

Race, Equity, and Inclusion in Postsecondary Education in Prison: Essential Policies and Practices Self-Assessment Tool

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Agency Name: _____ Date: _____

Background and Context

What is equity? Equity is when space and resources are provided so that each person can thrive in their own identities, circumstances, and histories, disparities are eliminated, and everyone prospers. Ultimately, equity requires that one's identities, circumstances, or histories do not statistically or experientially predict one's outcomes in an institution, system, or structure.

What is racial equity? Racial equity is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, processes, systems, and

structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color. Racial equity is when racial identity no longer predicts, in a statistical sense, how one fares. This can be defined not only in outcomes related to well-being such as in health, employment, postsecondary education, and contacts with the criminal legal system, but also in intangible and internal feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and belonging. In a state of racial inequity, race and ethnicity statistically predict access to resources and services that enable people to thrive in their own identities, circumstances, and histories.¹

Why racial equity? We commit to the ongoing and necessary work of disrupting and eliminating structural racism to fully realize racial equity in our criminal legal system and beyond. We name our focus and approach

addressing race first because of its outsized effects on the criminal legal system we aim to transform. However, we do not limit our race, equity, and inclusion (REI) focus to race; this tool assesses equitable access to postsecondary education in prison across dimensions such as ethnicity, gender (specifically correctional facility gender), disability, classification/custody level, disciplinary record status, and incarceration status.

What is a lens? A lens is a conceptual set of questions, concerns, and issues that people proactively center and repeatedly consider when they plan, develop, evaluate, or implement a policy, program, or decision. A lens is always applied, not temporarily or as part of a separate side task or project.

What is a racial equity lens? A racial equity lens is a continuous reflective practice and conceptual set of questions, concerns, and issues that proactively considers the lived experiences and perspectives of people of color when planning, developing, evaluating, or implementing a policy, program, or decision. Using a racial equity lens centers race at the forefront of the decision-making process and helps ensure the outcome does not produce unintended racially disparate consequences. Key considerations when applying a racial equity lens to an issue or decision (e.g., a policy change or practice change) include questions around the “5 Ps”—people, place, process, power, and purpose (see Figure 1).

Getting Started

This tool is designed to help departments of corrections (DOCs) assess and continuously improve policies and practices that impact equity in postsecondary education in prison programs.² The essential practices listed are informed by decades of experience from experts in the field, evidence in current research, and Vera’s working knowledge of postsecondary education in prison. This assessment will help the program establish a baseline for current policy and practice, identify programmatic barriers to equity and inclusion, and identify essential policies and practices to implement. For more information and examples of emerging practices to advance equity in postsecondary education in prison, refer to Vera’s [report](#).³ References to relevant sections of the report are included throughout the tool.

Who should complete the tool: Here are some examples of key staff who may need to complete the tool comprehensively: corrections education directors, education coordinators, corrections counselors, adult basic education and secondary education staff (e.g., principals, coordinators, education coordinators), wardens/superintendents, corrections officers assigned to education units, specialized housing staff (e.g., restrictive housing), mental health staff, reentry coordinators, and diversity, equity, and inclusion department leadership.

How to use the tool: Evaluate the topics in the table of contents to ensure relevant staff are involved. This tool spans several aspects of postsecondary education in prison and, thus, may be relevant to various staff across DOCs; therefore, program staff should think critically about the best way to compile information and incorporate it into the tool. The DOC should assign a project lead to coordinate the self-assessment. The project lead may consider assigning one or more point people to complete questions in a specific section of the tool and then set aside time for these point people to connect with the project lead, discuss challenges and gaps, and compile information.

