

# Our approach to Equality Impact Assessment

*This document offers learning from the Agile Initiative for researchers, research administrators, EDI professionals, and others interested in enhancing equality in fast-paced, policy-facing research.*

## What is an Equality Impact Assessment and why should researchers care?

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a way to systematically evaluate potential or unintended equality impacts of policies, guidelines, services, projects, processes and events. While completing an EIA is not itself a legal requirement in England, it is one practical way that university communities can help meet responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). EIAs are grounded in the principles of the UK Equality Act, 2010.

Although EIAs have more commonly been used for policies, services and institutional processes, their application to research projects is an emerging practice in universities.

Agile is committed to enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and ensuring that research projects are delivered fairly and do not discriminate against any groups based on their protected characteristics. We therefore use EIAs as a practical tool to help teams anticipate barriers, reduce unintended harms, and strengthen inclusion throughout the research process.

In rapid research projects, this is especially important because decisions about scope, partners, methods and outputs are often made quickly, and early choices can shape who is included, whose knowledge counts, and who may benefit from or be affected by the research.

## What do we mean by Equality, Diversity & Inclusion?

The definitions below are taken from Agile's [Diversity and Inclusion Plan](#).

**Diversity** refers to including and collaborating with people from various backgrounds, disciplines, and stakeholder groups. It encompasses diversity of expertise, knowledge, and approaches as well as diversity in terms of race, gender, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and socio-economic background.

### Defining stakeholders

Agile works with many different stakeholders. Stakeholders in this series refers to non-academic groups who have an interest in, may be affected by, or hold relevant knowledge, rights or responsibilities in relation to the research. These may include policymakers, practitioners, civil society groups, private sector actors, Indigenous Peoples, communities, and other knowledge holders. The relevant groups will depend on the project context.

**Equality** means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equality broadly implies equal access to opportunities for everyone to realise their potential; however, this can lead to neglecting the variability in access needs and the diverse impact of systemic and personal biases, structural inequalities, and power disparities.

**Equity** recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates the resources and opportunities needed to achieve an equal outcome. This approach would include tailoring resources and opportunities to specific needs and positions to help researchers achieve equal outcomes.

**Inclusion** refers to the proactive and intentional effort to involve all relevant stakeholders in a respectful, equitable, and fair research process. It goes beyond representation, ensuring that individuals and groups have access to participate, contribute, and benefit from environmental research. It emphasises the importance of diverse perspectives and voices, particularly those traditionally marginalised or underrepresented in decision making and scholarship.

## How we approach EIAs in Agile

We developed and trialled an EIA tool in Agile that includes a series of questions to support research teams with assessing the potential or unintended positive and negative equality impacts of their project. The EIA helps teams assess how a project may affect stakeholders and team members differently, including in relation to protected characteristics.

### Agile's EIA

You can download [Agile's EIA template](#) to see what's included in the assessment.



## 1 When to complete an EIA



We recommend you write the EIA at the same time as the project proposal. The goal is to ensure that EDI considerations are embedded in the project from the start. The EIA should be treated as a living document that contributes to the advancement of EDI.

## 2 What to include in an EIA

Your EIA should consider potential equality impacts across the full lifespan of a project: research planning, design, implementation, events, communications, publications, knowledge dissemination, and team and career development. It should then identify actions or mitigations that reduce potential negative impacts and promote positive ones. Collaborating with the whole research team and key project stakeholders can develop an EIA that identifies feasible actions based on the perspectives of those who may be affected by the project.

Some of the issues to consider include:

-  Any individual, institutional or societal norms and attitudes in the framing of the research that should be considered and potentially challenged
-  Any significant gaps in understanding, evidence or data that affect your ability to assess potential equality impacts

-  The ways that the research might affect people with different characteristics, including stakeholders, members of the research team and broader users of the research
-  Potential negative impacts arising from the use or implementation of the research findings, results or recommendations, particularly where these uses may be beyond the control of the researchers

### 3 How to monitor and review an EIA

Monitoring and reviewing the EIA allows for structured engagement with EDI throughout a research project while supporting continuous learning and improvement. Revisiting the EIA regularly, for example around major project milestones, provides an opportunity to assess whether actions and mitigations are reducing negative impacts and promoting positive ones. The EIA should also be updated when the project changes, when new team members or stakeholders join, or when a group previously expected to participate is no longer included.

## Top tips

These tips are based on learning from Agile, and our commitment to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in research.

**Complete an EIA at the start.** Use an EIA to consider equality impacts throughout the lifespan of the research project, including research planning, design, implementation, knowledge dissemination and team and career development.

**Take a comprehensive approach.** In addition to the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act, consider socio-economic status, parental and caregiving responsibilities, and part-time work to align with current trends in diversity and inclusion in higher education.

**Think critically.** Carefully review the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act. Consider the definitions and who may be left out.

**Tailor the EIA to the project.** Make your EIA useful for the specific scope, timeframe, and stakeholders of your research project. Remember, no project can be everything to everyone. Focus your EIA on the specific groups who may be intentionally or unintentionally impacted by your project.

## Resources

[Agile Equality Impact Assessment template](#)

[University of Oxford Equality and Diversity Unit Guidance on Equality Analysis](#)

[Equality Act, 2010](#)

[Government of Canada best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion in research practice and design](#)

Webinar recording. [“The Agile Initiative: Integrating equality, diversity and inclusion in research design”](#). [YouTube, 2024](#)

## About the Series

The “How to do a Sprint research project” series was produced in 2026 by the Agile Initiative at the Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford.

The Agile Initiative aims to revolutionise how research responds to the urgent needs of policymakers on critical environmental issues through rapid research projects called Sprints.

The aim of this series is to provide guidance on how to run a Sprint research project in contexts outside of the Agile Initiative, based on learning collated by the programme support team and researchers.

Stephanie Perrin led the writing of this briefing, with contributions from research support staff and researchers across the Agile Initiative.

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Other guides in the series include:

- Co-creating research
- Interdisciplinary research
- Managing rapid research projects
- Theory of change in research

Available at <https://www.agile-initiative.ox.ac.uk/our-approach/>

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