



COLORADO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AGENCY EQUITY FRAMEWORK

July 23, 2024

www.puc.colorado.gov | www.puc.colorado.gov/equity

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Mission and Acknowledgements

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission serves the public interest by effectively regulating utilities and facilities so that the people of Colorado receive safe, reliable, and reasonably-priced services consistent with the economic, environmental and social values of our state.

The Agency would like to thank all who helped to inform this report, including members of the public and stakeholders who provided written and oral comments in Proceeding 22M-0171ALL. Director Rebecca White took a lead role in working with the following Staff to create this document:

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The Commission also acknowledges the efforts of the Energy Equity Project, whom the Commission contracted to guide the development of this document and help the Agency surface the ways that it can consider equity in all of its work. The Commission thanks Justin Schott of the Energy Equity Project for his contributions.

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Definitions

- **Agency:** When the term *Agency* is used, it refers to all of the staff of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission and how they operate day-to-day.
- **Commission:** When the term *Commission* is used, it refers to the appointed decision-making body of three Commissioners.
- **Disproportionately Impacted Community:** See definition on pages 6-7.
- **EnviroScreen:** Colorado EnviroScreen is an interactive environmental justice mapping tool developed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The tool enables users to identify disproportionately impacted communities based on the definition in Colorado's Environmental Justice Act.¹
- **Guiding Principles:** Concise statements that specify the Agency's vision for how it will operate and make decisions to consider equity in all of its work.
- **Adjudication / Adjudicatory Proceeding:** These proceedings, which include applications, advices letters, non-rulemaking petitions, formal complaints, show cause proceedings, or any other proceeding designated by the PUC as adjudicatory, are litigated by the Commission and require expert testimony by intervening parties.
- **Rulemaking:** These proceedings enable the PUC to establish rules that regulate the industries it regulates. They are initiated by a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.
- **Fixed Utility Fund:** The Fixed Utility Fund funds some Colorado Public Utilities Commission activities. It comes from a small charge on utility customer bills.

1. Introduction

The mission of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is to serve the public interest by effectively regulating utilities and facilities so that the people of Colorado receive safe, reliable, and reasonably-priced services consistent with the economic, environmental, and social values of our state. In 2021, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill (SB) 21-272, which required the Commission to make rules in which it considers how best to provide equity, minimize impacts, prioritize benefits to disproportionately impacted communities, and address historical inequities in all of its work.² This mandate, coupled with stakeholder comments requesting the Agency share and follow a clear path to implement the legislation, initiated the Agency's work on an overarching equity implementation strategy. This resulting Equity Framework represents our commitment to embed equity and environmental justice within our practices.

The Equity Framework is overseen and supported by the Agency Director, Rebecca White, who manages the day-to-day operations of the Agency. Just as the director will oversee the Agency's Equity Framework, the Commission will lead the creation of rules for how equity will impact its legal proceedings and requirements for regulated industries. While the Equity Framework does not bind the outcome of Commission proceedings, the agency and the Commissioners have engaged in and will continue to engage in a unique partnership to fully realize SB 21-272.

This inaugural Equity Framework contains a description of each team within the PUC and identifies team-specific equity priorities. It provides a set of guiding principles across four dimensions of equity that serve as aspirational

¹ More about [EnviroScreen](#)

² [Colorado Senate Bill 21-272](#)

goals for Agency staff. The Equity Framework also provides an initial assessment for actions the Agency can take to implement SB 21-272, separate from the creation of rules. Some of these areas of work are specific to a particular team, and others may affect multiple teams or the entire Agency.

Words From the PUC Director Rebecca White

It is hard to imagine a future with safe, reliable, reasonably-priced utility services without a core commitment to equity. SB 21-272 gave the Colorado Public Utilities Commission the needed focus and mandate to bring this important effort to the fore. Our team has been hard at work meeting with stakeholders and engaging with our own team to determine how we can best achieve equitable energy, transportation, telecommunications, and public safety services for Coloradans.

This is just the beginning. Refining and applying the Equity Framework to provide greater equity will be an iterative process. Articulating these work areas is the first step to identifying how to institutionalize equity within Agency operations, which will be continued as part of a strategic planning process developed through 2024. Moreover, many of the opportunities identified here will require resources, including staff, funding, and technology. Embedding specific tasks and priorities within the strategic planning process will enable the Agency to build a more comprehensive team to implement the many ideas set forth here. Through twice-annual updates, the Agency intends to report out on priorities and progress. Ultimately, the Equity Framework and the work areas identified within will be dynamic, as equity is an ongoing practice, not an end state.

This Framework is both a start and a cornerstone for a much larger body of work that will impact every aspect of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission, including how we operate, communicate, and make decisions. Throughout this process, our Agency is committed to being thoughtful, open, and in constant dialogue with stakeholders. Thank you for taking the time to read this document.

Sincerely,

Rebecca White, Director

2. Methodology

In April 2022, the Commission opened Proceeding No. 22M-0171ALL to host public comments opportunities and equity-related workshops supporting the implementation of SB 21-272.³ Since the proceeding's inception, numerous stakeholders, drawing on local and national examples, suggested that the Agency develop an equity framework to detail the Agency's equity initiatives.⁴ The Agency took this advice and partnered with Justin Schott at the University of Michigan's Energy Equity Project (EEP) to develop this framework.⁵

Senate Bill (SB) 21-272

³ [Proceeding No. 22M-0171ALL](#) is a miscellaneous docket opened by the Commission to gather information about how the Commission should implement SB 21-272 within the Agency and through one or more rulemaking proceedings.

⁴ In their June 13, 2022 comments, the Environmental Justice Coalition stated "as a preliminary step, we recommend that the Commission establish an equity framework that serves as a lens through which the Commission can suggest new programs and evaluate existing programs and policies." (p. 8). In their July 27, 2022 comments, the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) stated "with various suggestions of different equity frameworks and goals before the Commission, CEO suggests that as a next step in the process of implementing SB 21-272, the Commission put forward a discussion draft of an equity framework the Commission would use to evaluate its work as well as utility programs and policies that it regulates. Finally, in their June 13, 2022 comments, the Rocky Mountain Institute stated that "examples from other states can be informative, [including t]he goals included in the California Commission's Equity Framework..."

⁵ The framework is modeled after Energy Equity Project's [Energy Equity Project Framework](#)

In recent years, public utility commissions across the country have increasingly become recognized as state agencies with the potential to advance equity. At their formation in the early 20th century, public utility commissions were mandated to ensure safe, reliable, and affordable service in the public interest. In recent years, many state legislatures have tasked their state public utilities commissions with taking a broader view of the public interest and consider concerns such as decarbonization, racial and economic equity and justice, new dimensions of utility competition, and accountability alongside their traditional regulatory mandate.

In 2021, the Colorado legislature passed SB 21-272, which required the Commission to, going forward, “ensure that the Commission, in exercising its regulatory authority, will take account of and, where possible, help to correct ... historical inequities.”⁶ The legislation describes historical inequities as including unequal distribution of pollution in the state, systemic exclusion from environmental decision-making processes, and enjoyment of fewer environmental benefits.

Specifically, SB 21-272 states that “the Commission shall promulgate rules requiring that the Commission, in all of its work including its review of all filings and its determination of all adjudications, consider how best to provide equity, minimize impacts, and prioritize benefits to Disproportionately Impacted Communities and address historical inequalities.”⁷ Further, it states that “when making decisions relating to retail customer programs, the commission shall host informational meetings, workshops, and hearings that invite input from Disproportionately Impacted Communities and shall ensure, to the extent reasonably possible, that such programs, including any associated incentives and other relevant investments, include floor expenditures, set aside as equity budgets, to ensure that low-income customers and Disproportionately Impacted Communities will have at least proportionate access to the benefits of such programs, incentives, and investments.”⁸

The passage of SB 21-272 moved the Colorado Public Utilities Commission into a select group of state utility commissions tasked with considering three equity issues: environmental justice (10 percent of commissions shared this mandate as of summer 2021), racial equity (6 percent of commissions), and economic equity (27 percent of commissions). Colorado’s comprehensive mandate to consider equity in all of its work—as opposed to a directive to consider equity issues when considering in a specific utility action such as resource planning—also makes the Agency’s equity requirements some of the broadest across the United States.

