# Table of Contents

**Introduction** 3  

**About the Guidebook** 4  
Using the Tools and Resources 5  

**Embracing Equity-Minded Leadership** 6  

**Understanding Your College’s Readiness and Commitment to Equity Efforts** 9  

**Longer-Term Processes** 13  

**Looking Forward: Infusing Equity into Planning and Decision-Making** 14  

**Beyond Policy and Procedure: Opportunities for Further Exploration** 16  
Student Input 16  
Campus Climate Survey 16  
Understanding Equity Implications of Specific Interventions 17  
Diversifying College Personnel 17  

**External Facilitation** 19  

**Inventory of Institutional Policies and Practices** 21  

**Equity in Action** 22  
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College 22  
Forsyth Technical Community College 23  
South Piedmont Community College 23  
Wake Technical Community College 24
Diversity is a key asset for North Carolina, but persistent gaps in college and career access and success limit the state’s ability to achieve equitable economic growth. North Carolina’s community colleges play a critical role in equipping residents to be full participants in an evolving economy. Leaders at both the college and system levels have made commitments to addressing patterns of inequity in access and completion. In particular, North Carolina Community College System President Thomas Stith has set a goal for NCCCS to “lead and set the standard—not only within the state but nationally—for diversity and inclusion.”

In 2020-2021, the Committee for Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) embarked on an effort to assess how policies and procedures at the system and institutional levels may be negatively affecting college access, learning, completion/transfer, and labor market outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and other students of color. As an accompaniment to the analysis, this guidebook provides recommendations for colleges seeking to examine the equity implications of their institutional policies and procedures.

Of course, numerous systems affect equitable economic advancement in North Carolina, including K12 education, public four-year institutions, and private postsecondary institutions, as well as workforce system partners. Each of these systems and institutions has a role to play in addressing historic patterns of inequity, and true progress will require local- and state-level partnership. This guidebook focuses on what community college leaders and trustees can do, using institutional policy as a lever, to contribute to the larger goal of equitable economic growth.
About the Guidebook

This guidebook is designed to provide tools for institutional leaders—presidents, executives, and trustees—that want to explore how policy and procedure may be adversely affecting student groups underrepresented because of systemic bias and inequity, and how they can instead be used as a lever for tackling these present-day issues. The guidebook is intended to work in concert with efforts underway at the Belk Center and the North Carolina Student Success Center, as well as other statewide efforts.

The guidebook includes:

- Resources to help leaders lay the groundwork for equity-minded policy analysis, including resources on equity-minded leadership and tools for trustees
- Tools and resources to assess your college's readiness to embark on an equity-minded policy assessment or equity initiative
- Tools and frameworks for examining institutional policies and procedures, including longer-term processes that college teams can work through
- Decision-making guides
- Opportunities and resources for further exploration of campus equity issues, such as climate surveys and focus groups
- Additional resources and services for colleges that want external support for their equity efforts
- Specific institutional policy areas to explore, based on JFF and ASA Research's policy analysis and interviews with college leaders, staff, and students
- Examples of various North Carolina colleges' institutional policies and strategies that can close equity gaps
Using the Tools and Resources

The guidebook contains both standalone resources and suites of resources. We encourage college leaders, along with chief diversity officers, DEI committees, and other relevant stakeholders, to review the guide to determine the most relevant sections for their school and the tools that best fit their needs. Some colleges can start with a readiness assessment, while others may be ready to move straight to policy assessment. Colleges can opt to use a single tool or a combination of resources. Working with a coach or external facilitator may be useful for sequencing the use of different tools, assessments, and discussion guides.

What Is Institutional Policy?

