



Office of Equity

Office of Governor

JB Pritzker

VOL.1



Greetings,

Happy 2023! The start of the year is a perfect time to reflect on how far you have traveled, to assess the path ahead, to thank those who have walked with you, and to invite others to join you. If you are reading this newsletter, I assume you have been walking this path towards equity with our Office, and I thank you for your leadership, commitment, and bravery in striving to create a state government we all deserve and where everyone can thrive!

As public servants, we all have affirmed our commitment to serve the people of Illinois. That charge requires that we **hold** ourselves and others to a higher standard if we are to mitigate the compounding systems of oppression and exclusion that are at the core of our state’s governmental processes, policies and practices. The vision of the Office is to work to ensure “Illinois is a state free of social inequity with a healthy and thriving population with access to high quality services delivered by diverse, inclusive, equity-oriented, and accessible state governmental systems, agencies, institutions, and services,” and our approach for advancing equity and racial justice utilizes intersectional and social determinants of health frameworks.

As we continue to work toward this vision, I want to share what has become a useful framework for describing how I have been **building capacity to lead for equity** this year and the unique opportunity to serve our state agencies, boards and commissions. From your advocacy for more standardized trainings and full day institutes for deeper engagement so that our workforce could develop a shared language and strategies in order to advance DEIA to your advocacy to incorporate more robust systems of accountability, you have been excellent guides, teachers and collaborators. Our inaugural *Summer Equity Institute: Intersectional Approaches to Advancing Equity in State Government* engaged 161 people from across state government this past summer and we are already dreaming up new engagements for this year. We hope you appreciate the incremental progress we made together in 2022, as noted in our Year in Review, and we look forward to deepening our work with you this year!

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While developing a DEIA infrastructure and processes are key strategies for our Office, supporting and **holding up** the hard-working DEIA change agents and leaders within our agencies is a critical part of our Office’s work. Building community is a central part of building capacity and creating organizational change. I have been truly inspired by the people working in state government who are confronting institutionalized forms of inequity and injustice while also prioritizing accountability and sustainability in DEIA processes.

DEIA is a cross-functional priority that must be integrated and embedded in every level of organizational culture to achieve systematic and continuous improvements in the processes and outcomes of DEIA work. We understand that stewards of DEIA work are often navigating the very systems of harm that they are working to change. We are here to affirm your efforts and strategize a way forward with you!

Finally, our office is in the “business” of **holding space** for those who are entering on a ramp that may seem “behind” others on the path. Perhaps you are unsure about pronoun use as a practice of supporting your gender diverse colleagues and clients, or you are becoming aware of how a policy that your agency is implementing may reinforce racial inequities, and you need guidance on how to mitigate future harm. Possibly you have engaged in compliance-based approaches to DEIA and need support in shifting to one focused on both individual and organizational growth as outlined in our Illinois Toward Equity Framework. Our approach to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility is based on the recognition that individuals must be and stay curious about the relationship between power and privilege and how it perpetuates institutionalized forms of injustice and inequity. These systems have harmed us all, and we need your support and alliance on this path forward with us.



Dr. Sekile Nzinga
Deputy Chief of Staff for Equity
Office of the Governor



Image Description: Left to right, the Office of Equity team Dr. Sekile Nzinga, D. Javier Thompson, Sandy Orozco, and Dr. Addie Shrodes smile for a picture together at the Governor's Office Holiday Party.

Meet the Team



Sekile M. Nzinga (She/Her/Hers) PhD, MSW was appointed by Governor JB Pritzker as the inaugural Chief Equity Officer for the State of Illinois and was recently promoted to Deputy Chief of Staff for Equity. Prior to joining state government, she was a senior administrator in higher education as the former interim Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Provost of Diversity and Inclusion as well as Women’s Center Director at Northwestern University. Nzinga also worked as a professor of Social Work and Women and Gender Studies for 18 years. Her professional and community work have centered on the intersections of race, class, and gender in reproduction and parenting; gender equity in the

workplace; family centered employment policy; and reproductive justice. She is the author of *Lean Semesters: How the University Reproduces Inequity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020) and the editor of *Laboring Positions: Black Women, Mothering and the Academy* (Demeter, 2013).

She serves on the board of The Journal of Women Center’s in Higher Education, was the 2020-21 Author in Residence at HigherEd Jobs, and is the recipient of the 2019 Evanston-Northshore YWCA’s Women in Leadership Award.



D. Javier Thompson (They/Them/Theirs), AM, LCSW, joined the Office of Equity’s in January 2022, as the inaugural Data, Assessment, and Research Specialist. As a process-focused administrator and researcher, their focus over the past year has been building systems and projects that can be readily accessed, assessed, and modified to effectively build equity at scale across agencies. 2022’s projects have included building the Office of Equity’s data and assessment infrastructure, providing technical assistance for integrating equity throughout DEIA-focused research and assessment projects, creating learning assessments for state-wide trainings, and collaborating with other members of the Data Governance and

Organization to Support Equity and Racial Justice Act’s project team on expanding demographic data collection across the agencies named in the Act.

