



CITY INSIGHTS

Equity in Action



MITRE's Social Justice Platform (SJP) collaborated with the City of Bozeman, Montana to support Bozeman's equity action planning process. As part of this work, MITRE's Tammy Freeman and Tamey Habtu along with Bozeman's Dani Hess (Community Engagement Coordinator for the city of Bozeman, Montana) held a series of conversations with leaders, from various cities across North America, who are actively working to improve equity for their respective residents. In these pages, we share these conversations with leaders and outline key insights and best practices gleaned from our conversations. Additionally, we provide key takeaways that Federal agencies (and others) can leverage to enhance equity efforts. We share this in the spirit of radical transparency in hopes that leaders at all levels are inspired to learn from and take action on what is presented here.

CITY INSIGHTS

Equity in Action



MITRE's Social Justice Platform and the City of Bozeman are deeply grateful to the city leaders we spoke with, who took time to share their equity efforts, and for their willingness to be included in this resource.

Cities across the country—and world—are continuously working to improve access, participation, and opportunity for their residents through better, more equitable service delivery and by implementing policies and programs that address and eliminate inequity, barriers, and burdens faced by groups who experience systemic bias (due to race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and other groups who have been historically pushed to the margins and made vulnerable).

The City of Bozeman and MITRE's Social Justice Platform joined forces in a cross-sector collaboration to help advance Bozeman's effort to develop an equity action plan for their city. As part of this effort, Bozeman and MITRE organized conversations with several cities across North America who are deeply engaged in equity efforts. These conversations provided an opportunity for Bozeman and participating cities to learn from and share lessons with each other as well as build and strengthen relationships among city leaders conducting equity work.

This document serves several purposes: (1) to showcase the intentional efforts by city governments to advance equity and to shine light on how benefits, burdens, and unintended consequences can, at times, fall unevenly across communities; (2) to share how communities large and small—at all stages of institutional change—establish shared language for social equity and justice, engage their communities as co-creators in policy and program making, and create the necessary momentum and take the appropriate action to build cities where all can thrive; and (3) highlight and extol effective practices that Federal agencies (and others) can adopt to improve equity within their jurisdictions.



PARTICIPATING CITIES

Figure 1 locates our participating cities across the landscape of North America. The characteristics of the cities vary by location, geography, population size, demographics, as well as the stage of their equity work. The following pages provide additional information about the participating cities.

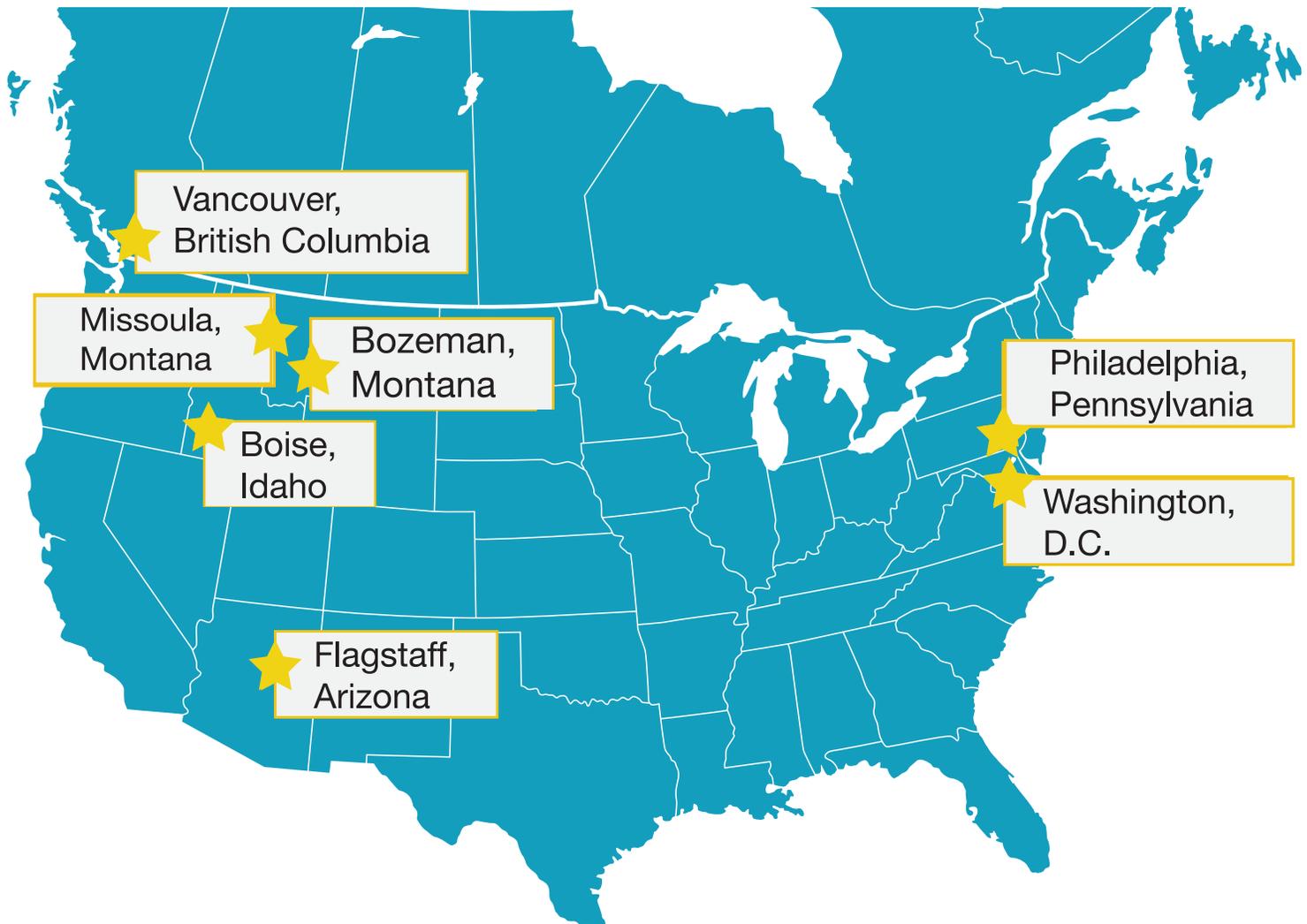


Figure 1. Participating Cities (Adapted from Alternate History)