For the purposes of this guidebook, institutional policy refers to policies and procedure that fall under the purview of college leadership and/or the board of trustees. This includes the Delegated Authority in the North Carolina Community College State Board Policy. In addition to shaping institutional policy, college leaders play a role in advocating for state policy.
Prior to engaging in an institutional policy audit, college leaders need to lay the groundwork: making the case for examining the impact of institutional policy on equitable outcomes, creating an environment that welcomes courageous conversations, and managing pushback. The first part of this guidebook provides resources on leadership practices that support a college-wide focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many of these resources build on the concept of equity-mindedness, created by Estela Bensimon and her colleagues at the Center for Urban Education to “describe actions that demonstrate individuals’ capacity to recognize and address racialized structures, policies, and practices that produce and sustain racial inequities.”

“Improving outcomes for racially minoritized students is likely to happen if the change strategy is focused on things within the immediate control of the leaders and practitioners”

- Center for Urban Education
1. **Shared Equity Leadership** is a 2020 report from the American Council on Education, in collaboration with the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education. It expands on the idea of equity-minded leadership to include shared leadership that involves multiple stakeholders in agenda-setting and decision-making. Drawing on interviews with college leaders, the report describes the values and practices associated with shared equity leadership.

2. In 2020, the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement released a series of guides for community colleges seeking to integrate an equity focus into guided pathways implementation. These guides were designed to “spark essential conversations and actions towards addressing equity gaps through the implementation of guided pathways.” The NCII Discussion Guide #1, the Institutional Self-Assessment for Equity, can help leaders assess their college’s progress in implementing 11 equitable practices. Discussion Guides #2 and #3 provide two different perspectives on leading institutional change to promote equity, one from a CEO of color, and one from a white CEO. These guides can help leaders reflect on their role in promoting a greater institutional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3. Debra Bragg and Heather McCambly’s Equity-Minded Change Leadership brief discusses how leaders engage in self-reflection and learning to examine institutional norms and “disrupt opaque structures, policies and practices that contribute to inequities.” The embedded reflection questions can help college leaders examine their current approaches to equity-focused change efforts.
4. **The Role of Senior Leaders in Building a Race Equity Culture**, by Kerrien Suarez of Equity in the Center/ProInspire, examines how leaders create an “organizational culture focused on the counteraction of race inequities, both internally and externally.” Similar to Bragg and McCambly, Suarez emphasizes the importance of learning, listening, and reflection. Suarez also outlines the five steps leaders can take to start building a race equity culture: establish a shared vocabulary, identify champions at the board and senior leadership levels, name race equity work as a strategic imperative, demonstrate how equity connects to broader organizational goals, and disaggregate data. This resource is part of a larger body of work from Equity in the Center, *Awake to Woke to Work*, that is designed to support organizations in building a race equity culture. While this work was written for the nonprofit sector, many of the recommendations apply to postsecondary settings.

5. **Working with trustees**: Alongside presidents and senior leaders, community college trustees play an important role in advancing DEI efforts. Building on its 2018 Equity Action Report, the Association of Community College Trustees developed *A Checklist and Implementation Guide for Community College Boards* that outlines steps for embracing equity-mindedness. The Implementation Inventory outlines specific steps that boards can take, for example, establishing DEI goals and emphasizing DEI in hiring and evaluating the college president. The guide also emphasizes the importance of a board that reflects the diversity within the community and the support that trustees may need to take a leadership role in campus DEI efforts.
Before launching a policy audit or larger DEI initiative, it may be helpful to assess where the college is starting from. These tools can help colleges assess institutional culture and values with an equity lens, establish a baseline before engaging in policy- or practice-oriented equity initiatives, and determine where additional learning and case-making is needed.

1. **Assessing Your College’s Commitment to Equity** was developed by Community College Research Initiatives as part of JFF’s Student Success Center Coaching Program. This tool uses the Center for Urban Education’s five guiding principles for equity by design as a framework for examining college documents and materials, including the college’s mission and vision statement, college/departmental policies, marketing materials, and strategic plans. In partnership with a coach or external facilitator, college teams assess the degree of alignment or misalignment between the selected documents and the guiding principles. Coaches or facilitators can then engage the team in individual and collective reflection on what they learned through the process.