A social worker by training, Javier held behavioral health clinician, research, and administrative roles across healthcare, social service, and K-12 plus higher education organizations before joining the Office of Equity. Through partnering directly with service users, providers, and administrators, they built the intersectional lens, ethics, technical expertise, and engagement strategies they are currently employing in all Office of Equity initiatives.



Addie Shrodes (She/They), PhD, joins the GO Office of Equity as the Deputy Director. Dr. Shrodes will serve as a thought and action partner for State agencies to create, implement, and report on Illinois Toward Equity DEIA Action Plans. Their portfolio includes training and education and DEIA Action Plan Implementation. In collaboration with the GO Equity team, Addie will be planning a series of convenings, workshops, and toolkits in 2023 to provide opportunities for cross-agency learning and capacity building. These plans will be informed by meetings with each of the 38 agencies within the Governor’s cabinet and a review of FY23 DEIA Action Plans submitted to GOE.

Dr. Shrodes has a background in equity-centered education, strategic planning, and institutional change in higher education, local government, and philanthropy. She holds a Ph.D. in Learning Sciences (School of Education and Social Policy) and a graduate certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies from Northwestern University, and a M.A. and B.A. in English from the University of California—Los Angeles and the University of Michigan, respectively.



Sandy Orozco (She/Her/Hers) joined the Office of Equity’s in August 2022, as the first Dunn Fellow. Her focus is on advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility within state government to impact the work of Illinois’ new Office of Equity within the Office of the Governor. She contributes to ongoing initiatives such as our searchable DEIA resource bank of DEIA best practices, publishing our newsletter, developing training and educational materials, researching benchmarks, and tracking progress DEIA metrics for state agencies.

Sandy recently graduated from Illinois Institute of Technology with a B.S. in Business Administration and an accelerated Master of Public Policy and Administration. She also double minored in Political Science and Public administration.



Arielle Capel (She/Her/Hers) joined the new Office of Equity within the Office of the Governor as the Equity Intern in Fall 2022. She contributed to the edits and revisions of the ITE framing documents to the intersectionality resources for the Summer Institute. Arielle also attended the Dept of Labor’s Women’s Bureau’s DC Summit and her copious notes led to the creation of Equity in Focus Summit: Office of Equity Conference Overview. Arielle is currently a junior majoring in philosophy on the pre-law track at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. We are deeply grateful for the contributions Arielle made to our office in the Fall semester and wish her the best in her continued study. Farewell!

Illinois Toward Equity

Launching the Illinois Towards Equity Framework

In 2022, the Office of Equity created and launched the **Illinois Towards Equity (ITE) Framework and Action Planning Toolkit**. The ITE Framework emerged from a detailed review of 2020-early 2022 DEI action plans and listening sessions with the 38 agencies within the Governor’s cabinet. This process indicated that there was an opportunity to build a state government-specific DEIA Action Planning framework and set of resources to systematically support agencies’ ongoing work.

Key to the **Illinois Towards Equity Framework** is its **five core areas** of work, or domains: **1)** Infrastructure & Accountability; **2)** Opportunity and Advancement; **3)** Organizational Culture & Climate; **4)** Training & Education; and **5)** Thriving Community.

By structuring DEIA initiatives with these five domains, agencies establish infrastructure to promote synergy, partnership, and shared learning across state government.

Supporting the ITE Framework is the Action Planning toolkit, which currently includes the FY 23 DEIA Action Plan Template and SMARTIE Goals Worksheet. Later this year, we will introduce materials agencies can use when implementing various parts of their plans and pursuing other DEIA-focused projects. We will also add materials for annually assessing and reporting the progress agencies make on the DEIA Action Plans.

How to Engage with Illinois Toward Equity

The Office of Equity’s Illinois Toward Equity Supporting Series creates opportunities to engage with and learn about the Illinois Toward Equity Framework and Toolkit. Each Supporting Series session walk through a key framework, tool, or topic to create, pursue, and assess DEIA Action Plans. We will announce new Supporting Series WebEx sessions as new resources are added to the DEIA Action Planning Toolkit. Agency executive leaders and DEIA champions can view materials from past sessions in the “Illinois Toward Equity Action Planning and Reporting” Microsoft Teams Space (‘general’ chat > ‘files’ button).

The Illinois Toward Equity DEIA Action Planning and Reporting Microsoft Teams Space serves as a one-stop shop for resources and announcements. To add additional staff to the ITE Action Planning and Reporting MS Teams space, please send a request to your agency’s Equity Action Plan Accountability Designee. The Designee will post the request to each respective agency’s Teams channel.



Image Description: D. Javier Thompson stands in front of a podium at the Office of Equity Summer Institute to present on Intersectional Approaches to Advancing Equity in State Government.