Defining Disproportionately Impacted Communities in Colorado

SB 21-272 contains several provisions that require the Commission to consider or identify Disproportionately Impacted Communities. In 2023, House Bill 23-1233 was passed, which included a requirement that all state agencies use the same definition of a disproportionately impacted community.⁹ House Bill 23-1233 defines disproportionately impacted communities as “a community that is in a census block group, as determined in accordance with the most recent five-year United States Bureau of the Census American Community Survey and meets one or more of the following criteria:

- a. the proportion of the population living in households that are below two hundred percent of the federal poverty level is greater than forty percent;
- b. the proportion of households that spend more than thirty percent of household income on housing is

⁶ [Colorado Senate Bill 21-272](#) p. 3

⁷ [Colorado Senate Bill 21-272](#) p. 3

⁸ [Colorado Senate Bill 21-272](#) pp. 3-4

⁹ [Colorado House Bill 23-1233](#) pp. 20-21

greater than fifty percent;

- c. the proportion of the population that identifies as people of color is greater than forty percent;
- d. the proportion of the population that is linguistically isolated is greater than twenty percent;
- e. a statewide Agency determines, after a community presents evidence of being and requests to be classified as a disproportionately impacted community, that the population is disproportionately impacted based on evidence, presented in a relevant statewide Agency decision-making process, that a census block group is disproportionately impacted because it has a history of environmental racism perpetuated through redlining or through anti-indigenous, anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, or anti-black laws, policies, or practices and that present-day demographic factors and data demonstrate that the community currently faces environmental health disparities;
- f. the community is identified by a statewide Agency as being one where multiple factors, including socioeconomic stressors, vulnerable populations, disproportionate environmental burdens, vulnerability to environmental degradation or climate change, and lack of public participation may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and may contribute to persistent disparities;
- g. the community is a mobile home park, as defined in section 38-12-201.5 (6), regardless of whether the mobile home park is a census block group; or (h) the community is located on the Southern Ute or Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation, regardless of whether the community is a census block group.”

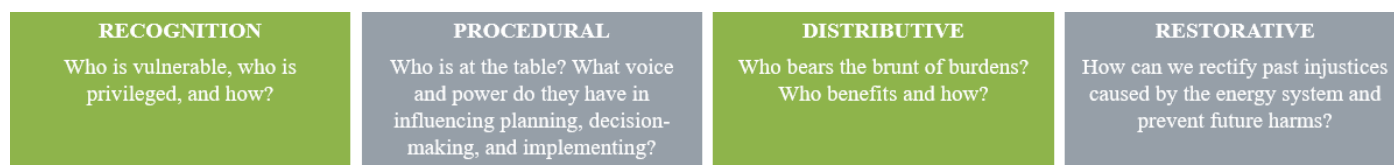
The law also states that in applying the definition of disproportionately impacted community, a statewide Agency may prioritize or target certain criteria of the definition of disproportionately impacted community or certain subsets of communities that meet the definition of disproportionately impacted community if the statewide Agency makes a determination by rule or other public decision-making process that the prioritization or targeting is warranted and reasonably tailored to the category of statewide Agency action involved.

Energy Equity Project’s National Equity Framework

There are a number of frameworks and definitions used to articulate and advance equity—whether racial, economic, or specific to a particular sector. The Agency is using the Energy Equity Project’s four dimensions of equity to guide this Framework. These dimensions allow equity to be communicated through a series of questions (see Figure 1). Unlike equality, which generally seeks identical treatment, equity seeks to account for specific community identities, demographics, and histories. Equity seeks to rectify disparities in the benefits that different communities have received and the burdens they have shouldered, both in the present and historically. Equity recognizes that these disparate outcomes are rooted in limited access to planning and decision-making processes, and it seeks to expand opportunities for meaningful participation. Finally, equity recognizes that a restorative approach is necessary to rectify past harms and protect the communities that have been most impacted.

FIGURE 1. Four Dimensions of Equity¹⁰

¹⁰ Adapted from Energy Equity Project’s [Energy Equity Project Framework](#).



Equity Framework Development

The Equity Framework was developed between May 2023 and March 2024 and includes input from across the Agency and from interested members of the public. The Equity Framework will serve to inform the public about the Agency’s equity goals, share the Agency’s equity baseline, and guide internal teams’ progress toward considering equity in their work. Throughout the process, the Agency communicated updates and opportunities for input with the public through the Commission’s equity initiatives website and email updates to interested stakeholders.¹¹ Figure 2 shows our approach to creating the Equity Framework.

FIGURE 2: Outcome-Based Roadmap to Create the Agency’s Equity Framework

Outcome	Equity Framework Component
Establish where we want to go	Create agency-wide Guiding Principles
Understand where we are starting	Baseline with each section of the agency
Propose a route to destination	Develop impactful and feasible section-specific goals and actions
Stay on the path	Create workplans for near- and long-term goals

Director Rebecca White and a team of Agency staff drove the development of the Equity Framework. Commissioner Megan Gilman advised on the scope of the Equity Framework. All staff were briefed on the creation of the Equity Framework and surfaced equity challenges and opportunities within their work to consider in the Equity Framework during two days of in-person meetings in May 2023.

The Agency-wide guiding principles were developed by a staff working group. The working group convened three times to brainstorm and revise the principles and facilitated four remote meetings in August 2023 to seek public input. After the input was integrated, final guiding principles were approved by executive members of the Agency.¹²

To create a baseline across the Agency, each section shared information about how they currently engage with the public and other stakeholders, how they access and use data, how they coordinate with other sections and agencies (local, state, and federal), and the resources needed to advance equity. The sections then co-developed a series of proposed actions for their section, with section-specific goals and actions with Agency leadership.

In addition to this Equity Framework, the Agency is taking steps to immediately improve how equity is considered at the Agency. We have: a) launched and run an Equity Advisory Focus Group in December 2023 for the public to inform organizational and process improvements, b) attended and hosted public meetings in disproportionately

¹¹ The Colorado Public Utilities Commission’s equity initiatives [web page](#) is meant to keep the public informed of the scope, efforts to date, and upcoming ways to participate in equity-related initiatives.

¹² Executive members of the Agency include the Director; the Deputy Director of Public Safety; the Deputy Director of Policy and Research; the Deputy Director of Fixed Utilities; the Chief Administrative Law Judge; and the Section Chief of Media Relations, Outreach and Engagement.

impacted communities, c) tested procedural equity interventions in various proceedings, d) tracked efforts to improve equity in our stakeholder workshops, e) incorporated plain language in some Commission events, and f) began developing “Commission 101” resources.