2. The **Racial Equity Readiness Assessment Tool** walks teams through a process of examining institutional mission, values, and culture; capacity to track racial disparities; curriculum; leadership and staff morale; and external relationships and advocacy. While it was designed for workforce development organizations, this tool can be useful for college leadership as well. The questions go beyond policy and procedure, which can make them a useful complement to a more traditional policy assessment.
Colleges seeking to improve outcomes for student groups excluded by systemic bias can engage in an examination of institutional policies and procedures to determine:

- How institutional policies and procedures influence access and success of students of color
- How institutional policies and procedures affect practice and inform decision-making in matters related to access and success for students of color

The following tools provide an in-depth look at how policies, practices, and other institutional factors influence equitable access and success. All of these tools can provide college teams with useful insights. Colleges should examine the different tools and resources to see which fit best with their goals and institutional context. For example, some tools require engaging a dedicated team that can work through the tools over multiple months.

1. **The Community College Equity Assessment Lab at San Diego State University** offers quantitative and qualitative data collection tools as well as advisory services on topics such as professional development, student voice, and equity-minded institutional research. The Institutional Assessment Package (IAP) provides a comprehensive assessment of factors that influence success for underserved students in community colleges. The IAP includes three instruments: the Community College Success Measure (CCSM), the Community College Instructional Development Inventory (CCIDI), and the Community College Staff Development Inventory (CCSDI). The CCEAL can also augment these assessments with focus groups for various college stakeholders, including students. This is the only option on this list offered as a fee-for-service model; the others are free.
2. The Center for Urban Education's Protocol for Assessing Equity-Mindedness in State Policy can be used at all levels, including for institutional policy. The protocol helps institutional leaders assess the goals and assumptions embedded within policies. It identifies equity-minded policy indicators and provides prompts for examining specific policies, for example: Who will benefit from the policy? Who will be excluded? In addition, CUE’s Document Review tool can be used to assess strategic plans, quality enhancement plans, application forms, and other campus procedures through an equity lens. This includes examining if and how the documents reflect a commitment to equity, how they talk about students (and racially minoritized students in particular), and what could be improved.

3. Conducting an Institutional Diversity Audit in Higher Education explores nine dimensions of a comprehensive diversity audit that can be implemented by the institution, using a set of templates for each of the dimensions. The book and associated templates can be used by a wide range of campus stakeholders to identify processes, relationships, and practices that support campus DEI efforts.

4. The 360-Degree Student Equity Audit, from EAB, helps colleges examine existing strategies to promote equity, with an emphasis on the added urgency created by the pandemic. The checklist outlines quick wins and longer-term strategies. The tool, which includes a discussion guide, recommends data analyses to inform the equity strategy and an implementation planning exercise. It is focused on four-year colleges, but many of the questions are relevant for two-year colleges, and the questions specific to COVID-19 will likely remain relevant beyond the pandemic.
5. The **Policy and Practice Assessment** was developed by JFF in partnership with Ed Bowling from Guilford Tech, Susan Burleson from Davidson Davie, and Stephanie Sutton from Stark State College in Ohio. The tool enables colleges to analyze institutional policies and practices that impact the four pillars of guided pathways on their campus: clarifying the path for students, helping students enter the path, assisting students with staying on the path, and ensuring students are learning. The tool also includes specific questions focused on the equity implications of policies and practices. The tool is available through the North Carolina Student Success Center.
Longer-Term Processes

These resources include multiple phases that a college can engage with over a longer period of time, ideally with a dedicated person (either internal or external to the college) to guide the team through the different tools and exercises.

1. The Pathways to Results process was launched in 2009 by Debra Bragg and her colleagues at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois, and was brought by Bragg to the Community College Research Initiatives Group at the University of Washington. This equity-minded approach provides data and inquiry tools that colleges can use to improve pathway designs in ways that lead to more equitable outcomes. The process, which typically includes an external facilitator, includes five phases: engagement and commitment, equity and outcomes assessment, process and practice assessment, improvement and evaluation, and review and reflection. OCCRL supported the majority of Illinois community colleges in undertaking this process; a 2015 report described what the experience looked like for five colleges. The tools are publicly available for use by college teams.