CITY INSIGHTS

The following section presents the conversations held with leaders working to improve equity in their respective cities. In the spirit of transparency, and to capture the breadth of their insights, the responses of the representatives remain in their original, first-person state.

The interviews were directed by three sets of guiding questions that cover objectives critical to equity action planning:

- **Defining Equity**
- **Engaging with the Community**
- **Turning Commitment into Action**

As the representatives highlighted experiences, tools, and programs in their responses to the guiding questions, additional questions were asked to dive deeper into those experiences.

BOZEMAN, MONTANA



Dani Hess
Community Engagement
Coordinator

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK



POPULATION
53,293



**NUMBER OF CITY
EMPLOYEES**
272



**DEDICATED EQUITY
OFFICE**
In Development

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

No (In Development)

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

The effort to “ensure that all residents, visitors, and City of Bozeman employees feel welcome, valued, and like they can thrive in our community no matter their race, identity, or life circumstance.”
[\(Adapted from Gaps Analysis for Equity Indicators Project, City of Bozeman\)](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

“Engage Bozeman” Framework adapted from International Association for Public Participation

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BOISE, IDAHO



Kate Nelson
Director of Community Partnerships



Kathy Griesmyer
Director of Government Affairs



POPULATION
235,684



NUMBER OF CITY EMPLOYEES
2,000



DEDICATED EQUITY OFFICE
No

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

Yes

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

No Formal Definition

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Community Liaisons

back to map

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA



Rose Toehe
Coordinator for Indigenous
Initiatives



Sara Dechter
Comprehensive Planning Manager



POPULATION
76,831



**NUMBER OF CITY
EMPLOYEES**
876



**DEDICATED EQUITY
OFFICE**
No (Dedicated
Staff: Rose Toehe)

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

No

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

No Formal Definition

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Partnerships

back to
map

MISSOULA, MONTANA



Ashley Brittner Wells
National League of Cities JEDI
Coordinator



Dalton Johnson
Human Resource Generalist



POPULATION
73,489



**NUMBER OF CITY
EMPLOYEES**
>600



**DEDICATED EQUITY
OFFICE**
Yes

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

Yes

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

Equity is the full and equal access to opportunities, power, and resources so that all people achieve their full potential and thrive. (Developed by King County, City of [Missoula JEDI Resolution](#))

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Intergovernmental Collaboration

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA



Liana Dragoman
Director of Strategic Design,
Service Design Studio



POPULATION
1.6 million



**NUMBER OF CITY
EMPLOYEES**
>25,000



**DEDICATED EQUITY
OFFICE**
Yes

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

No

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

No Formal Definition

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Community Engagement Toolkit

Community Liaisons

Community Engagement Coalition

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA



Mumbi Maina

Social Planner – Social Policy and Projects



Peter Marriott

Social Planner – Equity, Research and Data



POPULATION

631,486



NUMBER OF CITY EMPLOYEES

7,610



DEDICATED EQUITY OFFICE

Yes

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

Yes

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

Equity is both an outcome and a process.

Equity names and addresses systemic inequities that benefit and favour some groups and often disproportionately impact cultural communities, Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC).

Therefore, equity efforts seek ways to transform current structures, policies, and processes in order to balance power and influence, expand access, and create new ways of walking together that nourish all people by embedding intersectionality in institutional and sectoral change.

[\(City of Vancouver's Equity Framework\)](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Community Liaisons

External Equity Advisory Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C.



Amber Hewitt, PhD
Chief Equity Officer



Chikarlo Leak
Policy and Operations Director,
Office of Racial Equity



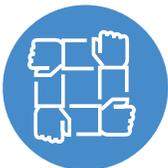
Emily Ruskin
Data and Policy Analyst,
Office of Racial Equity



POPULATION
689,545



**NUMBER OF CITY
EMPLOYEES**
37,456



**DEDICATED EQUITY
OFFICE**
Yes

STATUS OF EQUITY WORK

ADOPTED ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY PLAN?

No

FORMAL DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

Racial equity is both a process and an outcome. As a process, we apply a racial equity lens when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race will no longer predict opportunities, outcomes, or the distribution of resources for District residents—particularly for communities of color.

[\(D.C. Office of Racial Equity\)](#)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS IN USE?

Community Engagement Toolkit

DEFINING EQUITY

Creating shared language matters. As governments work to instill equity throughout their internal and external work, a shared understanding of equity is required to truly attain that vision. Finding common ground across community groups' differing interpretations of equity is a challenge.

We asked city representatives about their organizations' understanding of equity and how that understanding is being embedded across their work and throughout their departments.

GUIDING QUESTION(S): How does your organization define equity?
How was this definition established and how does it guide your work?



Sara Decter
Flagstaff, Arizona

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As a city, Flagstaff does not yet have a definition of equity or a policy guide that is explicit and comprehensive. The American Planning Association has an equity-in-all-policies approach outlined in their [Planning for Equity Policy Guide](#). The guide defines equity as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Unlocking the promise of the nation by unleashing the promise in us all” ([Planning for Equity Policy Guide](#)).

