



Independent Evaluation of the Service Access and Equity Program

California Department of Developmental Services

Report Summary

Submitted by Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence

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Introduction

In 2016, California created the Service Access and Equity (SAE) grant program. This program spends \$11 million each year to make sure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) from diverse backgrounds get the same access to services as everyone else. This includes people in California from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities.

Two organizations were hired to find out how well the SAE Grants Program was working. This is called an evaluation. The organizations that conducted this evaluation were the Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence and Mission Analytics Group. They are called evaluators. The evaluators looked at California's Regional Centers and community-based organizations that were funded by the SAE grant program in 2018 through 2020. Part of this time included the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a difficult time to provide services to people with disabilities.

Their evaluation found that California leads the nation in passing laws and spending money to help make sure people with IDD and their families from diverse backgrounds get the supports and services they need. The evaluators recommended that the SAE grant program should continue. They also recommended changes to the program to make sure it works better.

It will take more than the SAE grant program to reduce unfair treatment for people with IDD and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Sometimes people who need services are treated unfairly because of their race, ethnicity, or the language that they speak. When this happens, it causes disparities between what people need and what they receive. The evaluators found that in addition to the SAE Grant program, there are other efforts within the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to make services fair and equitable for everyone. Still, it is important to learn more about what causes racial, ethnic, and linguistic disparities for persons with IDD and their families in California.

Why we did this

The evaluation of the SAE grant program began five years after the program started. From public information like reports from advocacy and social justice groups, the evaluators learned there were ongoing disparities for people with IDD from different racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. The evaluators also said that leaders within the California Department of Developmental Services are committed to removing these disparities, in the SAE grant programs and in other programs.

Unfair treatment based on race, where people come from, and the language they speak is not new. This goes beyond California and the IDD system. However, the IDD system nationwide is far behind other groups in describing what *equity* means for people with IDD. (Equity means being treated fairly. This is different from equality, which means being treated the same.) The IDD system has not explained how unfairness, or inequity, has been part of the services people with IDD receive. They have not described how to measure this inequity. And the IDD system has not explained how to promote equity for people with IDD in partnership with other groups who are treated unfairly.



The evaluators used the Disabilities Disparities Framework to look at the services people with IDD and their families received. This framework was created by Tawara Goode. It looks at the availability, accessibility, acceptability, quality, and utilization of services and supports. This framework also shows how the each parts of this framework are linked together and what this means for people with IDD, their families, and the communities in which they live.

What we did

The evaluation of the SAE grant program had three big goals:

1. Explore the impact of the SAE grant program on people with IDD from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups and find out what changes would improve the program.
2. Develop a way to measure the results and the impact of future SAE grant programs.
3. Develop a way to prioritize what is working to reduce disparities.



The evaluators collected information from many different sources. This included information from individuals, organizations, and reports that were submitted to California Department of Developmental Services. The evaluators interviewed people who run SAE Grant programs including Regional Centers and Community-based Organizations and listened to the experiences of families. Staff of California's Department of Developmental Services were also interviewed.

How we did it

The evaluators used several ways or methods in their evaluation. This means that they used quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative refers to information that can be counted or compared on a numeric scale. Qualitative data describes qualities of characteristics and is not so easy to count or measure.

What we learned

Findings about the impact of the SAE grant program on people with IDD include:

- Spending on services for people with IDD from diverse backgrounds increased more between 2017–2018 and 2021–2022 than it did for non-Hispanic White individuals, but in some cases, disparities remained.
- Regional Centers and Community-based Organizations don't have enough resources to collect and understand information or data about disparities.
- The grant program operates without an official definition of equity and has no written plan for advancing the concept of equity.
- Funded categories, such as parent training and advocacy, do not show a direct impact on reducing disparities.

- There are many reasons why disparities exist in California's IDD system. Some reasons include:
 - » Services were historically designed to serve White non-Hispanic populations;
 - » The types of services and supports that are provided do not meet the interests and needs of racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse people with IDD and their families;
 - » Families are not aware of services that are provided; and there are many competing demands in the lives of families that makes it difficult to get to or receive services.
- Many Regional Center leaders said it was hard to gain the trust of racially and ethnically diverse populations because of the long history of racism and unfair treatment.
- SAE Grant programs only last about one year. This is not long enough to know how much benefit they could be to racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities.
- COVID-19 made it very hard for people with IDD and their families to access services because they lacked computers, and/or had difficulty using online platforms.