2. CUE offers a suite of racial equity tools that college teams can use to engage in a race-focused continuous improvement process, including but not limited to institutional policy and procedure.
Once they have examined their existing policies and practices, college leaders are likely to want to develop new policies, procedures, and programs. To help them, tools are available that include prompting questions they can use to explore the equity implications of any new or revised policies, practices, and procedures.

1. The **Equity-Minded Decision-Making Guide Example**, from Achieving the Dream, can be used as is or tailored to the college’s student and institutional context. According to Achieving the Dream, “Your decision-making guide should be grounded in your campus’ own definition of equity. Addressing equity on community college campuses requires a systemic approach that permeates the institution. Only by infusing principles of equity more intentionally into daily and strategic decisions that ensure policies and practices are designed to support students in achieving their goals can colleges see gains in their student outcomes. Developing a strong understanding of societal biases and how they manifest both nationally and locally is the most effective way for colleges to identify systemic issues that reflect these biases and make decisions that correct these issues.”

2. This **Racial Justice Impact Assessment**, developed by Race Forward, can help leaders clarify the issue they are seeking to address, assess the potential impact on different populations, identify who might benefit and who might be adversely affected, and create a process for measuring success.
3. The CUE’s Checklist for Sustaining Institution-Wide Racial Equity is another tool that leaders can use to examine institutional policy, as well as practices, procedures, and structures. It provides a series of prompts to help assess the extent to which racial equity is a priority, the language used, how data will be used to assess outcomes and impact, and opportunities for additional inquiry.

4. The Institute for Higher Education Policy has developed an Equity Planning System that organizations, including colleges, can use to sharpen their definition of equity, uncover key factors influencing equity, and generate ideas for equity initiatives. The IHEP plans to offer support for facilitation, which is the recommended approach, but the planning system is currently only available for self-guided use.
Beyond Policy and Procedure: Opportunities for Further Exploration

In addition to using the tools highlighted here, leaders may wish to gather additional data to gain a deeper understanding of how policies, procedures, and practices affect the student experience. Getting input directly from students, as well as from the faculty and staff who interact with students on a daily basis, can illuminate where changing institutional policy could have the greatest impact.

Student Input

Colleges can use a number of tools to get a better understanding of how students experience the college. The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory are commonly used survey instruments. Colleges can also use student focus groups to examine specific aspects of the student experience. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE), which administers the CCSSE and SENSE, has a focus group toolkit and discussion guides. Knowing Our Students: Understanding & Designing for Success is a guidebook from Achieving the Dream that is designed for institutional leaders and student success teams that are ready to talk openly about the students they serve and are eager to learn practical strategies from national experts and peer institutions.

Campus Climate Survey

Many elements of state and institutional policy influence campus climate, especially as it relates to how comfortable faculty, staff,
and students feel discussing issues of racial inequity at their college. For example, how might institutional policies focused on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and hate speech affect the willingness of students to speak up about discrimination? College leaders can use campus climate surveys such as the **PACE Climate Survey** (available through the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness at North Carolina State) to understand employee perceptions of institutional policies, practices, and routines. The survey includes optional questions focused on diversity and inclusion.

**Understanding Equity Implications of Specific Interventions**

The following tools can help college leaders examine specific efforts, such as dual enrollment or advising redesign, to understand how these transformations can affect equity in access and success.

1. The **Aspen Institute’s Dual Enrollment Playbook** focuses on equitable access to dual enrollment programs. In addition, the Aspen Institute has developed tools for assessing equitable practices at high schools and community colleges. These tools include questions for college and district leaders to assess the extent to which they are implementing the design principles described in the playbook, such as setting a shared vision and goals that prioritize equity.

2. **Equity in Design for Holistic Student Supports**: What We’re Learning is a series of briefs and webinars from Achieving the Dream that explores how supports can be tailored to the needs of specific student populations, including underrepresented high school students, student parents, and part-time students.