For each essential practice listed in the first column, convene program staff to discuss the extent to which the practice listed is currently implemented in the college program within the prison. In the second column, using the definitions provided under Stage of Adoption Definitions and the questions to consider in the third column—which ask targeted questions from the framework of the 5 Ps—as guidance, indicate the extent to which the college has adopted these practices into the program. In column four, track any notes or reflections and, when possible, identify “easy wins” or practices that already have agency buy-in and could be adopted or implemented.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Background and Context
2	Getting Started
5	The Self-Assessment Tool
5	Stage of Adoption Definitions
5	Example
7	<u>Section 1: Agency Values</u>
9	<u>Section 2: Data Collection, Sharing, Analysis, and Use</u>
12	<u>Section 3: Recruitment and Admissions</u>
15	<u>Section 4: Faculty and Staff</u>
16	<u>Section 5: Student Supports</u>
20	<u>Section 6: Education and Career Pathways</u>
22	Figure 1: Applying a Racial Equity Lens with the 5 Ps

The Self-Assessment Tool

STAGE OF ADOPTION DEFINITIONS

Please consider the following definitions when assessing the program for stage of adoption. Use the questions to think about where the program truly is.

- ☐ **Not present:** The policy or practice is not present in the program at all.
- ☐ **Present, not systematic:** There is some part of the program that is testing or using the essential policy or practice. However, use of the essential policy or practice is not system wide, or the policy or practice is system-wide but is done inconsistently, intermittently, without coordination, or without a plan.
- ☐ **Plans to make systematic:** There is a plan in development, in place, or being initialized to expand the essential policy or practice to all parts of the program and/or to make the use of the policy or practice more consistent and coordinated across the program, both in how and when it is used.

- ☐ **Systematic, with room to improve:** Parts of the essential policy or practice have been implemented consistently through the program, but not all aspects, or the purpose of the policy and practice is not fully implemented.
- ☐ **Advanced:** All aspects of the essential policy or practice have been implemented throughout the program consistently and in a coordinated way; the effect of the essential policy and practice is revisited periodically; the purpose of the policy is understood and accepted by all stakeholders.

EXAMPLE

Policy/Practice: Currently tracking student demographics

- ☐ **Not present:** The program does not currently track student demographics.
- ☐ **Present, not systematic:** A few teachers collect demographics, but not the program; or the program sometimes collects demographics, but not consistently; or the program collects demographics, but uses different definitions across years or terms; or demographics are tracked on paper but are not aggregated into a database.

- ☐ **Plans to make systematic:** Plans are in place to make demographic definitions consistent and to coordinate tracking across programs and over time.
- ☐ **Systematic, with room to improve:** Some demographics are collected but not all; or the results of data collection are not shared; or the demographics of the student body are not compared to those of the facility or DOC as a whole.
- ☐ **Advanced:** Multiple different types of demographic data are collected; data is regularly reviewed, and the composition of the student body is compared to the facility or the DOC as a whole; data is used to course-correct or to inform changes to other policies to improve race, equity, and inclusion outcomes.

SECTION 1: AGENCY VALUES

Key Concepts

Incarceration factors as correlates for race: Some static or dynamic factors related to a person's incarceration—for example, sentence length, sentence type, risk assessment score, security classification, custody level, facility gender, disciplinary record, earliest release date, parole eligibility, housing assignment, etc.—may in fact correlate with race/ethnicity. When program eligibility, education access, and student support heavily rely on these factors, it may contribute to disparate outcomes by identity group (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, and gender). For example, in many states, those with longer and life sentences are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and Latinx. If DOCs exclude people with longer and life sentences from education, this may affect the proportion of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people in the prison population who can take advantage of education.

Equity policy: A department-wide policy focused on diversity, equity, and/or inclusion. For an example of DOC equity policy, see Washington State Department of Corrections, [DOC 810.005](#) “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Respect, and Anti-Racism.”