3. Overview of the Public Utilities Commission

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission is an administrative agency created in 1913 and given jurisdiction to regulate public utilities operating in Colorado. It was established by the state Constitution and General Assembly and is one of ten divisions housed within the State of Colorado’s Department of Regulatory Agencies. Its actions impact the lives of almost every Coloradan. The Commission regulates electric, steam, gas, water, transportation, and telecommunications service companies, plus rail, transit, and gas pipeline safety. While the Commission’s regulatory focus has changed over the years based on legislative and policy decisions, the Commission is primarily responsible to advance the public interest by ensuring utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and reasonably-priced services while granting utility service providers the opportunity to earn a reasonable return on investment. The Commission’s authority varies by the industry it regulates, as shown in the examples below (see Table 1).¹³

Table 1: Examples of the Colorado Public Utilities’ Commission’s Regulatory Authorities

Industry	Regulatory Authority
Energy and Water	Ensures the availability of safe, reliable, adequate, and efficient electric, gas, steam and water services to utility customers at rates that are just and reasonable.
Transportation	Ensures the affordability and availability of motor carriers transporting passengers for hire and enforces safety and operating rules.
Telecommunications	Regulates services related to 911, 988, the No-Call List, the High Cost Support Mechanism and associated funds, inmate communications, and telephone service for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or speech disabled. Regulation over telecommunications providers is limited.
Rail and Transit	Maintains safety at all public highway-rail crossings in the state and is the State Safety Oversight Agency for fixed rail (i.e., light rail) systems.
Gas Pipeline Safety	Ensures the safety of gas utility services, conducts gas pipeline safety inspections and accident investigations.

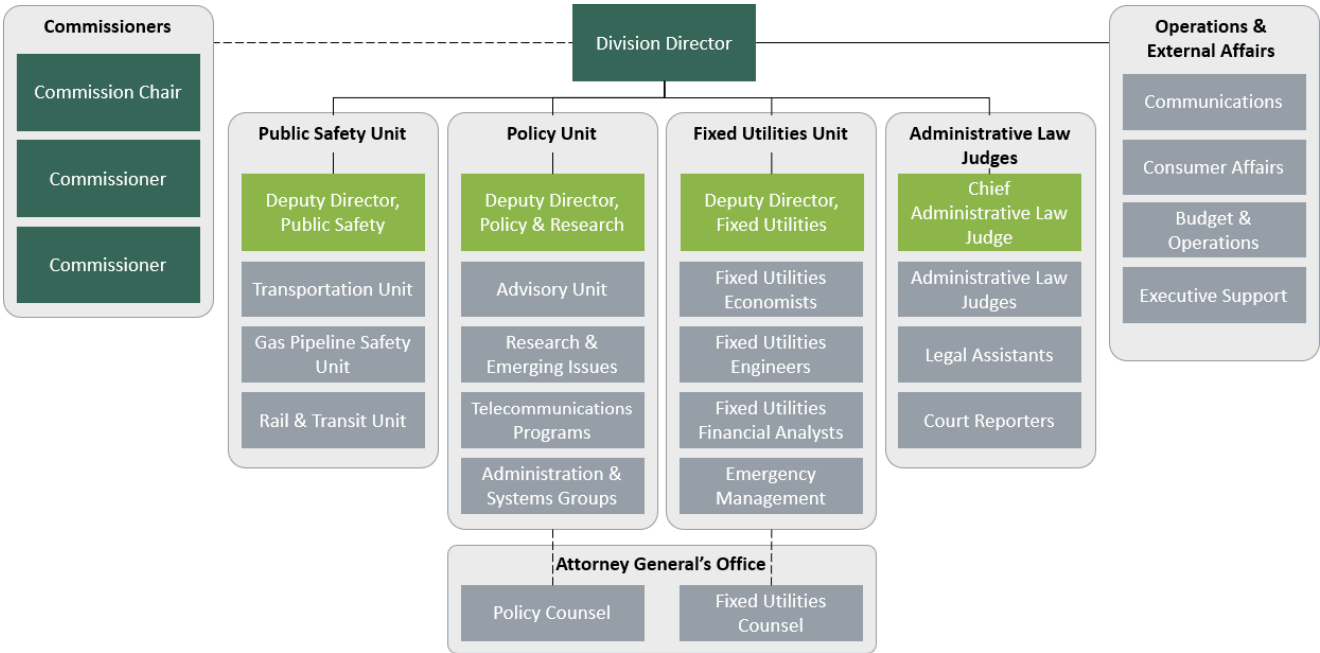
The Commission exercises its legislatively delegated powers to perform both quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial functions. When it is acting in a quasi-legislative capacity, the Commission generally adopts administrative rules of general applicability to the industries it regulates. These rules are binding for all regulated entities. When it acts in a quasi-judicial capacity, the Commission formally adjudicates utility petitions, applications, and other requests for approval or decision. These formal adjudications are generally litigated like a court case with multiple parties

¹³ These are examples of the Commission’s regulatory authorities, and do not constitute an exhaustive list of Commission authorities.

and a formal evidentiary record. In both cases, the Commission’s decision-making ends in a formal written decision, which is subject to appeal to the courts.

The Agency is organized into five units to carry out its authorities: **public safety, policy and research support, fixed utilities, administrative law judges, and external affairs** (see Figure 3). These sections have different functions, obligations, and expertise within the regulatory process and work on issues across the Commission’s regulated industries. The units are overseen by the Division Director, who manages Agency staff and daily operations. Three decision-making Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for a four-year term. The Agency is allocated 128 full time employees; however, there are approximately 100 employees on staff at the time of this Framework’s publication. Attorneys from the Colorado Attorney General’s office also provide general counsel to the Commission and its staff.

FIGURE 3: Agency Organizational Chart



4. Team Descriptions and Summary of Initial Equity Baseline Assessments

This section provides a brief overview of each unit within the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. It summarizes their regulatory authorities and provides considerations for how equity intersects with their work. The equity considerations in this section help inform the equity-focused outcomes in the next section of this Framework.

Public Safety Unit

Public Safety consists of the transportation, pipeline safety, and rail and transit sections. Staff in this section are primarily responsible for ensuring that the industries they regulate provide safe and reliable service.

Transportation Section

Team Overview. The Transportation Section is primarily responsible for regulating transportation providers including carriers providing taxicab, limousine, shuttle, and sightseeing services along with towing carriers, booting companies, and moving companies. The Commission also regulates some aspects of rideshare companies like Uber

and Lyft. The Transportation Section is staffed by a team of 15 full-time employees and has an annual budget of approximately \$2.35 million.

Staff within this section regularly engage stakeholders and the public to carry out their authority. Most directly, transportation staff enforcement officials investigate complaints filed with the Commission alleging a regulated carrier has violated state law or a Commission rule. In addition, transportation staff work directly with the public in rulemaking proceedings where the Commission is considering new or revised rules to regulate this industry. Staff also engages with the public through the [Towing Task Force](#).

Under state law, the Commission's regulatory authority over these different carriers varies by type of service provided. For example, while the Commission is tasked with regulating most operational and safety aspects of service provided by common carriers like taxicab and shuttle companies, including their defined service territory, its regulation of rideshare companies such as Uber and Lyft is more narrowly focused.

The Transportation Section advises the Commission to make rules and prescribe rates covering the operation of motor carriers where necessary for effective regulation. As authorized by state law, the section has the authority to a) ensure motor carriers work in the public interest, have financial responsibility, demonstrate consumer protection, maintain service quality, and provide required services to the public; b) articulate the circumstances under which tows and vehicle storage may occur and set tow rates; c) administer required record checks; and d) ensure the safety of regulated motor carriers and facilities through audits, inspections, and compliance reports.

State law carves out certain transportation areas that are not regulated by the Commission. These include private transportation, most school-related transportation, emergency vehicles, volunteer transportation, transportation of property, and transportation provided by the federal government or state.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Transportation Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Tracking, Reporting, and Responding to Incidents	The Transportation Section identified an opportunity to analyze whether the volume and type of customer complaints and enforcement actions vary depending on whether they occur in disproportionately impacted communities. This may involve reexamining the formula that determines the frequency of auditing transportation operators based on risk and complaints.
Lack of Service in Rural Communities	While the Commission cannot require that certain transportation services be provided in certain areas, the Transportation Section identified an opportunity to assess disparities in transportation services, which may acutely affect rural and disproportionately impacted communities.
Transparency and Public Participation	The Transportation Section can proactively provide consumers with accessible, multilingual information on consumer rights' and how to comply with state laws and rules. This would better equip the public with information regarding their rights on issues like towing, ride shares, and car bootings. ¹⁴

¹⁴ Much of the Transportation Section's interactions with the public are reactive, coming through informal complaints (e.g., an individual calls with questions about a tow) or through public comments during transportation-related rulemaking proceedings.