**Diversifying College Personnel**

An issue flagged throughout JFF and ASA’s interviews was the need to diversify community college faculty and staff and to
adequately train existing staff to engage in DEI conversations. Part of the institutional policy assessment should include examining policies related to recruitment, hiring, retention, and professional development.

1. The NCII’s Advancing Equity Through Guided Pathways Series Discussion Guide #4 focuses on fostering faculty diversity, including suggested research tasks for college leaders.

2. Many of the questions included in the “Faculty and Staff” section of the ACCT Checklist can also help colleges examine hiring and professional development practices. For example, it asks whether equity-mindedness is an explicit goal for hiring faculty and staff.

3. The California Community College System’s Vision for Success includes a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Integration Plan. The research-based plan identifies strategies for increasing faculty and staff diversity and cultivating a more culturally responsive workforce.
External Facilitation

Colleges don’t have to do this work on their own. In many cases, working with an external facilitator can spark more open and honest conversations and provide political cover for senior leaders. There are a variety of resources within North Carolina and nationally that can support colleges through the process of examining policies, procedures, and practices influencing equity.

**Equity coaches:** The North Carolina Student Success Center is training a cadre of equity coaches to support efforts to enhance student success and completion at their home institutions or support other sister institutions. These coaches—leaders and practitioners from across the state—bring change-management knowledge and/or subject-matter expertise and are trained to work as thought partners, facilitators, and guides to college teams. Coaches are trained in how to support collaboration, courageous conversations, and inclusion through an intersectional lens; how to foster accountability; how to prioritize student needs and advocate for systemic and institutional change to ensure equitable outcomes; and how to advance practices that help bridge the student equity gaps. Equity coaches can support colleges in designing and implementing an equity audit. Those interested in working with a coach should contact the Success Center for more information.

**Belk Center case studies:** The Belk Center recently started conducting equity case studies of North Carolina colleges, with Carteret Community College as the pilot. The purpose of the case studies is to learn more from a college’s students, faculty, staff, and administrators about the programs, policies, and practices
that may lead to relatively higher success outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students. A case study can also supplement the evaluation needs of the college and its leadership. Carteret Community College demonstrates a relatively higher graduation rate for students who are Pell-eligible and students who identify as Indigenous, Black, and Latinx. The data that were reviewed included enrollment; three-year graduation rates for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students; graduation rates for students who are Pell-eligible; and certificate attainment relative to colleges across the state. At the conclusion of the case study, the Belk Center intends to provide an executive summary and presentation of the findings for the Carteret president and leadership team, as requested. The Belk Center will also highlight the promising practices that lead to student success through publicly available venues (e.g., practice briefs, webinars, presentations) with Carteret’s approval.

**Achieving the Dream:** ATD works with over 300 network colleges across the country, helping them to identify and address equity issues on their campuses. [This page](#) outlines how ATD can help colleges move the needle related to equity. ATD conducts workshops, equity coaching, training, and learning events for all stakeholders at the institution.
Inventory of Institutional Policies and Practices

Based on findings from interviews and focus groups with students, faculty, staff, and administrators at a representative sample of 12 community colleges in North Carolina, ASA Research developed an inventory of recommended policies and practices that institutional leaders and practitioners ought to consider when advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion aims on their campuses and in their communities. The inventory was submitted to the DEI Committee and to the NC Community College System Office as part of the JFF-led project. To access the inventory, contact Dr. Kim Gold, senior vice president and chief academic officer for the NC Community College System.
Visionary leaders across the state are making equity a priority through their strategic plans, policy assessments, and targeted HR strategies. These case studies provide examples of how leaders at colleges across the state are addressing equity gaps on their campuses.

**Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College**

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College recognizes the power of data for making inequities visible. As part of its commitment to becoming a more diverse and inclusive institution, the college’s HR department [publicly posts faculty and staff demographics](#), comparing them with the demographics of the college service area, and it has examined how HR policy can improve the college’s ability to recruit and retain a diverse workforce—for example, rethinking the experience and education required for some roles and conducting regular pay equity audits.