For more information about the ways corrections and education policies may overlap and create disparities in postsecondary education in prison, refer to “Overlapping Inequities Exist in Postsecondary Education and Criminal Legal Systems” from the [Beyond Access](#) report.⁴

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
a. Agency has an equity policy (or includes one in its education policy) with a focus on equitable access to postsecondary education programs by race, ethnicity, and gender	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the agency had critical conversations about factors assumed to be race-/ethnicity- neutral—such as custody level of facility—and how they might affect outcomes by race/ethnicity? • Has the agency assessed policy with a lens toward gender equity and parity between access to education across facilities designated for men and facilities designated for women? • Does the agency conduct regular equity assessments of policies, initiatives, and practices to ensure they do not create unintended consequences for specific identity groups? • Does the language used in the agency's missions and goals center equity, diversity, or inclusion? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
b. Equity is a measure of success for the agency	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the agency set goals by race and ethnicity and has it established indicators for racial equity (e.g., increase literacy for Latinx people, increase college enrollment for Black students)? If not, is the agency considering setting goals? • How close is the agency to achieving those goals? • Does the agency's mission and value statement include a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion? • Is equity a part of the agency's strategic plan? 	

SECTION 2: DATA COLLECTION, SHARING, ANALYSIS, AND USE

Note: These essential policies or practices and questions ask about ways that the program/institution tracks data for **students who are incarcerated** attending the prison-based program.

For more information about best practices for data collection, sharing, analysis, and use, refer to “Data Working Groups Ground Strategies in Data” from the *Beyond Access* report.⁵ For additional tools and guidance on establishing a statewide data working group, see Appendix B.⁶

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
a. Currently tracking student demographics	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the agency capture at least race, ethnicity, gender, and age? • Do the racial/ethnic categories match those used by colleges? If not, how do they differ and how is that reconciled? • Is data used to compare the demographics of students to the facility/prison system? • Does the agency collect information regarding students’ veteran status? • Are any groups overrepresented or under-represented in particular custody levels? • Do staff use disaggregated data as a tool to interrogate program outcomes? 	
b. Currently tracking number of enrolled students	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information stored in a database that relevant DOC staff can access? • Do colleges, corrections, other state agencies, and/or the public have access? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
c. Currently tracking number of students who leave/are removed from the program	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there policies in place for students to continue classes while in restrictive housing? Is there capacity to do this (e.g., staff, technology, materials, etc.)? • Does the agency track the reasons why students leave/are removed from the program? • Do students in education have transfer holds—policies that keep students from being transferred to other prisons until after they complete their degree program or other course of study? • When someone is removed from a program for administrative reasons (e.g., placed in restrictive housing or transferred to a different facility), is there a clear, communicated pathway for returning to the program? • Does the agency notify postsecondary institutions of student transfers to another facility, placement in restrictive housing, and releases to the community? Does the agency share data related to these transfers and releases? 	
d. Currently tracking individuals on the waitlist for postsecondary education	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the agency track how many students are on the waitlist for postsecondary education? • Is the agency able to disaggregate waitlist data by demographics such as race, custody level, facility gender, etc.? • Are any groups overrepresented on waitlists as compared to the prison program population? • Does the agency have a plan to reduce waitlists for programs? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
e. Currently tracking program completions and credentials earned	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the agency track completions for individuals who complete programs in facilities and in the community? • Does the agency track attainment of industry-recognized credentials, certificates, and degrees? 	
f. Currently sharing data with external stakeholders—especially other state agencies and education partners	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this data shared? • Is the higher education institution and corrections agency part of a statewide data sharing system? • Is there a public-facing dashboard with data regarding incarcerated students online or elsewhere? 	
g. Currently tracking education and employment outcomes post-release	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these outcomes are tracked: employment, employment relevance to degree/certificate earned, wages, and career satisfaction? • What data or data sources are used or needed to track outcomes? 	
h. Currently have inventory of program offerings and availability by facility	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an inventory is maintained, is it updated regularly (e.g., annually)? Shared with corrections staff? With community supervision or other state agencies (e.g., probation and parole)? • With prospective students and their families? With other DOC college partners or community-based organizations? • Does the inventory include the facility type (i.e., men/women, custody level, work release center)? 	