Interactions with Small Businesses	The Transportation Section can proactively provide transportation operators with plain-language, multilingual, and streamlined communications on topics like compliance filing requirements, educational materials, and trainings. These actions could improve understanding of the legal requirements operators in Colorado must comply with, as many operators appear on their own behalf (without legal representation) in Commission proceedings.
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Pipeline Safety Program

Team Overview. The Commission’s Pipeline Safety Program (PSP) oversees requirements set by the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration for gas pipeline operators, including the construction, operation, and maintenance of in-state gas pipelines. The PSP program has approximately 14 staff and has a budget of \$1.9 million funded through the State Pipeline Safety Program Base Grants and the state’s Fixed Utility Fund. PSP staff have many different roles and receive specialized training on pipeline safety to enable them to conduct highly technical inspections and audits, including logging and following up on complaints about potential safety issues; conducting field inspections of gas pipelines; reviewing operator safety programs; conducting accident investigations; evaluating reports and records; and issuing notices for alleged violations. They may also recommend administrative rules to the Commission to set standards for pipeline operators. The major entities the PSP regulates are called operators, and they can include large utilities like Xcel Energy and smaller companies like those that distribute gas to mobile home parks and rural areas.

The PSP is not involved in regulating gas utility planning, rates, or programs.¹⁵ It also does not regulate interstate pipelines, gas pipelines for gas production or gas piping within a home, gas wells, or activities like gasoline refining.

2023 Audit & Response

A legislative performance audit was issued for the PSP program in 2022 and 2023. Out of 39 findings in the audit, the PSP agreed with 38.5 of them and is implementing a comprehensive program to respond to the audit’s findings.¹⁶ Recommendations included enhancing tracking and reporting around complaints and inspections. PSP staff efforts to implement these recommendations and audit findings may provide opportunities to embed equity considerations in the program. *Fulfilling the audit and focusing efforts where they minimize risks and enhance benefits in disproportionately impacted communities is central to the PSP equity strategy.*

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The PSP team identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Ensuring the Highest Level of Safety	The 2023 audit communicated that both process improvements and increased staff capacity are needed to meet federal standards and ensure the public is protected. Fulfilling the audit recommendations will have implications for equity, and the PSP recognizes the need to prioritize actions that help identify and alleviate disproportionate risks in disproportionately impacted communities.

¹⁵ These are regulated by separate teams—including the Trial Staff, Advisors, Commissioners, and Administrative Hearings—at the Commission.

¹⁶ The audit and progress reports can be found [here](#).

Equitable Regulation	The PSP identified the opportunity to assess whether and how safety performance, risk, complaints, and inspections vary in disproportionately impacted communities.
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Rail and Transit Section

Team Overview. The Rail and Transit Section focuses on railroad and rail fixed guideway (i.e., light rail) safety in Colorado. While many areas of state regulation of railroads have been preempted by federal statute and regulation, the Commission retains jurisdiction over safety matters. This section has five staff members and a budget of \$1 million funded from the state Fixed Utility Fund and a State Safety Oversight (SSO) formula fund grant from the Federal Transit Administration. Staff in the Rail Section have a variety of roles, ranging from participating in interagency discussions, conducting field investigations and safety audits, counting traffic data and performing other diagnostics, reviewing transportation safety plans and advising the Commission as to their sufficiency, and advising the Commission on potential rules changes for rail and transit providers.

A major area over which the Commission has jurisdiction is the safety of rail crossings at public highways. The Commission has the authority to prescribe the terms and conditions of installation and operation, maintenance, and warning at rail crossings. This authority is crucial to prevent accidents and promote public safety. Stakeholders typically involved in these processes are the railroad, such as Union Pacific Railroad or Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, and the road authority, such as the local town or county and the Colorado Department of Transportation.

Similarly, the Commission provides safety oversight for the rail transit authority—the Regional Transportation District (RTD)—in the operation of the passenger light rail system through the State Safety Oversight (SSO) program. The Commission does not regulate the RTD bus system.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Rail and Transit Safety Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Impacts in Disproportionately Impacted Communities	The Rail and Transit Section can increase its understanding and documentation of any disparities in benefits and burdens across communities related to rail and light rail, such as distribution of quiet zones. It can also support efforts to enhance public engagement of underrepresented groups to more directly understand how benefits and burdens apply to their communities.
Ensuring Proportionate Safety	The Rail and Transit Section can enhance data collection and analysis of root causes of incidents to understand the effectiveness of safety practices for potentially vulnerable customer groups, such as people with visual and hearing impairments

Policy and Research Unit

The Policy and Research Unit consists of commission advisors, research and emerging issues, data systems, and telecommunications programs. Staff in this unit directly support the Commissioners through case management, research and analysis, and issuing Commission agendas and decisions.

Commission Advisors

Team Overview. The Advisory Section directly supports the Commissioners and the Commission’s Administrative Law Judges (ALJs) as they make decisions in proceedings. Advisors provide technical analysis and policy advice; help the Commissioners manage cases; and assist the Commissioners and ALJs in reaching their decisions in formal proceedings. Advisors also have project management roles within individual proceedings. These tasks include

initiating Agency activities around proceeding-specific communications, supporting evidentiary hearings, managing public-facing activities, and ensuring the proceeding is compliant with all regulations and statutes. Advisors also present at public meetings to support the Commission’s decision-making processes.

Nearly all the work completed by the Advisory Section is conducted within a legally privileged deliberative process to allow for candid discussions between the decision-makers and advisors. Advisors also occasionally assist the Commissioners and ALJs with research and analysis outside of formal proceedings, such as workshops and special projects. They may also conduct outreach related to pre-rulemaking and other administrative proceedings to gather information and recommend effective procedural structures and policies to the Commission.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Advisory Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Increase Equity in Decision-making	As project managers for many proceedings, the Advisory section has a critical role to play to identify and coordinate resources to increase the public’s awareness of proceeding issues and improve participation accessibility. ¹⁷ These actions can increase participation from disproportionately impacted communities in proceedings.
Support Commissioners to Provide Equity in Decisions	Advisory Staff can highlight relevant information on equity and environmental justice issues within proceedings evidentiary records for Commissioners to help them effectively consider these issues. This action can help to ensure that equity issues are not overlooked in proceedings.

Research and Emerging Issues (REI) Section

Team and Overview. The Research and Emerging Issues Section is a recently expanding, standalone section within the Agency. It provides general analysis and policy evaluation to the Commissioners and Agency staff on engineering, economic, financial, and operational policy matters related to the industries regulated by the Commission. The team accomplishes this by performing or coordinating objective and balanced research and sharing the results of this work with the Commissioners and Staff. The REI Section is often tasked with developing informational meetings, procuring expert support, and managing technical assistance. Staff on this team have technical and policy expertise, and the section is supplemented by external expert assistance on an as-needed basis. This section functions largely outside of formal legal proceedings and relies on original research, informational discussions with regulated companies, members of the industry, other stakeholders, and consultation with peers and colleagues in other organizations across the state and nation.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Research and Emerging Issues Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Consider Equity in	The REI team can incorporate equity considerations into its existing technical and policy research and analysis. This action can help draw connections about how emerging issues in Colorado may create or exacerbate impacts to disproportionately impacted communities.