College leadership also knew that registration and transcript holds because of past-due balances were a common barrier for students; registration holds can disrupt momentum along a pathway, and transcript holds can create barriers to transfer and employment. To understand the equity implications of this issue, the college disaggregated its data and found an outsized impact on students of color (Black students in particular) and students from low-income backgrounds. In addition, the college found that most of these past-due balances were very small. Half were for less than $50, and some were as small as 30 cents. The college didn’t have the ability to clear
these small debts without state permission, so it has been seeking creative alternatives to pay off the debts and plans to collaborate with peer institutions to advocate for policy change.

**Forsyth Technical Community College**

Janet Spriggs, president at Forsyth Technical College, has made equity a visible priority on campus. When she came on board in 2019, she led the college in rewriting the college vision statement to put equity front and center, and she incorporated equity into the college strategic plan. She formed an equity council, developed an equity action plan, established a presence for equity leadership on the president’s cabinet which has evolved into a vice president of inclusive excellence, and contracted external consultants to identify and implement DEI strategies. Spriggs, along with her cabinet, has started examining institutional policies, procedures, and processes through an equity lens. A culture of belonging is a core value for the college, and Spriggs is working to incorporate student voice into planning and is engaging more directly with students. She has also invited the campus community to engage in conversations about race, holding several of these after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020, with several hundred students, faculty, and staff in attendance. In focus groups, students spoke positively about the way that the president talks about DEI and the activities that have taken place. At the programmatic level, the Council for Equity, Belonging and Inclusion uses data to identify gaps and opportunities for more strategic outreach with local high schools.

**South Piedmont Community College**

As a part of the North Carolina Student Success Center’s efforts to support guided pathways at colleges in the state, South Piedmont Community College used the Policy and Practice Assessment tool to identify policy and practice changes that would support equitable implementation of GPs. The assessment was completed by campus
constituents (academic/student affairs staff and faculty), with results reviewed by external reviewers. This approach allowed the college to receive feedback from the reviewers on policies and practices that support guided pathways implementation on their campus, as well as areas for potential growth and opportunity.

The feedback received from the external reviewers has allowed the college to implement immediate changes to support its guided pathways efforts, such as increased communication with faculty and staff, organizational restructuring of personnel, and implementation of a guided pathways summit on campus. The summit was used to determine longer-term plans for institutional changes to continue to support the guided pathways project into the future.

**Wake Technical Community College**

Wake Technical Community College also centered equity and economic mobility in its revised strategic plan and is taking concrete steps to achieve its equity goals. For example, the college worked with an external consultant to conduct a policy audit to find barriers to success and completion. This uncovered a number of equity implications, such as that the college's automatic withdrawal policy failed to take into account the needs of students who missed class due to family and work obligations. The college has also looked closely at its outreach models, advising structures, and instructional practices with an emphasis on strategies that support more equitable student success. The college prioritizes outreach to high-need high schools to promote dual enrollment and to lower-income neighborhoods, and it has used Finish First, an applied data tool developed by the college, to reenroll students who have dropped out. It has focused on better coordination of academic supports, including having faculty work with tutors, libraries, and other on-campus resources to better connect students to wraparound supports. It also developed a certification process for teaching online and is working to improve how responsive faculty are to student outreach.
Through regular examination of disaggregated student data, the college is able to see which practices are narrowing equity gaps. For example, a majority of students who received the wraparound supports indicated these supports helped them succeed in college-level English and math classes, with higher perceived benefits among students of color. Rigorous evaluation also indicated that student success rates were significantly higher and withdrawal rates were significantly lower in the courses receiving wraparound services in fall 2020 as compared to fall 2019, especially for students of color. The college is also working to increase faculty diversity by strengthening its own talent pipelines, creating opportunities for staff to move into faculty roles and raising local awareness of career opportunities within the college. The college is currently using Achieving the Dream resources to develop an Equity Scorecard for the college.