This graphic has been a good reminder when we slide back into the mindset of, “we treat everyone the same, so if I do something different here, I am treating a customer special.”

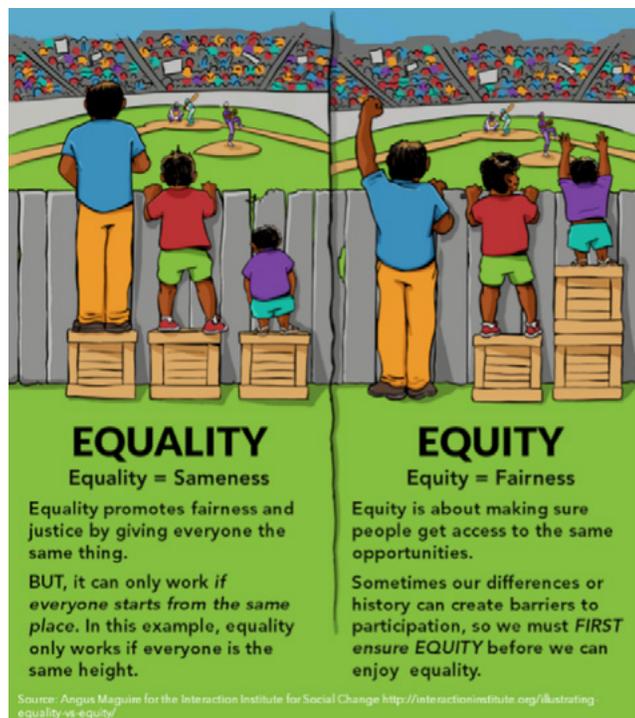
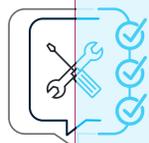


Figure 2. Equality vs. Equity

(Taken from [Angus Maguire for the Interaction Institute for Social Change](#))



TOOLS AND PROGRAMS – INTERNAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Mayor's Office – Boise, Idaho

As an employer, the City of Boise is committed to building a workforce that is representative of our whole community. This means focusing on how we are recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce so that we can continue to serve our community in the most expansive and equitable way possible. The City of Boise's 2021 DEI Strategy is a multi-stage process focused on the city's comprehensive approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion goals, and to develop and nurture a workforce that is representative of the community that it serves. This includes:

- A complete assessment of the organization to document current state and to identify opportunities and next steps, including the establishment of a steering committee and extended team (completed)
- Development of an organization-wide strategy, including focus areas related to representation and retention
- Assessment and implementation of changes within the recruitment, hiring, and on-boarding processes
- Implementation of a comprehensive engagement program for all employees related to DEI goals



Rose Toehe
Flagstaff, Arizona

The importance of building understanding that people of color do not have the same starting place as the rest of the population. What is important in the work I do is to bring Indigenous voice and values into the municipality structure and provide a framework whereby there is teaching and learning as we engage internally and with our Indigenous community members and neighboring Indigenous nations. For example, an Indigenous value is humility – not about being higher or lower than anyone else, all are equally valued which promotes equity. This could be in direct conflict with a municipality structure in varied areas.



Kathy Griesmyer
Boise, Idaho

Boise's vision is to be a [City for Everyone](#). At a very high level, this means that our commitment lies in ensuring we create a community that protects people, welcomes all, and offers opportunities for everyone. The next step for us is to define terms on a more granular level as an internal organization. We have hired a consultant to work with our leadership team to define what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) means to us as well as our vision/mission to guide how our DEI efforts take shape throughout the full organization.



Mumbi Maina
Vancouver, British Columbia

Equity is both a process and outcome. While equality may be an end goal, equity is the development and implementation of targeted efforts to reach that goal.



Amber Hewitt
Washington, D.C.

Race is centered in Washington D.C.’s equity efforts. Definitions were adapted from the [Government Alliance on Race & Equity](#).

Racial equity is both a process and an outcome. As a process, we apply a racial equity lens when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race will no longer predict opportunities, outcomes, or the distribution of resources for District residents—particularly for communities of color.



Ashley Brittner
Wells
Missoula, Montana

Definitions that guide Missoula’s Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion efforts were compiled by the National League of Cities [“Cities of Opportunity”](#) cohort and with a City-County Equity Workgroup. These terms are defined in the JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) [Resolution](#) adopted by City Council in August 2021. The definitions used are attributed to The Avarna Group, King County, the D5 Coalition, the Michigan Nonprofit Association, Beyond Intractability, Yale Law school, Oxford Languages, and the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation.

Missoula’s definitions do not center on race, yet emphasize the importance of understanding power, systemic barriers to resources and opportunities, and ensuring dignity and the ability for all people to achieve their full potential and thrive.



Dani Hess
Bozeman, Montana

Bozeman’s definition of equity is broadly defined as the effort to “ensure that all residents, visitors, and City of Bozeman employees feel welcome, valued, and like they can thrive in our community no matter their race, identity, or life circumstance” ([Inclusive City Report](#)). This definition was established by the City in our initial [Inclusive City](#) recommendations after an internal analysis of policies, programs, and practices around policing, human resources, and community relations. We carried it forward into our [Equity Indicators and Gaps Analysis](#) project that will inform the action planning process that we are in the early stages of. As we begin building our internal team to design and develop our Equity & Inclusion Plan and implement staff training on the foundations of equity in local government, we will continue to refine and clarify language and definitions.

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ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Equity begins internally by getting one's house in order, doing the internal work, and planning. However, authentic partnership, engagement, and relationship building with the community are essential in working towards equity with trust and accountability.