¹⁷ For example, Advisors could work internally and with the Commissioners to create a proceeding timeline with clearly articulated opportunities for public engagement on key proceedings. They could then coordinate with the Communications and External Affairs teams to increase public awareness of the issues being considered and the opportunities to engage in these proceedings.

Research and Analysis	
Promote Equity Through Partnerships	The REI team can promote diversity, equity, and inclusion by diversifying sources of research and expertise to include diverse perspectives or engaging community-based organizations to inform equity-related research needs. This action can promote more diverse research findings and broaden the Agency's perspectives on equity issues.
Identify Industry Trends and Equity Implications	The REI team can monitor equity-related proceedings, workshops, and working groups at public utility commissions in other states and share learnings with the Agency. This action can help the Agency learn from its peers in other states and implement successful actions other states are taking to improve how equity is considered in regulatory proceedings.

Telecommunications Programs Section

Team Overview. The Telecommunications Programs Section has nine employees and is responsible for regulating switched access providers, the Basic Emergency Service Provider, 911 services, Inmate Communication Service providers, and Colorado High Cost Support Mechanism contributors and recipients. Routine regulatory filings include, but are not limited to, operational applications, switched access filings, transfers, local tariff filings, discontinuances, interconnection agreements, and eligible telecommunication carrier applications.

This section is also responsible for administering the Telecommunication Relay Service program for those with hearing and speech disabilities, Colorado's No-Call List, collection and administration of the Telephone Users with Disabilities Fund, collection and distribution of the 988 surcharge to the Colorado Office of Behavioral Health, and collection and distribution of the statewide 911 surcharge to local 911 entities. The Telecommunications Programs Section advises the Commission to make rules and prescribe surcharge rates for the Telephone Users with Disabilities Fund, Colorado High Cost Support Mechanism contributions, and local Emergency Telephone Charges. Staff also certify federal Lifeline vendors and occasionally refer income-qualified individuals to the program.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Telecommunication Programs Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Accessibility	The Telecommunications Program recognizes that more information is needed from users of its critical communications services to determine if disparities exist in accessing telecommunications services. Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and public hearings are tools that the Program could use to assess barriers and understand community needs. Collecting this data can provide the Program with insight into whether its critical services are creating unintended accessibility or cost barriers for vulnerable communities.
Standards for Service Quality	The Telecommunications Program can establish metrics to evaluate service provider performance, consult with service users, and track and resolve any disparities that may be experienced by certain customers. These actions can ensure that program quality is not creating additional burdens for disproportionately impacted communities.

Fixed Utilities Unit

The Fixed Utilities Unit consists of staff involved in reviewing and auditing utility filings, assessing compliance, providing testimony in hearings, and engaging with regulated entities as part of emergency response.

Team Overview. Staff of this unit are often called Trial Staff because of their role as an autonomous party in litigated proceedings. In this capacity, Trial Staff issue discovery questions, gather evidence to develop arguments, write testimony, participate in evidentiary hearings, and negotiate settlement agreements. The team of approximately 20 people is organized into economics, engineering, and rate/financial analyst sections. Staff in this unit have other functions including the intake and initial review of utility filings for compliance with legal requirements, negotiation of tariffs prior to filing to minimize contested issues, and review of reports filed by utilities. Fixed Utilities staff can also audit utility records. Fixed Utilities staff may sometimes act as advisors to the Commissioners in uncontested cases or rulemakings, but when acting as trial staff, are not able to discuss ongoing proceedings with the Commissioners. Finally, Fixed Utilities includes an emergency management team that participates in statewide emergency planning and response efforts. While the Fixed Utilities team generally focuses on utilities that are “fixed,” (i.e., operating in place—electric, gas, steam, and water), staff teams may provide expertise in a variety of other areas.

Common areas of focus for the Fixed Utilities team are whether the rates that utilities charge are just and reasonable, including the appropriate rate of return for utility investments; whether utilities are providing reliable service; the sufficiency of various customer programs, such as solar plus storage, electrification, or energy efficiency programs; competitive practices and consumer protection issues; and reviewing requests for new infrastructure. Fixed Utilities staff build new expertise as needed to support the Commission’s expanding regulatory roles.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Fixed Utilities Unit identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Increase Awareness of Equity Issues	Trial Staff can increase their knowledge and awareness of energy programs and assistance programs available to income-qualified and/or disproportionately impacted community customers. By combining this information with data and lived experience, they can characterize disparities between customer groups and provide the Commissioners with more information on which to base their decisions.
Data Collection	Trial Staff can help grow the Agency’s capabilities related to SB 21-272 by requesting and analyzing equity-related data in regulated utility proceedings.
Communications Coordination	Trial Staff can coordinate with the External Affairs teams to understand insights and trends occurring in regulated industries. This can inform Trial Staff advocacy by helping them integrate the experiences of utility customers into their analyses.

Administrative Hearings Section

The Administrative Hearings Section conducts hearings, issues written decisions, and ensures an accurate record of proceedings. The Section consists of Administrative Law Judges, court reporters, and legal assistants.

Team Overview. When a new utility proceeding is initiated, the Commissioners decide whether they will oversee the case or whether they will refer the case to an Administrative Law Judge. When a case is referred to an ALJ, the

ALJ oversees and reaches a recommended decision in the proceeding. ALJs follow the same statutes, rules, regulations, applicable federal and state case law, and Agency and departmental policies as the Commissioners. The Commissioners have an opportunity to review recommended decisions reached by ALJs before they become final decisions of the Commission. Court reporters listen to and create an accurate transcription of all proceeding-related meetings and conferences to include in a formal record. Legal assistants support the use of technical resources in hearing rooms, provide research for judges, and facilitate compliance with legal processes.

When ALJs oversee a proceeding, they establish all processes and procedures in that proceeding to ensure they can create a thorough record of information to use to make decisions. This may include scheduling hearings, workshops, public comment opportunities, or other ways to engage parties and other stakeholders.

Leveraging Technology to Expand Access to Proceedings

The Administrative Hearings Section strives to expand access to proceedings, and continuously looks for ways to increase participation. This section utilizes hybrid and remote hearing models, informs participants of alternative means to participate, and has held hearings at different times of day to better accommodate participant's schedules. Based on the type of proceeding, they may direct that additional notification of a proceeding be provided to a wider stakeholder audience. The Section has also begun to ensure interpretation services are available as needed. These interventions are meant to lessen the barriers to public participation. This has expanded inclusiveness and facilitated involvement for those who otherwise may be unable to participate.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Administrative Hearings Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Increase the Accessibility and Inclusivity of Public Comment Hearings	The Administrative Hearings Section sees the opportunity to coordinate closely with the Communications team to support testing different engaging communication strategies, to apply best practices for inclusive public comment hearings and workshops, and to promote robust and plain-language marketing of opportunities for public participation.
Increase the Usage of Plain Language	Residents have expressed difficulty understanding the technical nature of Commission proceedings and communications. Translating complex, technical, and lengthy documents into concise, easy-to-understand, and relatable materials is an important component of supporting an informed and engaged public.
Engage in Equity-Related Trainings	Maintaining a working understanding of best practices in procedural equity can help ALJs promote accessibility and fairness in their proceedings as they implement the Commission's future rules regarding SB 21-272.

External Affairs Section

The External Affairs Section consists of the Consumer Affairs and Communications teams. Staff on these teams work directly with the public, helping them resolve complaints, providing education, and communicating about upcoming opportunities to provide public comments to the Commission.

Consumer Affairs Team

Team Overview. The Consumer Affairs Section receives complaints directly from individuals and routes issues to the appropriate party at the Commission. This is distinct from the Commission’s processes for people who want to submit public comments on ongoing proceedings; it involves active issues that customers are experiencing and for which they need real-time resolutions. This Section does not advocate on behalf of members of the public but may explain how to take particular actions or individuals to assistance providers for support with their utility bills.

