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What is Logic and Why does it Matter for Equity?

The first stage of the [diversitydatakids.org](https://www.diversitydatakids.org) policy equity assessment is logic. The policy or program logic refers to the program assumptions, design and desired outcomes, as defined by authorizing legislation and ensuing regulations and policy guidance. A logic model maps out the relationships between the program's or policy's assumptions about the target population, the resources needed, the program design, the performance objectives and the anticipated changes in participants' outcomes. In other words, a program's logic defines the specific objectives of the program (program outputs and participant outcomes) and how it intends to achieve these objectives (program inputs such as service components, for example curricula or income assistance).¹ Consistency within program logic is a key component to a program's effectiveness, that is, a program's design should match its goals. In addition, consistency between a program's logic and its [capacity](#) – the magnitude and reach of actual program resources, service delivery, and quality – is also crucial to a program's ability to achieve its stated objectives.

[diversitydatakids.org](https://www.diversitydatakids.org) analyzes the logic of policies and social programs with an emphasis on the extent to which equity considerations are incorporated into a program's logic. Through a careful assessment of program goals (and the corresponding problems the program is intended to address), [diversitydatakids.org](https://www.diversitydatakids.org) determines whether and how the program acknowledges and addresses equity issues, either explicitly or implicitly. For example, program goals focused on improving the outcomes of vulnerable populations or on reducing access barriers to services for particular groups may directly address inequities between groups or other equity-related issues, even if this is not explicitly stated. Similarly, a detailed assessment of program design can reveal whether program services target vulnerable populations or are tailored to meet the specialized needs of subgroups of participants. Thus, an examination of program logic can uncover if a program is explicitly or implicitly intended to ameliorate inequitable outcomes or improve opportunities for vulnerable populations. It is important to clearly identify the objectives and design of a program to ensure a fair assessment of effectiveness based on the true intention of the program (equity-focused or not).

The [diversitydatakids.org](https://www.diversitydatakids.org) approach builds on the recommendations from agencies such as UNICEF, which suggest that logic models should identify the equity-focused elements of each part of the model (e.g. design, inputs, outputs, and outcomes).² In addition, federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) recommend that logic models consider the context of programs (e.g. political, legal, economic) and their target populations, both currently and historically. Program context can have an important influence on how programs are implemented and whether they achieve their outcomes.³ Both the logic and capacity stages of the [diversitydatakids.org](https://www.diversitydatakids.org) policy equity assessment emphasize current context and the evolution of the program over time, including changes in goals and services, changes in the target population, and changes in the resources available to meet the program's defined goals.

Overall, understanding the logic of a program is crucial when evaluating its success: in order to determine if a program is effective, one must first understand the problem it addresses, what goals have been set for the program, the assumptions it makes about the needs of the target population, and how it is designed to achieve these goals. Once the intended goals and design are well understood, the policy equity assessment compares

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the logic to the actual capacity to better understand and interpret research evidence. Furthermore, understanding the logic of a program can uncover equity considerations inherent in its goals and design and provide context for an assessment of the program's ability to improve equity within the program and reduce gaps between participants and the general population.

Sources & notes:

¹ W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2004). Logic model development guide. Retrieved from <http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide.aspx>.

² My M&E. (n.d.). Section 5: Designing the evaluation. UNICEF. Retrieved from http://www.mymande.org/designing_the_evaluation.

³ Ibid; Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. (2010). The program manager's guide to evaluation (second edition). Washington, D.C.: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/program_managers_guide_to_eval2010.pdf.