- Nearly all Regional Center leaders said they and their employees learned more about what causes disparities and about what they can do to better serve people with IDD from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Families said they are frustrated by long wait times for services.
- Families also said they often don't get services at all because applying for them is too complicated and/or they aren't available in their languages.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are grouped into four categories: grant focus, project structure, project types, and grant measures.

1. Grant focus

- Reduce the number of grant priorities by identifying areas of impact that have the best chance of reducing disparities.

2. Project structure

- Define what equity is within DDS and the SAE Grant Program. Make sure the definition is easy to understand by people in receiving and in need of supports and services and organizations that provide such supports and services.
- Require that Regional Centers partner with a community-based organization in order to apply for and receive an SAE grant.
- Define the area of focus and type of disparities that will be reduced. Consider using the Goode Disability Disparities Framework to identify disparities in availability, accessibility, acceptability, quality, and utilization.

- Require that culturally competent and linguistically competent practices are part of each SAE grant project. Grantee applicants should be required to define cultural competence and linguistic competence and how such practices will be applied in their projects.
- Increase the duration of SAE Grant projects that show they are reducing disparities. Consider up to four years of additional funding.
- Require a logic model and a theory of change framework for all SAE grant projects.
- Develop better ways to measure the progress of SAE Grant programs.

3. Project types

- Define approved project types. Find the areas of impact that have the best chance of reducing disparities. The evaluators suggest for four project types:
 - » **Education and training:** The provision of education and training may not result in meaningful increase in POS, particularly in the short-term. Regional Centers and CBOs would need to prove the direct correlation between a training, advocacy,

leadership, or business development activity and an increase in service access or disparities reduction (i.e., logic model, theory of change, data collection including ongoing and longer-term follow-up with participants, data analysis and reporting). These education and training activities are an important resource to persons who experience IDD and their families as well as CBOs. The NCCC-MA Team suggests that DDS should continue to fund this project type but it should not be subjected to the stringent metric of POS due to the complexity and cost associated with proving outcomes and impacts by race, ethnicity, and language based solely on expenditures for previously stated reasons.

- » **Engagement and outreach:** Community engagement and outreach are essential to inform culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities about DDS supports and services throughout the life course. The NCCC-MA Team suggests continuing to fund this project type. Similar to Education and Training, this project type may not yield the data required to satisfy POS. Again, grantees will need to be able to demonstrate a direct correlation between the activities (informational presentations and fairs) that resulted in increased service access or a reduction in disparities.
- » **Community connectors:** The NCCC-MA Team supports continued funding of this project type. Priority funding should be given to those racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups (i.e., monolingual in languages other than English, limited English proficiency as defined by US Census, ASL or other sign language users) that experience the greatest percentage of disparities in service access. While the demographic make-up may indicate a larger population of a particular racial or ethnic group, smaller population groups may be inadvertently overlooked. This project type should require Regional Centers to partner with CBOs.
- » **Workforce capacity and development:** Should DDS continue to fund this project type, innovative, collaborative, and strategic approaches will be required. Clear guidance should be provided on exactly what cultural competence and linguistic competence mean for individuals (various workforce disciplines including direct support professionals) and organizations (policy and practice). There is not a shared understanding across Regional Centers and CBOs: 1) of what cultural competence and linguistic competence are, 2) of how these practices are defined and conceptualized differently, and 3) that cultural and linguistic are not synonymous with language access. Expanding the available workforce is a long-term goal given the crisis in the number of direct support professionals who have left the service system, particularly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for other reasons including wages and working conditions. Consideration should be given to whether or not this area of focus is the most appropriate investment for DDS grant funds.

4. Grant measures

- Require that projects report the progress and outcomes of their activities. Projects should provide both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Require that all who receive SAE grants listen to the participants in their project.
 - » Conduct focus groups
 - » Hold listening sessions



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