This section is also responsible for educating the public about Commission authority around certain industries. To do so, they work with internal subject matter experts to develop clear ways to explain challenging issues to members of the public. Consumer Affairs has specific reports on resolution of issues that it makes public and provides to the Department of Regulatory Agencies for annual tracking.

The Consumer Affairs Section has five staff members, including a bilingual customer representative who provides Spanish-language support. Support is usually provided by phone or email. Consumer Affairs staff handle a volume of about 750 calls per month, with the most frequent topics in recent years being around winter heating bills, towing complaints, and electric utility issues (advanced meters, time-of-use rates, and solar interconnection).¹⁸

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Consumer Affairs Section identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Increase Awareness of Equity Issues	The Consumer Affairs team can identify trends and emerging or ongoing issues to help inform the Agency, about the need to change or better articulate to internal processes or rules. This can also keep staff informed on the effectiveness of utility programs for increasing equity outcomes.
Provide Inclusive Customer Service	The Consumer Affairs team can identify priority topics and needs as they engage with customers with diverse life experiences to ensure that materials and resources are accessible, understandable, and available in customers’ preferred languages.
Communicate Equity Trends	The Consumer Affairs team can share any challenges it hears about how utility programs are distributing benefits and burdens once adopted. This action can ensure staff are informed on the effectiveness of utility programs for increasing equity outcomes.

Communications Team

The Communications Team is integral to enabling diverse and robust public participation. Strategic communications and outreach can provide customers, especially in disproportionately impacted communities, with the necessary information to effectively advocate for their needs and priorities.

Team Overview. The Communications team plans and implements statewide communications, stakeholder engagement, and education strategies for the Commission. The engagement and outreach strategies are aimed at keeping utility customers, businesses, government agencies, utilities, and media informed about high-profile Commission decisions and ratepayer issues. The unit implements various in-person, radio, social media, and internal media campaigns to inform and obtain input from the public on various topics facing the Agency. There is currently one staff member for the communications unit, though other Agency employees support communications efforts.

¹⁸ Based on 2023 call data.

Opportunities to Increase Equity. The Communications team identified the following equity issues and potential opportunities to respond.

Equity Issue	Description
Increase Strategic Communications	The Communications team can increase the variety of educational resources for the public to better explain how their priorities intersect with regulatory decision-making, help customers understand their rights, and keep customers aware of major decisions.
Collaborate With Other Sections in the Commission	The Communications team can work closely with other sections to develop plain-language materials, promote opportunities for public comment, and develop thoughtful outreach plans for proceedings.

5. Increasing Equitable Outcomes from Agency Actions

Many actions that the Agency must take to consider equity in all of its work will be cross-cutting. This section discusses the focus areas that will affect staff on multiple teams, or the entire Agency.

Colorado Public Utilities Commission Equity Guiding Principles

The Colorado Public Utilities Commission created Guiding Principles across the four dimensions of equity. The purpose of the Principles are to convey concise, cross-cutting aspirations for how the Agency will apply SB 21-272 to its work. The Principles are not specific goals, actions, or tasks for any team. Rather, they are a comprehensive vision that staff and the Agency, with public input, sets forth to guide how we center equity in our work.

Colorado Public Utilities Commission Equity Guiding Principles

Recognition

1. **Recognize Disproportionately Impacted Communities:** The Agency will identify disproportionately impacted communities and other burdened or underserved communities using relevant data sources and tools. The Agency will tailor strategies to enhance equity based on unique community histories and experiences.

Procedural

2. **Improve Outreach and Engagement:** The Agency will utilize accessible and intentional outreach and education venues for Coloradans to learn about the Commission's authority, its regulatory role, and its processes for conducting proceedings. Through Agency-led and collaborative educational efforts, the Agency will improve access and opportunities for stakeholder participation, particularly by members of disproportionately impacted communities, to build capacity and engage effectively with Commission processes.
3. **Improve Accessibility and Ease of Participation:** The Agency strives to minimize obstacles to full participation in regulatory activities and proceedings through language, process, and outreach accessibility. The Agency will take actions and provide resources to ensure that accessibility is not a barrier to meaningful participation, with particular attention to creating opportunities for participation by underrepresented voices.

Distributive

4. **Promote Equitable Safety and Services:** Customers of regulated utility services in Colorado should be served by reliable, affordable, and safe utility services, regardless of their demographic or socioeconomic status. The Agency will define benefits and burdens, and work to reduce disparities experienced by disproportionately impacted communities, to ensure that safety, quality of service, and consumer protections are equitably delivered and enforced.

5. **Promote Transparency:** The Agency will collaboratively create metrics to track and report on equity efforts with the intention of increasing equity outcomes. Agency staff will articulate how equity considerations are weighed in their actions and will assess equity impacts in the development and implementation of decisions, policies, rules, and programs.

Restorative

6. **Rectify Historical Inequities:** The Agency will increase its awareness of how regulatory decisions have contributed to communities being disproportionately impacted by the industries it regulates. Agency staff will use this knowledge to foster fairer, healthier, safer, and more equitable outcomes.
7. **Promote Meaningful Involvement and Informed Outcomes:** The Agency will coordinate with communities, community-based organizations, local governments, state agencies, and sovereign Tribal Nations to better engage disproportionately impacted communities in its decision-making processes. Meaningful involvement is affirmed by outcomes that minimize impacts and prioritize benefits to disproportionately impacted communities.
8. **Respect the Sovereignty of Tribal Nations and Communities:** The Agency will promote the sovereignty and self-determination of Tribal Nations in all actions that may impact them. Agency staff will strive to cultivate strong relationships of reciprocity, mutuality, and respect with Tribal Nations and with representatives of American Indian/Alaska Native communities.
9. **Take Action on Urgent Issues:** While working toward a more equitable future, Agency staff will not lose sight of present-day impacts to disproportionately impacted communities and will seek to recognize and address near-term inequities as they appear.

Internal

10. **Advance Internal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):** The Agency will model the equity it seeks to achieve externally within its own team, structure, and operations by undertaking EDI training, improving hiring practices, and seeking to understand lived experiences of disproportionately impacted communities.
11. **Leadership and Staff Commitment:** The Agency commits to a culture of continuous improvement related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Leadership will prioritize equity efforts by understanding obstacles to equity, learning about their own biases and how to counter them, and directing the necessary resources and attention to fully support equity efforts. Agency staff will be the driving force to ensure equity efforts are upheld across Agency functions. The Agency will evaluate and communicate its progress regularly.

Cumulatively, these Principles will help inform Agency actions related to equity across all regulated industries and will serve as a reference for how the Commission is committing to prioritize equity in its work.

Cross-Cutting Equity Work Areas

The Commission's regulatory authorities vary in different contexts, so for each proposed equity action in the framework, we considered the scope of the Commission's authority in that area and what aspects it has discretion over. This allowed us surface four cross-cutting focus areas for the Agency to focus its equity efforts. These focus areas will help uplift each of the four dimensions of equity. The focus areas are:

1. Data access, analysis, and management
2. Transparent, accessible, and meaningful communication and outreach
3. Process efficiency and innovation
4. Hiring, retention, and Agency culture

Data Access, Analysis, and Management. Implementing SB 21-272 effectively increases the need for more robust and granular data collection than what was previously performed by the Commission. Considering equity in all of its work will mean that the Commission must understand why certain customers have challenges accessing programs or benefits, and build venues to reduce those barriers. Agency staff will need to assess new data and perform new analyses to support the Commission when it makes decisions related to equity. This may involve analyzing and synthesizing geospatial data, data from sources like the U.S. Census Bureau or EnviroScreen, and information about participation, lived experience, and historical inequalities. Certain new needs for data collection and storage are being considered through an ongoing process to replace the Agency's legacy software, and Agency staff have increased collaborations with other agencies, such as the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, to better leverage new data and mapping tools. Being able to analyze and draw conclusions from reputable data will help the Agency recognize where inequities exist and propose opportunities to promote distributional and other dimensions of equity.