Community engagement is not as straightforward as talking with members of the community. There are lessons that can be learned from the approaches different cities have taken to build authentic relationships.

GUIDING QUESTION: How is the community engaged in your city's equity work?
What role has your city taken in working with local organizations and partners?

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Amber Hewitt
Washington, D.C.

There is an overlap between community engagement and equity—it is a core tenant of what we do, and we are not doing true equity work without community engagement.

TOOLS AND PROGRAMS – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDES

Office of Racial Equity – Washington, D.C.

Our office is developing a Meaningful Community Engagement and Equity Guide for use by agencies across the City. Containing a checklist with best practices related to concepts like racial trauma, the guide serves to set the agencies up for genuine success when working with different communities.

Service Design Studio – Philadelphia, PA

The development of our Equitable Community Engagement Toolkit has been an experience that resulted in built trust. By collaborating with community members and community-based organizations in the design of the toolkit, we acknowledged and discussed challenges that residents face when encountering the city. The issues spanned across the topic areas of language, disability, and digital access. This toolkit will help city staff plan for and implement community engagement efforts centered on access and equity goals.



Liana Dragoman
Philadelphia, PA

We view community engagement as a mechanism for rebuilding trust, and there is a need to rebuild trust in Philadelphia. Our office created an internal Civic Engagement coalition that meets monthly and is [developing our Equitable Engagement Toolkit](#), which contains strategies and templates for city staff working with communities. In addition, we hold a [Civic Engagement Academy](#) which teaches government 101 and civics lessons to community organizers, nonprofits, and those leading similar efforts in their communities.

TOOLS AND PROGRAMS – COMMUNITY LIAISONS

Several communities have established liaison programs that seek to build ongoing relationships with marginalized communities through trusted leaders in those communities.

Vancouver’s Community Navigator Program was a foundational component to engaging underrepresented groups in the Vancouver Plan process in 2020.

Philadelphia’s [Community Resource Corps](#) and [Neighborhood Liaison](#) programs also use this model to connect residents to resources and build the city’s capacity for strategic community engagement.



Rose Toehe
Flagstaff, Arizona

Our City’s equity work is based on partnerships and government support for grassroots organizations and those commissioned to lead the work. The groups that drive these efforts are [Neustras Raices](#), the [League of Neighborhoods](#), the [Black Lived Experience Coalition](#), the [Indigenous Circle of Flagstaff](#) and the Coconino County Tri-Diversity Advisory Councils. We can now add the City’s Indigenous Commission to the list. The [Museum of Northern Arizona](#) and the [Arizona Historical Society](#) are also strong allies and have been working to spotlight stories of discrimination alongside celebrations of culture and resiliency in the community.

Coconino County is also working to include a DEI position after completing work with a consulting firm on DEI which included leadership, employees, and the Tri-Diversity Advisory Councils.



Kathy Griesmyer
Boise, Idaho

At this stage, most of our DEI work has predominately been internal as we continue our leadership training and consultant work. However, we have worked to build relationships with traditionally underserved community groups and leaders to connect them to our current city projects. Examples include:

- Integrating Latinx, LGBTQIA+, and Refugee liaison officers within the Police Department.
- Financial support and staff participation in [Neighbors United](#), a partnership led by the City of Boise and the Idaho Office for Refugees, along with community partners. The network is focused on supporting refugee community members in their resettlement and rebuilding of their lives in their new community.
- Hiring a Language Access Manager to adopt and implement the recommendations of a recent needs analysis to ensure we’re providing appropriate, and accessible, language access for our non-native English speaking community members.



Mumbi Maina
Vancouver, British Columbia

- Serve as the lead agency in [Our Path Home](#), a public-private partnership working to end homelessness in Ada County. The partnership is comprised of nearly 50 partner agencies who work together to provide homelessness prevention services. The City of Boise currently has two permanent supportive housing developments, New Path Community Housing and Valor Pointe, that provide housing and wrap-around services to people who were previously experiencing chronic homelessness.

Community partners are engaged across the city through many touchpoints, from the External Equity Advisory Committee that helped develop the [Equity Framework](#) and supported the creation of Equity Office; to reconciliation work with Indigenous Nations and urban Indigenous peoples; to programs like the Community Navigators for engagement with the Vancouver Plan.

Ultimately, this is relationship-centered work. If the city is really going to advance equity, it starts with forming authentic relationships with communities, especially those that have been systemically marginalized, and starting to heal and build trust with these communities.



Ashley Brittner Wells
Missoula, Montana

Intergovernmental coordination is an example of the City of Missoula’s success in partnering with Missoula County on engaging the community and aligning regional efforts. The City of Missoula will serve as a partner on Missoula County’s JEDI Advisory Board workgroup, which will form the JEDI Advisory Board.

The purpose of developing a JEDI Advisory Board is to create a community-driven advisory structure within Missoula’s local government comprised of community experts of diverse backgrounds, fields, and experiences to inform, support, align, and hold accountable Missoula City-County strategies and outcomes related to ensuring that all Missoula County residents have equitable and just access to the resources that they need for their health, social, economic, and educational well-being. For more information, folks can visit the [Missoula County Voice JEDI website](#).



Dani Hess
Bozeman, Montana

Equity and inclusivity are guiding principles in our [community engagement initiative](#). This means that we are going outside of our comfort zone to engage in new ways, acknowledging and addressing barriers to engagement for certain groups, and including residents who are most impacted by a given project or policy.