Peer-2-Peer Exchange

Early in our Office’s development, we learned that our agency-based DEIA change agents wanted dedicated time to connect, support and learn from each other. Monthly Peer-to-Peer Exchange convenings have provided opportunities for our office and DEIA leaders within state government to share promising practices and progress made and have helped to identify barriers to our collective success.

For example, last August, we hosted Mike Scott, the State’s Inaugural Information Accessibility Officer at the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT), for a session dedicated to accessibility of information technology systems, websites, documents, and content to better serve people with disabilities. You can [review Mike’s slides here](#). In September, we hosted Curt Clemons-Mosby and Marc Staley from the Governor’ Office of Management and Budget (GOMB) so they could review how the annual budget planning process as a critical step in prioritizing equity resource needs. [Review the recording for the P2P here](#). We also hosted Sergio Hernandez from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). He shared ISBE’s [Equity Journey Continuum](#), which is an “informational tool to help districts view their data through the lens of equity.” It identifies gaps in student achievement, opportunities, and supports by analyzing data that districts already collect and report to ISBE and makes the data more useful for districts to improve outcomes for students.

Please join us for our upcoming 2023 Peer-2-Peer Exchanges:



Our **January 25th, 2:00-3:00 pm** Peer-2-Peer Exchange session will feature Deputy Governor Andy Manar (He/Him/His) for a presentation and discussion of the DEIA work he is leading with the review and reimagination of our State’s Historic Sites.



Our **February 22nd, 2:00-3:00 pm** Peer-2-Peer Exchange session will feature LaReyna Griffin (They/Them/Theirs), Data Analytics Manager at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, who will discuss ways to use data provided by annual climate & cultural surveys to inform DEI efforts by managers and staff.

To join the invitation for these Peer-to-Peer Exchange opportunities, or to share what equity efforts your agency is striving toward, please reach out to us at GOV.EquityOffice@illinois.gov.

Equity on the Move

The Office of Equity is committed to collaborating with stakeholders and our partners at the local, state, and federal level.

In 2022, we participated in a visit with United States Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh and other elected officials to the Chicago Women in Trades to celebrate their USDOL's Women's Bureau Grant award. This investment to support women in the trades is a direct example of the power of state and federal governments aligning to prioritize gender equity in the implementation of key federal funds. Chicago Women in Trades represents a model for the types of non-traditional labor programs that we need to fund and scale at both state and local levels. Dr. Nzinga also participated in a panel at the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau's Equity in Focus Summit in Washington D.C. along with other equity officers from across the county. The Summit focused on removing race and gender barriers in order to increase women and people of color's access to work in the trades and increasing childcare supports for all working women. Now more than ever, we need women and especially Indigenous women, women of color, and other under-represented women to have access to fulfilling employment and to be able to advance in jobs they have historically been excluded from due to gender-based discrimination.



Image Description: U.S. Secretary Marty Walsh, Chief Equity Officer Dr. Sekile Nzinga, Mayor of Chicago Lori Lightfoot, U.S. Representative Robin Kelly, U.S. Representative Danny Davis, DOL Acting Director Jane Flanagan, DOT Deputy Secretary Becky Locker, Alderman Irvin, and Chicago Women in Trades staff and Board Members pose for a group photograph at the Chicago Women in Trades event.

In October, Office of Equity also represented the Office of the Governor during United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland's visit to the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ's Community meeting to discuss the pivotal role that the church has played in the nation's history and the Civil Rights Movement through the visitation and funeral of Emmett Till. The violent way that Emmett Till was murdered, and the courageous manner in which his mother Mamie Till-Mobley honored his life by publicly exposing the manner in which he was tortured, reminds us that the United States still has a long way to go before the system of racism is dismantled. Secretary Haaland's visit affirmed the critical need to tell, preserve, and learn from the full story of our country's history.

Inclusion @ Work

Striving to become a more inclusive workplace should always be an organizational practice. The Equity team likes to walk our talk, so in October we created an *ofrenda* in our work area in celebration of *El Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). We encouraged our Governor's Office colleagues to participate in the celebration of life by honoring our ancestors, including our community members lost to COVID and structural violence.

Our colleagues contributed decorations and/or photographs of deceased loved ones to place on our alter. Our hope is to foster healing, wellness, belonging, and community building by experiencing and learning about the cultural significance this tradition has for many others in our nation and the world. Muchas Gracias to our Dunn Fellow, Sandy Orozco, for sharing your sacred cultural tradition with us!



Image Description: Day of the Dead alter with colorful Mexican inspired decorations, photos of deceased loved ones, food, candy, toys, a Black Lives Still Matter sign, yellow marigold flowers, candles and a plant.

Resources and Contact Us

To support your ongoing DEIA efforts in state government, [please see our brief primer of external resources, linked here.](#)

If you have questions, suggestions, or would like to join our listserv to stay in the loop, please contact us at GOV.EquityOffice@illinois.gov