Transparent, Accessible, and Meaningful Communication and Outreach. Strategic, accessible, and plain-language communications are a critical bridge between the technical work of the Commission and the public interest. The Agency can improve access to information surrounding:

- The industries the Commission regulates;
- Ways the Commission affects Coloradans;
- Summaries of high-impact cases; and
- Opportunities for public input.

There are also opportunities to standardize and coordinate public communications and public participation practices across teams. Expanding its resources in this area would allow the Agency to coordinate across teams when providing outreach to stakeholders; to provide information about comment opportunities in the communications channels people prefer; and to gather insights from the public about how programs and processes work. Currently, the Commission engages the public through focus groups, public comment hearings, workshops, and consumer complaints. There are also opportunities for the public to listen to Commission weekly meetings to understand how decisions are being made. Each of these venues could be improved through standardized practices.

Process Efficiency and Innovation. The processes that the Commission uses to make its decisions necessarily include some components of judicial proceedings, namely, expert witness testimony, cross-examination, and weighing of evidence, so that affected parties' rights are protected through due process and the Agency's decision can be reviewed by a court to ensure it was reasonable. As a result, equity-focused process modifications will largely need to fit into this existing structure.

Ensuring processes can support diverse public input will help the Commission to consider equity across all of its work. To be sure, the Commission bases its decisions on the legal record of each case, any prescriptive requirements in statute, including considering factors like safety, reliability, and cost-effectiveness when regulating. Commissioners and the staff who work on cases have several opportunities to increase procedural equity:

- Augment the voices of disproportionately impacted community members in proceedings. This can be done by adjusting the format of public comment hearings or considering additional public participation venues.
- Partner with local organizations to get the word out about proceedings and participation opportunities.
- Increase opportunities for trial staff to incorporate equity-related issues and concerns raised in public comments into the written staff testimony that is submitted in a proceeding.

These interventions, together with future changes to the Commission rules to enable the Commission to consider equity in all of its work, can help improve distributive equity outcomes from regulatory decisions.

Hiring, Retention, and Agency Culture. A major constraint the Agency faces as it tries to implement a range of equity actions is its limited staff capacity.¹⁹ There are a few possible approaches to surface and alleviate capacity issues:

- Develop a staffing plan to fully implement SB 21-272 requirements and to create and adhere to future rules.²⁰ Throughout our baselining interviews and the process of developing actions to advance equity, staff in every section expressed a desire to do more but that they were already working at full capacity to meet existing responsibilities. If there is not enough integrated staff time or individual positions working on equity, consider one or more dedicated positions.
- Ensure adequate budget for implementation of SB 21-272. Staff have begun tracking the costs of outreach, interpretation, and other activities. This information can be used to benchmark overall Agency needs and incorporate costs into annual budgeting cycles, with the caveat that these processes follow State of Colorado requirements and timelines, which limit the Agency’s flexibility.
- Identify and budget for professional development needs for deepening equitable practices among key staff.
- Deepen partnerships to supplement staff capacity. Options include a) temporary fellowship opportunities focused on equity, b) an equity advisory board, and c) technical assistance such as data analysis and mapping from universities, education, law, and policy clinics.

Taken together, increasing personnel, budget, time, training, and external assistance for advancing equity can have a significant impact on the Agency’s ability to consider equity in all of all its work. At the same time, the PUC should work to expand recruitment efforts to attract a more diverse range of talented candidates from various backgrounds and communities.

Cross-Cutting Opportunities to Increase Equity

For each identified focus area, we provide a set of priority goals and actions that the Agency can take to improve equity. The recommendations shown below within each focus area should generally be prioritized in order, with those at the top of the table considered foundational to those at the bottom. Notably, while the potential Agency venues identify specific teams, many actions will begin with Agency leadership, and some responsibilities may shift across teams.

Data Access, Analysis, and Management	
Focus Areas and Priority Actions	Anticipated Team(s)
Document and analyze complaints, referrals, and other inquiries related to each industry to baseline and standardize information.	

¹⁹ In 2023, Energy Equity Project, in partnership with NYU’s Institute for Policy Integrity, conducted interviews with staff and commissioners at 10 other state utility commissions on equity initiatives in their agencies. The interviews found that most commissions already had a list of equity actions they wanted to take as soon as there was sufficient staff time available.

²⁰ At the time of publication, the Colorado Public Utilities Commission does not have any employees wholly dedicated to advancing equity work. This gap makes the Commission uniquely disadvantaged because it is the only Commission in the United States amongst the Commissions that have a legal mandate to consider equity and either an Equity Framework or an active proceeding exploring equity that does not have a dedicated equity employee.

Explore options to require service providers to provide baseline data and reporting on program outreach and enrollment, variations of service and experiences, and other issues that may occur.	Telecommunications Fixed Utilities
Document and analyze complaints, referrals, and other inquiries related to each industry to understand the scope, nature, trends, and root causes of issues.	Consumer Affairs System Admin Pipeline Safety
Assign a lead staff person and additional resources across the Agency to manage the process of collecting, verifying, and maintaining a repository of customer resources on topics like “how to engage at the Commission,” types of assistance available, proceeding types, etc.	Communications Consumer Affairs Advisors
Use data collection and analysis to identify equity disparities across regulated industries.	
Assess reputable datasets to understand disparities in safety, reliability, affordability, and service quality across various socioeconomic demographics.	All Teams
Assess the intersection of impacts to evaluate disparities between disproportionately and non-disproportionately impacted communities’ experiences on interrelated issues (e.g., rail safety and environmental exposures, program participation and financing, towing and address).	Transportation Fixed Utilities Rail & Transit
Analyze historical data on accidents and incidents for patterns of inequitable exposure to safety hazards.	Rail & Transit Pipeline Safety
Establish a baseline of program participation for customers in disproportionately impacted communities and among other priority populations by program.	Telecommunications Fixed Utilities Advisors
Analyze data baselining and collection to mitigate equity disparities.	
Ensure that the application of audits, compliance reviews, and penalties is proportionate to company performance and does not inequitably impact any demographic or community.	Transportation Fixed Utilities
Develop approaches to measure success and track the Agency’s performance as it expands outreach and communications, including more formally tracking participation rates and resource needs.	All Teams
Assess the impacts of different communications interventions on reducing disparities in procedural equity.	Communications Consumer Affairs
Standardize documentation to raise awareness about equity issues.	
Document and communicate equity issues related to pipeline safety for rural communities, small contract holders, and municipal operators.	Pipeline Safety

Determine whether standard equity discovery questions and issues to consult in cases would support the Commission in better considering how to provide equity.	Fixed Utilities
Understand the policy and functional uses of EnviroScreen to inform equity initiatives.	
Participate in training and expand statistical analysis capacity to work with Colorado EnviroScreen data and other granular data sets. Subject to procedural constraints, consider where it may make sense to request data at the census block group level for analysis or reporting. Work with teams like REI to analyze geospatial data.	All teams

