and services. Furthermore, only 8% of social service nonprofits have a staff member who is assigned evaluation as a responsibility. These agencies and organizations need help examining their programs’ practices and outcomes with an intersectional equity lens, using data to drive practices and outcomes, and making program and service decisions based on those data.

An administrator of a county juvenile justice division in Ohio wanted to reduce the disproportionately high number of boys of color in detention. The court system’s and school district’s bureaucracy made getting the information she needed virtually impossible despite her determination. Partnering with Evident Change, however, made a huge difference. Evident Change helped her use available data to identify major points where disproportionality was occurring, which allowed her and her staff to create a plan to alleviate the problem.

DATA FOR EQUITY

Evident Change proposes a solution: Data for Equity. The Data for Equity program was created to help direct-service and other organizations build capacity for using data. Data for Equity can help agencies create internal cultures of accountability around equity, work toward sustainable reductions in racial and ethnic disparities, and rebuild systems in a way that supports equitable outcomes.

Data for Equity has three short-term goals and one long-term goal.

- Help direct-service organizations learn to collect, analyze, and use their data to evaluate and improve their services and programs.
- Provide clear, concrete evaluative data to funders that clarify whether their grantees are achieving their objectives for their services and programs.
• Expand the evidence base of effective solutions that reduce disparate social outcomes for families and communities of color.

• Ultimately ensure that people and communities receive the best possible social services so that they do not, at any point, need to enter the child welfare, juvenile justice, or adult justice systems. This will lessen racial disparities and inequities in those systems.

**Early results of Evident Change’s work with two national foundations show that Data for Equity is helping organizations build cultures of equity, both internally and in their services to clients. As a manager at a Michigan early education services provider said:**

*“I learned so many wonderful, amazing things in Data for Equity... [We’re] being very intentional now when we’re thinking about program design or data implementation, thinking, “Is everyone at the table that we feel like should be at the table? Are there people that are missing? How do we identify those people?” ... and making sure that’s an ongoing conversation through the process... I was very excited to be able to participate in [Data for Equity] to understand more about how to do that and to have some of those tools... to really try to dismantle some of the inequities that are occurring within our systems and communities.”*

**HOW IT WORKS**

Evident Change meets organizations where they are in terms of data collection, analytic expertise, and fluency with constructs such as race/ethnicity, equity, power, privilege, and oppression. Working as partners, we co-create a Data for Equity work plan that reflects the organization’s starting point and sets goals for strengthening their practice.

Each collaboration between Evident Change and a partner organization includes the following, with emphasis on what the organization needs and where it wants to go in the future.

**LEARNING AND DISCOVERY**

• Interpersonal/cultural equity assessment

• Shared language

• Data inventory and process maps

**GOAL SETTING**

• Collective vision including community voice

• Defined equity outcomes

• Clear equity indicators and metrics

**COACHING AND SKILL BUILDING**

• Equity-led data analysis and measurement

• Improved program design and evaluation

• Increased team capacity for equity work

Systems change work requires big thinking and brave vision. Data for Equity grounds transformative thinking with data so change is sustainable long term.
RESULTS

Data for Equity benefits organizations, funders, and—most importantly—the individuals receiving services. Outcomes include the following.

1. A clear vision of the desired program outcomes related to racial/ethnic equity or the reduction of disparities.
2. Increased staff competency to work more effectively within and across cultural differences.
3. Data-driven organizational cultures that can work flexibly with changes and staff turnover.
4. Increased effectiveness of community-based interventions and social service systems that work to build racial/ethnic equity and reduce disparate outcomes for communities of color.
5. When needed, implementation of a basic data collection system.
6. Substantial contributions to evidence-based clearinghouses, which lack critical information on race/ethnicity and equity outcomes for their programs.

Evident Change has more than a century of experience working with social service agencies across the country. Over the last several years, we have established partnerships with foundations to provide this technical assistance to grantees to improve their evaluation practices. We would love to tell you more.

LEARN MORE

For more information, contact Kathy Park, CEO, at (800) 306-6223 or KPark@EvidentChange.org. Visit us online at EvidentChange.org.