SECTION 3: RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS

For more information and best practices for recruitment, admissions, and enrollment, refer to “Learn from Related Research and Effective Practices: Recruitment” from the *Beyond Access* report.⁷

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
a. People with longer sentences or who are ineligible for parole have access to postsecondary education opportunities	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the agency restrict educational opportunities to a certain sentence length or to people with a certain time to release? By parole eligibility? How many years to release does a person have to have to participate in postsecondary education? Can the agency use data to review sentence length/time to earliest release date by race/ethnicity? Are any racial/ethnic groups overrepresented in groups that are ineligible for education based on their sentence length or parole eligibility? 	
b. Prison disciplinary records bar a student from program participation only in cases where an individual consistently engages in the most serious or violent behavior (i.e., would pose an imminent threat to program staff or participants)	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are students barred from program participation even when disciplinary records only include nonviolent/low-level behavior? In cases where students have to be removed from the classroom setting, are there opportunities to continue coursework? Are students in restrictive housing or segregation barred from program participation? Are any racial/ethnic groups overrepresented in the restrictive housing population? Are members or affiliates of gangs excluded from program participation? Are any racial/ethnic groups overrepresented in the security threat group or gang population? Are certain sentence types, custody levels, or risk scores excluded from participating in prison education programs? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
c. Career interests and past work and education histories are identified at prison intake and aligned to program placement and workforce needs	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are education/career aspirations included in intake paperwork or interviews? • How is that information stored and updated (e.g., individual employment plans, case management system)? • Can this information be looked at in the aggregate? 	
d. Barriers to participation are identified and students are supported in addressing those barriers on a timeline that aligns with the enrollment process	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long before the enrollment period are potential barriers identified (e.g., loan defaults, missing transcripts, Pell overpayments)? • Are students provided support to address student loan defaults? • Are students educated about how they can maintain student loans in good standing? 	
e. The recruitment process is inclusive of currently and/or formerly incarcerated students as credible messengers	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do current students play in the recruitment? • Are there barriers (in policy or law) to formerly incarcerated students' interaction with currently incarcerated students? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
f. Program marketing clearly communicates the enrollment process, program offerings, the credentials to be earned, and career opportunities these credentials are linked to (i.e., career pathways)	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are DOC staff well-versed in this information? Which staff? • Do prospective students know what they must do to enroll in a program? How long the application process is? What the current offerings are at their facility? Which career pathways each program is a part of? How is this information communicated? • Do marketing materials (e.g., photos, posters, brochures, flyers) and messaging represent and reflect the prison population? 	
g. The orientation process is inclusive of currently and/or formerly incarcerated students as credible messengers	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do current students play in student orientation? • Are there barriers (in policy or law) to formerly incarcerated students' interaction with currently incarcerated students? 	

SECTION 4: FACULTY AND STAFF

For more information about supporting faculty and staff in the prison education environment, refer to “Hiring, Training, and Professional Development Should Support Equity” from the *Beyond Access* report.⁸

a. Agency instructors are demographically representative of the students they teach (e.g., race/ethnicity, lived experience)	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are agency instructors diverse across factors such as race/ethnicity and gender? • Are there policies or practical barriers to hiring formerly incarcerated people as staff/instructors? 	
b. Staff receive diversity and inclusion training that includes understanding implicit bias	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the agency partnered with local or national leaders to understand implicit bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion? 	
c. Training for agency staff highlights the processes governing education and underscores its importance	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the training for custody and non-custody staff emphasize the importance of education? • Are custody staff well-versed in the processes for incarcerated students to enroll in postsecondary education? Do they know the correct staff to whom to refer students interested in education? • Are staff working within the corrections school district or primary education department trained on the processes to enroll in postsecondary education? 	