TURNING COMMITMENT INTO ACTION

A challenge in advancing equity is that we must boldly (re)imagine what can and should be. This an exercise in futures thinking, creating an equitable future requires a shift in mental models and practices that may be very different from the status quo. While creating a shared understanding helps others paint the vision, tangible examples of the bold vision are important for building commitment and maintaining momentum. Employees and the public want to see that the actions of the organization align with the commitments being made.

The guiding question for this section served to exhibit ways cities have actualized their commitment to equity.

GUIDING QUESTION: Can you share a story or example of how the city is taking equity from commitment (talk) to action (walk)?



Kathy Griesmyer
Boise, Idaho



We have a range of services that demonstrate the city's commitment to DEI:

- Our Energize our Neighborhoods program and cross-sector community partnerships, which have focused on capacity building through empowerment for neighborhoods and local communities.
- Robust and inclusive community programs from the Boise Arts & History department, including a grant program to support local artists. The department has also partnered with members of the Shoshone, Bannock, and Northern Piate tribes to honor the annual "Return of the Boise Valley People," which celebrates the native tribal land and tribal ancestors that call the Boise Valley home.
- Support for and/or partnerships with organizations that actively advance missions of DEI in our community, such as the Treefort Music Festival, the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights, Jannus Economic Opportunity (refugee focus), and the Idaho Black History Museum.
- Training for City of Boise employees, including implicit bias training for several key departments like Police, Legal, and Arts & History.
- Purchasing preferences for minority- and women-owned businesses.
- Permanent supportive housing programs / Housing First Initiative.
- Boise Parks & Recreation adaptive recreation program.
- Sponsorship of community events, such as Pride Festival, World Village Festival, and World Refugee Day.
- Progressive policing programs, such as the Boise Police Department's diversity outreach panel and dedicated liaison officers for the refugee, Latinx, and LGBTQIA+ community as well as a comprehensive human rights training for all officers.



Peter Marriott
Vancouver, British
Columbia

To turn commitment into action, our Equity Office is using soft power by aligning departmental and equity framework priorities through data and benchmarking efforts, centering relationships, building trust, and creating accessible and sustainable funding from the city to organizations supporting marginalized communities.

“We consent to learn in public. We will make mistakes. We will sit with those mistakes, be transparent about them, and use them both to learn and to teach” (Vancouver Park Board Reconciliation Vision, Vancouver Equity Framework).

TOOLS AND PROGRAMS – TRAINING, LEARNING, AND EDUCATION

JEDI Core Team – Missoula, Montana

Through funding by the National League of Cities, the City of Missoula put together a City JEDI Team to drive our equity efforts. Our City JEDI Team first decided to focus on Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion through training. This was to ensure that leaders across the government are leading with the same language.

We acknowledge that we are not working with the same lens across different departments. A department focused on parks and recreation may be at a different pace with conceptualizing JEDI than one focused on education. By getting leaders on the same page with language, we can better portray our equity vision back to staff and communities.



Sara Decter
Flagstaff, Arizona

The La Plaza Vieja Plan adopted in 2015 was the first plan on the equity path we have been traveling. We had many conversations about the



condition of parks in the neighborhood, why they were meaningful, and how homogenizing them with other parks in the City had created a sense of loss in the Hispanic community. The stories informed several implementations strategies, and a partnership between the Parks Department and the Beautification and Public Art program started implementing them almost immediately.

Improvements to the Old Town Springs Park were a milestone for the neighborhood. Outdated plaques that ignored the community's Hispanic culture were removed and replaced with high quality detailed panels that the Arizona Historical Society developed with the City and the Beautification program produced. The neighborhood representatives reviewed every iteration of the design. This was the first time that a neighborhood plan that was community-driven had created a capital project with a truly collaborative design process. We have been working to keep the neighborhood plan to capital program going through annual meetings with the neighborhoods that have completed plans.

TOOLS AND PROGRAMS – PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Neighborhood Planning Program – Flagstaff, Arizona

Our neighborhood planning program has been a success story in our equity journey. I liked that Tammy used the word “restorative” when I spoke about the flagpole. I think restorative neighborhood planning would be a great description of what we want to accomplish. I will say that was a shift in our thinking.

When we asked the neighborhoods what they wanted, they talked about culture, heritage, visibility, economic and social systems, and places. They talked about what they had lost and what they wanted to see more of. It was a clear that they were not against the change, but they did not want their culture to be erased by what was new. I would say that “new” meant a focus on infill and not doing much to stop or slow gentrification by the way that it was being described. Neighborhoods are a part of identities, and I think that is a touchpoint that helps us keep the equity lens on the work we do.



Rose Toehe
Flagstaff, Arizona

A short background on the collaboration of an Indigenous grassroots group, Indigenous Circle of Flagstaff (ICF) and the City of Flagstaff: In 2016 during a conversation with a council member, an idea was given to push for Indigenous Peoples Day. However, due to further discussion within ICF, it was decided that if this was to be the case, Indigenous Peoples Day had to be meaningful. This led to a series of Indigenous organized-led community forums in collaboration with the Flagstaff City Council and city leadership. The forums were completed in 7-8 months. The topics covered were Youth & Education; Homelessness/ Unsheltered Relatives; Elders; Economic Development and Economic Contribution; Police and Criminal Justice; and Environmental Justice.

In October 2017, after combing through months of information, the most voiced themes were gathered. ICF gave a recommendation report to City Council and they directed the City Manager's Office to work with ICF and the Indigenous community to create a strategic plan and related programming. In 2018, ICF asked for assistance in carrying out the tasks. This was also the year Council passed Indigenous Peoples Day. The City committed to a part-time temporary position to help with the work and again the City Manager's office realized a full-time position was needed. This was approved in 2019 and the Coordinator for Indigenous Initiatives was hired in February 2020 with the help and input of ICF. The point is that the coordinator position is a community-driven position. The programming work plan has input/feedback to/from the Indigenous community and City Council. It also serves as a balance for community and Council priorities within municipal government.