Transparent, Accessible, and Meaningful Communication and Outreach	
Focus Areas and Priority Actions	Anticipated Team(s)
Improve venues and quality of communications on important issues.	
Create an Agency communications plan that includes: a) materials to increase public awareness of the Commission's roles and authorities, b) venues to conduct public outreach, c) materials to make the public aware of how to participate, d) methods to communicate key issues the Commission is considering, and e) plain language and language access needs.	Communications
Create a communications plan for key proceedings that includes a) an overview of the equity issues the proceeding will contemplate, b) a public engagement plan, c) a proceeding schedule and objectives, and d) plain language summaries of the proceeding decisions and major actions.	Communications Advisors Administrative Hearings
Consider whether and how specific teams should engage with certain communities, including Tribes, on regulatory issues.	All teams
Develop and proactively communicate a process for communities to report safety and/or service concerns.	Rail & Transit Gas Pipeline Safety
Promote increased representation of impacted customers and people from disproportionately impacted communities and other priority communities in relevant task forces and other public forums on regulation and decision-making.	All teams
Work with regulated companies and community-based organizations to get understandable, timely information to the public, informed by equity issues showing up in proceedings and the types of questions being directed to Consumer Affairs.	Communications
Identify community and state partners (e.g. the Colorado Broadband Office, Energy Outreach Colorado) to increase outreach and accessibility.	Communications

Make Agency-hosted events more accessible and approachable.	
Develop an in-person outreach strategy that includes a) best practices to ensuring meetings are inclusive and accessible, b) a budget for meeting amenities, c) appropriate materials and venues for the public to raise issues.	Communications Advisors Administrative Hearings
Ensure simultaneous or consecutive interpretation services are readily accessible for all calls, and train staff on use of services as needed.	Communications Consumer Affairs
Ensure that rulemakings addressing retail customer programs include information meetings, workshops, and public comment hearings that seek input from disproportionately impacted communities.	Advisors Fixed Utilities Administrative Hearings Communications
All communities, and especially disproportionately impacted communities, should have opportunities to engage with the Commission in spaces that are comfortable and accessible.	Communications Advisors Administrative Hearings
Ensure regulated industry makes their public-facing communications relevant and plain-language.	
Work with the Agency to ensure regulated industry is adhering to standards that result in accessible, plain-language public communications.	Communications
Identify gaps in regulated entities' practices regarding accessibility (e.g., sufficiency of customer service for customers with limited English proficiency) and propose solutions where possible.	Consumer Affairs Fixed Utilities
Work with service providers to distribute program information to eligible households.	Communications
Create and support the Agency in adhering to standards for accessibility (e.g., protocols holding public meetings and conducting outreach, using plain language, and making materials available in multiple languages).	Communications

Process Efficiency and Innovation	
Focus Areas and Priority Actions	Anticipated Team(s)
Increase coordination on common workstreams.	
The Communications team should work with all other teams to a) maintain a list of best practices for equitable engagement, b) ensure teams have appropriate communications strategies, c) provide training on public engagement methods and venues, and d) standardize communications.	Communications
Work with Commissioners and counsel to summarize public comments and make the	Advisors

public aware of how comments were used in Commission deliberations.	
Periodically review proceedings, programs, and other industry activities to assess what is going well and what can be improved from an equity perspective.	All teams
Identify where stakeholder input may be significant when advising Commissioners on pre-rulemaking or rulemaking proceedings.	All teams
Prioritize equitable outcomes.	
Monitor activities relevant to equity and how they are being implemented at utility commissions in other states and at other State of Colorado agencies.	REI Advisors Fixed Utilities
Increase inspection and compliance activities in disproportionately impacted communities, communities with a history of violations or incidents, and communities subject to cumulative exposures as indicated by the Colorado EnviroScreen mapping tool.	Rail & Transit Gas Pipeline Safety
Work with disproportionately impacted communities to understand issues and improve the functionality of rail facilities and trains for priority populations.	Rail & Transit
Seek innovative regulatory mechanisms to improve equity outcomes.	
Consider, in evaluating cases, the impacts to potentially vulnerable people. Explore how to expand the incorporation of public comments and/or other forms of thoughtful outreach in Staff testimony.	Fixed Utilities Advisors Administrative Hearings
Manage and complete the rulemaking(s) required by SB 21-272 through which the Commission will consider how best to provide equity in all its work.	All teams
Explore opportunities to allocate state or federal funding to disproportionately impacted and other under-resourced communities to improve regulated services (e.g. safety, quiet zone, compliance, signage, outreach, communications investments).	Telecommunications Rail & Transit Transportation
Explore strategies to improve assistance in under-served areas (e.g. rate design, program design, program financing, workforce training).	All teams

Hiring, Retention, and Agency Culture	
Focus Areas and Priority Actions	Anticipated Team(s)
Determine personnel and resource needs to meet the objectives of this framework, Agency strategy, and SB 21-272 requirements.	

Recognizing the needs for data collection, analysis, and management, recruit for staff with data science expertise or procure data management systems.	Director All teams
Identify trends in hiring for equity or public participation roles in Commissions across the United States and determine if there is need in Colorado for similar positions.	Director All teams
Identify where there are resource constraints or knowledge gaps to inform hiring and resource needs as sections are working through specific actions.	Director All teams
Assess current recruitment practices and make improvements to attract a more diverse range of applicants to open positions.	Director
Create opportunities for internal exchanges of information on disproportionately impacted communities.	
Meet with other relevant staff teams to promote the exchange of information about potential stakeholder concerns and on-the-ground situations.	Communications Consumer Affairs Advisors
Increase internal awareness of equity, environmental justice, affordability, and income-qualified customer issues. Continue to improve cross-team dialogue to ensure that all teams have information about changing conditions.	All teams

These goals and actions provide a broad snapshot of the various interventions the Agency must take to begin advancing equity. To be sure, the need for advancing equity is dynamic. New challenges impacting equity arise every day. Integrating equity is about adopting a mindset and probing each meeting, proceeding, enforcement action, and public communication to ask questions like:

- What research is needed now to ensure equity is part of major transformations in regulated industry?
- How can we make this process more transparent and accessible, especially for the communities who will be most impacted by a proposed policy or investment?
- What data should the Commission request from utilities to assess equity impacts?
- How can staff best summarize a high profile proceeding in plain and accessible language and work to increase understanding of residents in communities that are most impacted by an upcoming decision?
- How can we deepen authentic relationships with community-based organizations, even when there is not a proceeding that immediately impacts them?

Reporting on Equity Progress

The Agency will actively monitor and measure progress toward the plan's goals. If there are areas where implementation of plan strategies is not progressing as planned, the Director will work with the necessary parties to identify any barriers to plan progress and develop an action plan to overcome those barriers.

Setting Agency-wide and section-specific goals and actions is just the beginning of successfully centering equity in the Agency's work. More importantly, executing on these actions and dedicating staff time, budget, and culture to this work is vital. It is critical to track progress to be sure advancements are being made. The Agency will commit to bi-annual internal progress reports and annual external progress reports. Reports will include:

- Each team's top three objectives, including the steps needed to reach the objective and a status report on progress toward the objective;²¹
- A team-specific point of contact for each objective;
- Other accomplishments in addition to the objectives;
- Evolving equity challenges the team is facing; and
- Upcoming opportunities for disproportionately impacted communities input on issues and how the team will communicate and engage on those issues.

Conclusion

This Equity Framework will guide the Agency as it addresses inequities in all our work. As the regulator of public utilities in the state, we recognize the impact our decisions have on all Coloradans, particularly those in disproportionately impacted communities. We acknowledge that to consider how best to provide equity, minimize impacts, and prioritize benefits to disproportionately impacted communities, and address historical inequalities, we must prioritize cultivating a diverse, responsive, and innovative Agency culture. We must also actively uncover and work against the effects of systemic racism and pervasive socioeconomic disparities through our role as regulators. This Framework is dynamic—it is a living document that will evolve as we deepen our understanding of equity issues and adapt our practices. We look forward to continuing to develop our equity initiatives within the Agency through future strategic planning and implementation of SB 21-272.

²¹ Objectives will be defined on a team-specific basis based on the above identified opportunities to increase equity, team resources, and ongoing strategic priorities. There should be no more than two to three objectives per progress update.