SECTION 5: STUDENT SUPPORTS

For more information about building equitable student and reentry support services and fostering digital literacy in prison education programs, refer to “Student Support Services,” “Digital Equity,” and “Reentry Supports” from the *Beyond Access* report.⁹

<p>a. Students have access to college support services within the facility, including but not limited to academic counseling, career counseling, tutoring, peer mentoring, financial aid counseling, financial literacy education and counseling, faculty advising, and academic resources (i.e., academic library)</p>	<p>Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these services does the agency provide to students? Which services do the colleges provide? • At what frequency can students access support staff? • Does a representative from each college work within the facilities? Do they have access to relevant information about students in the agency’s data management system? • Are there any barriers in DOC policy/regulations to students receiving support services? • How do support services vary across facilities/custody levels or by program? Are students required to participate? • Are students utilizing the services offered? 	
<p>b. Students have access to mental health counseling to address well-being</p>	<p>Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this counseling provided by DOC, colleges, or other outside organizations? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
c. Students are provided with accurate information about financial aid eligibility, including regarding the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), state financial aid applications, and how conviction histories may impact aid availability	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where is this information stored? How often is it updated? Do relevant corrections staff know when and whom to refer students to for financial aid advising (e.g., college financial aid advisor, TRIO program) Can DOC case management and program assignment staff assist with document collection—for the purposes of enrollment—when needed? 	
d. Students have access to regular and substantive interactions with instructors outside of class time	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do students communicate with faculty outside of class time (face-to-face, email, phone, mail)? Are plans in place to handle continued education and communication during lockdowns, particularly long-term lockdowns (i.e., public health emergencies)? 	
e. Students have pre-release access to potential employers	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can students participate in job fairs while incarcerated? Can students participate in interviews while incarcerated (whether in person or virtually)? Can students have paid internships while incarcerated? Can incarcerated people be hired as part-time or full-time employees? Are they paid market wages? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
f. Students receive support when removed or they withdraw from the program, and are aware of the process to reenroll, if eligible	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What supports are offered to students who are removed from a program by the agency (e.g., sent to restrictive housing, transferred to a facility within or out of state without the program)? • Can students appeal their removal from a program? What is the process? Who represents the student in proceedings? • Is there a clearly documented process on how to return to a program after removal or withdrawal? • How is the student's progress up until withdrawal/removal documented and recorded? 	
g. Students have access to basic computer skills training	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students trained to use college-specific learning management systems (LMSs) or other software they may interact with during their studies? • Are students trained in basic word processing software and email? • Are there security barriers to creating college or DOC email addresses for students? 	
h. Students have access to technology outside of classroom time to complete coursework	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does access to learning devices differ by security level? • Can students take learning devices like laptops or tablets to their living units to do coursework? • Can students save their coursework to devices, an intranet, or the internet? • When students leave or complete a program, can they access their completed coursework? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
i. Students can communicate with advisors and other key college staff outside of class time	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can students communicate with advisors and instructors via the college's LMS? • Does DOC have access to correspondence via email or LMS? • Can students use computers, tablets, or other devices to communicate with college staff? 	
j. Students receive wages for participating in education	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are wages comparable to those for work roles within the facility? • Are there income-based incentives for completing education programming (e.g., bonus for GED, higher working wages, etc.)? 	

SECTION 6: EDUCATION AND CAREER PATHWAYS

For more information about building credential pathways, refer to “Credential Pathways” from the [Beyond Access](#) report.¹⁰

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
a. Student pathways are inclusive of adult basic education, GED/high school equivalency, and postsecondary education	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can secondary and postsecondary staff identify career pathways between their programs? • Are secondary teachers competing for space with program instructors? • Are there integrated education and training programs available?¹¹ 	
b. A strong transferability and applicability of credit across the agency exists	<p>Not present</p> <p>Present, not systematic</p> <p>Plans to make systematic</p> <p>Systematic, with room to improve</p> <p>Advanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there diverse pathways in the system (e.g., stackable credentials, terminal associate degrees, associate to bachelor's degrees, terminal bachelor's degrees)? • Do credits from 2-year institutions operating in prisons transfer to the specific 4-year institutions operating in prisons? To other 4-year institutions? • If students do not earn credits, are they receiving a certificate or credential of value—meaning it has value to colleges or employers outside of prison? 	