The recommendations presented to and accepted by City Council in October 2017 and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives is currently working on:

- Visibility
- Economic Inclusion
- Indigenous Community Cultural Center
- Education
- Housing
- Transportation

The following projects are only a few of the highlights as accomplishments or currently in motion:

Indigenous Commission (IC). The IC was established and seated in December 2020. Its role is to provide advice to City Council and work with City leadership. A first accomplishment was advising Council to add Land Acknowledgement to meeting protocols. The Commission is also involved in providing input into several city projects including the Alternate Response Model, Carbon Neutrality, Stakeholder Public Participation on the Thorpe Park Annex, and others.

Alternate Response Model. Due to 2016-17 town forums and individuals lost to exposure, the topic of Unsheltered/Unhoused Relatives (homelessness) is being addressed. A high percentage are Indigenous. The police, fire, ICF and city courts have helped in forwarding the need to resolve cases ending up in the emergency room or jail system when there could be an alternate place to place individuals. Local service providers and the city departments came together to define solutions. The City provided an RFP and currently moved forward to fund a CARE mobile unit to be proactive in reaching this population. Further, two local Indigenous non-profit agencies are involved by providing an alternate

drop-in center and another providing a refurbished bus with built-in shower and essentials to the unsheltered. The planning of this endeavor has brought many providers to the table to assist and revamp their own services.

The City of Flagstaff's Beautification, Arts & Science Project has dedicated funds for Indigenous Art to address Visibility and Public Art. This project is now convening for planning.



Dani Hess
Bozeman, Montana

For the update of our Parks, Recreation, & Active Transportation Plan, we are proud to have partnered with local organizations to pilot a Community Liaison program. Three individuals have taken the lead in engaging communities of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community to bring these underrepresented perspectives to the forefront of our public parks and transportation planning efforts.



Amber Hewitt
Washington, D.C.

The Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) tool will guide agencies in addressing racial equity as they develop, implement, and evaluate policies, practices, and programs. Using racial equity tools like this one is not the end goal but a step towards integrating a racial equity lens across District work. The questions included in the tool are meant to help readers identify strategies and resources they may need to embed racial equity in their work. It is strongly encouraged to use this guide early in the policy/program development stage and to discuss the questions as a group with all staff who will be responsible for developing and implementing the policy/program. While each decision analyzed using a racial equity impact tool may result in seemingly small changes, their cumulative impact over time can result in significant changes.

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WHAT WE HEARD: KEY LEARNINGS AND INSIGHTS

The conversations with city staff leading equity and equity-related activities were immensely insightful and eye opening, providing best practices and lessons learned on the process of creating equity. A few key themes emerged from these conversations that highlight some components that are critical to the success of equity work:

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT IS VITAL

The success and sustainability of equity efforts are directly related to leadership's ability to embrace, embody, and support the work. Many of those interviewed highlighted that, without leadership as champions, sustainability and longevity of these efforts are at risk. Leaders must:

Demonstrate Communication and Commitment: Clear and consistent communication of the vision, goals, and purpose of the equity and inclusion efforts is essential. Leadership must demonstrate commitment in words and actions.

Allocate Necessary Resources: A few interviewees pointed out the immense scope of equity work. It is not enough for a few people to do this work as part of their jobs. The appropriate full-time staff and supporting resources must be funded and allocated to enable success. Outside consultants and support may also be needed, especially as staff builds their equity IQ. Consultants can supplement and augment activities and provide guidance where it may not be feasible or recommended that internal staff support.

EMPOWER GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

Nearly every interviewee indicated their equity journey originated as a direct response to community needs versus a government directive. This highlights the notion that people are experts on their own lives and are best suited to provide solutions for the issues they face. Enabling residents to be heard allows for communities to co-create solutions that work for them with government, as opposed to government creating solutions for them.



INCREASE TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Government must employ trauma-informed practices that support reparative justice if they want to build trust and transparency. This is particularly important for groups who have been historically harmed due to government actions and who have been pushed to the margins and continue to be underrepresented and underserved. Building trust starts with recognizing past harms and working towards truth and reconciliation. The more communities see themselves on the periphery of decision-making processes, the more likely communities will resist and distrust decision makers. Therefore, building trust and transparency is key. Two considerations are worthy of pointing out here:

Engage Community Organizations: Building trust can mean working with community groups and other affinity organizations that work with and in the impacted communities. These groups can serve as a bridge and filter and can help support activities in program and policy planning. This requires governments to listen, learn, cede power, and increase opportunities for communities to lead and engage in new and different ways.

Targeted Direct Community Engagement: Opportunities abound for cities to engage residents directly through a multitude of avenues that allow for participation in decisions that affect residents. Intentional actions must be taken to engage residents who are most vulnerable and underserved. For example, residents who speak English as a second language is one of many examples where support and other investments may need to be extended to ensure they are included. Support can include investing in culturally informed communications to ensure that people get the information they need in a way that is accessible to them, and other methods to ensure communities are effectively served. If intentional actions are not taken to make community engagement activities more accessible, the opportunity is missed to hear from and understand the perspectives of key individuals and groups.

BE PEOPLE CENTERED AND DATA INFORMED

All those interviewed agreed that this work is centered on people. Investments must be made in community outreach and engagement activities that go beyond informing communities, but which tilt toward enabling communities to lead and create solutions that work best for them. Good data enables the advancement of impactful decisions that help determine where inequity and other barriers exist; it also helps measure the success of programs and policies designed to eliminate disparities.



