Tools for Integrating an Equity Lens
VETTING SOLUTIONS AND MAKING A DECISION

Often, there is no singular right answer, but there can be many wrong answers. Similarly, good ideas or solutions may be proposed but never gain traction because of a lack of support or momentum. As a result, it can be hard for groups to reach a decision on how to move forward on a solution. The following will help your group think through how to narrow multiple solutions to a set of specific actions:

- Step 1: Develop clear criteria for making decisions about what solutions to implement or advance. *Being specific about the criteria you will use to evaluate solutions upfront will help your group not only think strategically about what is important, it also ensures the process is transparent and that those involved have a clear understanding of why a solution was selected or rejected.*

- Step 2: Use data to understand who will benefit the most from the solution and whether the solution is likely to lead to the types of outcomes intended. *Ask questions to refine your criteria, such as: what may be the short-, intermediate-, and long-term consequences of this solution? For example, if your group decides increasing the number of prenatal clinics in an area is a possible solution to the issue of infant mortality, consider whether there are barriers to people accessing clinics and what the consequences may be if people can't afford to go to a clinic.*

- Step 3: Vet the solutions you brainstormed against the criteria, including allowing multiple perspectives on how the solution fits into the criteria. Use data during this process when available. *Make sure the voices around the table have an opportunity to discuss how they see the solution measuring up to the criteria established in step one. Bringing data into the process can help move the conversation toward specific measures or goals, providing context for the overall discussion.*

- Step 4: Pick one or more solutions, ideally including at least a couple quick experiments – small wins that may not solve the problem for everyone or even solve it fully for anyone, but will allow for small gains. *If the situation allows, pick a few small, scale-able options to experiment with, which not only provides your group with small wins, testing ideas allows your group to see what is working, what isn't working, and what could work with a few tweaks.*

- Step 5: Review the solutions you selected and for each one, ask: What could we do differently, additionally, or better so that the solution will have a greater positive effect on populations most affected by inequities? *Which of your experiments move the needle against the long-term aim? You can use rapid data collection and intuitive learning to figure out what is working and what isn't, and then experimenting again in different settings with different populations*

- Step 6: Create a plan for implementation, evaluation and adaptation, recognizing that your solutions are likely to need to be refined once they are being deployed and new learning is coming in. *This process is not linear; instead it is cyclical. Once a solution has been selected for implementation or scaling, the next step is to evaluate what is working and find areas where the solution could be improved, which may require revisiting your initial criteria, collecting data to inform decisions, and possibly even additional experimentation to get to smaller wins.*

Are you interested in more tips and tools for taking an equity lens?
Spark Policy Institute's (www.sparkpolicy.com) interactive Tools for Integrating an Equity Lens is available at www.sparkpolicy.com/tools/equity. Please share your stories about integrating equity into your planning process, share your tools, and access tools and ideas from other organizations.