Policy or practice	Stage of adoption	Questions to consider	Notes, reflections, and examples
c. Credentials offered are tied to industry-relevant, in-demand, high-wage careers and licensure when applicable	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there opportunities for individuals to participate in pre-apprenticeships or other programs that start inside and finish after release? • Has the DOC conducted a job market analysis or other assessment of industry identifiers? What are the current industry growth areas in the state? • Were the results of this analysis used to determine degrees, certifications, and credentials the program will provide? • Are students earning college credits/credentials for career technical education and vocational programming? If not, are students receiving a certificate or credential of value—meaning it has value to colleges or employers outside of prison? • Are there opportunities to gain credit for prior learning? 	
d. Policy is in place to address students with accumulated credits that have not led to degrees/credentials	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the main driver for students in programs earning credits but not earning a degree? • Are most, if not all, courses offered by DOC a part of a degree pathway? 	
e. Memoranda of understanding exist among programs within a state to allow transfer of credits from postsecondary education in prison programs to other programs in the community	Not present Present, not systematic Plans to make systematic Systematic, with room to improve Advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the DOC require colleges to have a transfer or articulation agreement with at least one other college in the state? 	

Acknowledgements

This self-assessment tool was developed by Allan Wachendorfer, Kayla James, Eurielle Kiki, and Niloufer Taber as a supplement to the report *Beyond Access: Advancing Racial Equity and Inclusion in Prison Education Programs*. The authors would like to thank the REI Project consultation team for their review of and contributions to early versions of the assessment tool: Brenda Dann-Messier, Bret Visger, Cristen Moore, Eric Cherrie, Lara Couturier, Susana Contreras Mendez, Tiffani Williams, and Toya Barnes-Teamer. For further information about the assessment tool or report, contact Ruth Delaney, Initiative Director for Unlocking Potential, rdelaney@vera.org.

FIGURE 1.

Applying a Racial Equity Lens with the 5 Ps

People

- Who is positively and negatively affected, and how?
- How are people differently situated in terms of the barriers they experience?

Place

- How does the context of place affect the issue?
- How are resources and investments distributed by location?
- How do location and context affect equity?

Process

- How are we meaningfully including or excluding people and communities who are affected?
- What policies, processes, and social relationships contribute to the exclusion of communities most affected by inequities?

Power

- Who is accountable (and to whom)?
- What is your decision-making structure?
- How is the current issue, policy, or program shifting power dynamics to better integrate the voices and priorities of communities of color?

Purpose

- What is my purpose toward advancing racial equity?
- Where does my purpose align with the people most affected, and where does it not?

Modified from the Multnomah County “Equity and Empowerment Lens.”¹²

ENDNOTES

- 1 For this tool, postsecondary education includes any college-level program that results in a certificate, diploma, associate's, bachelor's, master's, or other advanced degree. Sometimes, these programs are non-credit-bearing and do not lead to a degree. Typically, these programs are run by colleges, universities, or nonprofit organizations.
- 2 The formatting and some of the elements of this tool are based on Community College Resource Center's *Guided Pathways Essential Practices: Scale of Adoption Self-Assessment*. An earlier version of the tool was created in collaboration with consultants from HCM Strategists and Education Strategy Group. See Community College Resource Center, *Guided Pathways Essential Practices: Scale of Adoption Self-Assessment* (New York: Community College Resource Center, 2017).
- 3 Allan Wachendorfer, Kayla James, Eurielle Kiki, and Niloufer Taber, *Beyond Access: Advancing Racial Equity and Inclusion in Prison Education Programs* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2024).
- 4 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 14–17.
- 5 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 37–44.
- 6 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 67–71.
- 7 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 23–25.
- 8 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 21–23.
- 9 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 27–31, 31–32, 35–37.
- 10 Wachendorfer, James, Kiki, and Taber, *Beyond Access*, 2024, 33–35.
- 11 U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, "Integrated Education and Training (IET) in Corrections: A Companion Guide to the IET Design Toolkit," <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/iet-corrections-guide.pdf>.
- 12 Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity, "Equity and Empowerment Lens," <https://multco.us/info/equity-and-empowerment-lens>.