WHAT WE CAN DO: TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCING EQUITY

Local governments are among the first to anticipate and respond to community needs. A local government's proximity and connection to communities coupled with the fact that local government staff usually come from the communities they serve positions local governments to best respond to challenges and locate opportunities to support residents. In this respect, local governments have an advantage in their ability to assess and understand problems residents face, allowing them to be responsive and flexible to a community's needs. This gives way for opportunities to co-create and co-solution with residents as a means to generate effective sustainable solutions. The Federal Government can be a significant catalyst for positive change and the advancement of equity by adopting, enabling, and/or supporting impactful techniques that local governments employ.

Outlined below are three effective techniques, often employed with great success at the local level, that the Federal Government can leverage, adopt, and enable.

PLACE-BASED INNOVATION, POLICY, AND DECISION-MAKING

“Place-based approaches” target the specific circumstances of a place and engage local people as active participants in development and implementation, requiring government to share decision making (A Framework for Place-Based Approaches). Place-based approaches can complement the bigger picture of services and infrastructure. Those leveraging place-based approaches engage with issues and opportunities that are driven by complex, intersecting local factors and that require a cross-sectoral or long-term response.

“Some places face a new urban crisis of overheated economies and housing markets, and growing unaffordability. Others face ongoing economic distress and lack of demand for the housing they have. And the country remains littered with pockets of concentrated poverty, not just in its inner cities but stretching across its older suburbs and into remote rural areas,” says Richard Florida, a University of Toronto professor. Florida goes on to say that “a locally oriented approach recognizes that federal policy can no longer succeed on a one-size-fits-all basis. It must be tailored to local conditions...” (Bloomberg).

Cookie-cutter, “blanket” approaches to policy and program making often fall short of meeting the needs of people since communities across the country vary widely, and at times, to drastic degrees. Community needs and challenges in Ashland, Kentucky, for example, are very different from

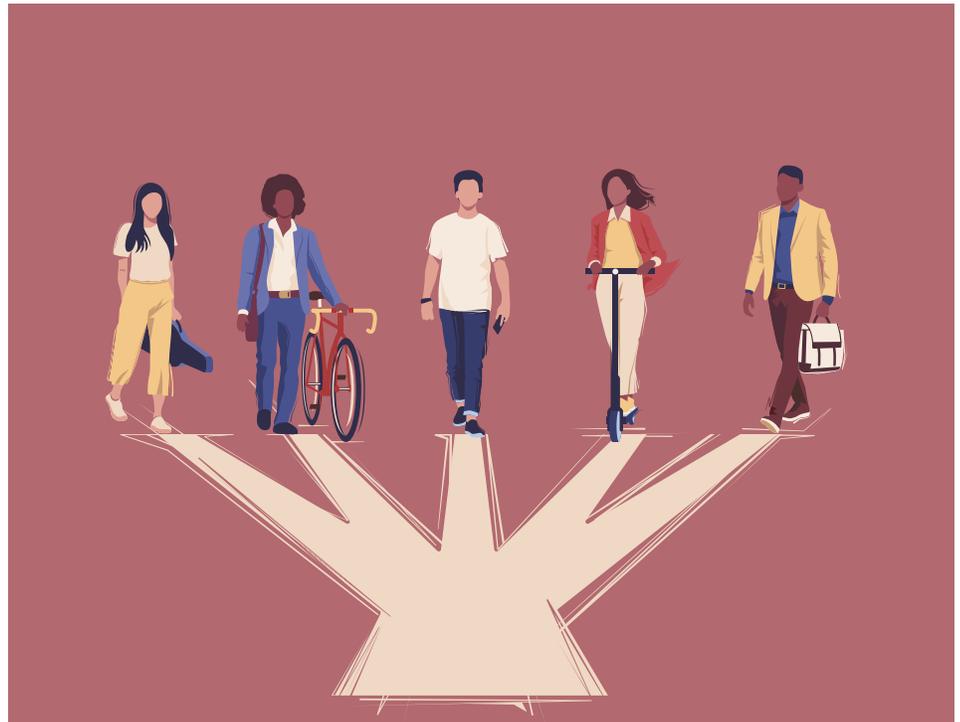


the needs of the community of Hoboken, New Jersey. The difficulty in a one-size-fits-all approach is that it misses opportunities to provide for the unique situations of communities and their unique characteristics. A uniform approach to policy and program making can do more harm than good, resulting in creation and perpetuation of (more) inequity. Increased and improved local decision and policy making can help alleviate this issue.

COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES

Community-led approaches are similar to place-based approaches in the way that community voices and an understanding of and responsiveness to local needs are central to the work being done. However, with community-led approaches, instead of the government leading or co-leading the work, the community takes the helm. Typically, with place-based approaches, power is shared to varying degrees with communities and other partners.

With a community-led approach, power is ceded to communities. Instead of a top-down approach where the government is prescribing and leading, the government shifts to support the expansion of a community's capacity to act on matters that will improve their livelihoods. The government is then a collaborator and partner to communities in development activities led by the communities themselves. For Federal agencies to effectively enable and support community-led development, partnering with local jurisdictions and community leaders is vital. The Federal



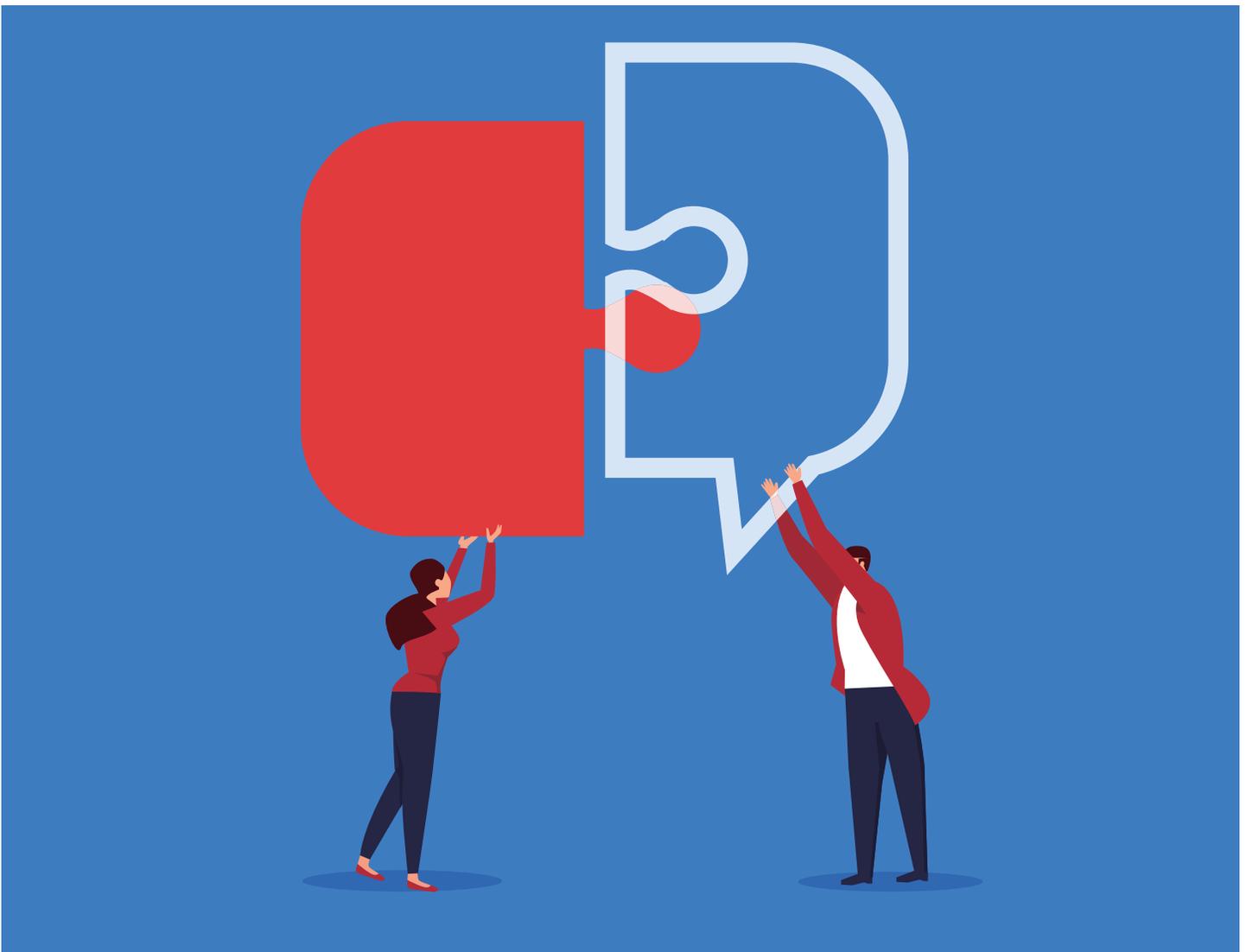
Government can then listen and learn from communities versus prescribe and tell. Governments can lend support by providing funding, access to resources and information, as well as data and contacts that communities may not have access to, in order to support and enhance their activities.

Community members have long acted in ways to support and enhance their communities through various actions and activities, in small and large ways. Community-led approaches call on the government and organizations to leverage their resources in a way to help increase the ability of communities to undertake these efforts, and, specifically to support those communities who have been historically underinvested, underserved, pushed to the margins, and where government programs and policies have caused harm and exaggerated inequity.

Community-led approaches are not a panacea or a solution for every community. There are instances where a community-led approach may not be best, and some communities may not have the ability or interest. However, it is a viable option, one in which the government has an opportunity to take part and support meaningful change and solutioning led by communities.

FOSTER AN EQUITABLE ORGANIZATION

Finally, each of the cities we spoke with had in common the notion that to enable equity for residents, they also needed to foster equity within their governments. As Federal agencies respond to Executive Order 13985 and other Executive Orders and initiatives to enhance equity, any assessment of equity or endeavor to create more equitable outcomes in what a program or service produces must also assess how the organization producing said program or service works. Equity is not just an outcome, but also a process. Equitable outcomes are seeded by equitable processes, mindsets, and cultures that embrace equity as the rule, not the exception. Equity in service delivery is an inside job. Federal agencies can increase equity in what they produce by evaluating how they work and aligning (or realigning) organizational structures, incentives, and cultures to ensure that their internal policies and practices help produce, not inhibit, equity.



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Achieving equity is a participatory, whole-of-society effort. We cannot effectively conduct or sustain this work without learning from each other and sharing mistakes, lessons learned, small wins, and big successes. It starts with self-reflection and awareness at both the individual and institutional levels, beginning with humility and curiosity to learn and unlearn. Public service is, at its core, a commitment to equity, fairness, and justice. In order to turn these ideals into reality, government at all levels must make the commitment to ask, listen to, and partner with the communities they serve.

Thank you to all of the communities who shared their journeys!

In solidarity and partnership,

Dani Hess, Tammy Freeman, and Tamey Habtu

BOZEMAN^{MT}

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