

Equity for All Arizonans

TUCSON COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

October 12, 2023 – Tucson, AZ

DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity can be defined in many ways, including as both accessibility or access to resources in general, with intent for an outcome driven approach to ensuring that there is correct distribution of resources across people, to ensure people have the same (or equal) opportunity to ensure their mental, physical, and spiritual health. Equity can be considered a step above equality, in that you cannot achieve equality without equity, which is the realization of true needs and customization of resource distribution to achieve equality.

The extent that equity has impacted our professional and personal lives is significant, in that:

It can impact personal and professional lives in many ways: to start, it is important to define that equity and equality are for everyone, and embodying that in all scenarios is crucial. The impact of equity can take many forms. It can manifest in the general feeling of people not being heard, feeling tokenized, and/or feeling left out of critical conversations, be they professional or personal. Power dynamics of inequity exist regardless of if they are overt or not, and disadvantaged people will always feel the repercussions of those feelings.

There is also the concept that most of time, inequity will manifest in resources not being allocated appropriately. We do not enter this world on equal footing, and therefore, we need to be cognizant of inequity manifesting in personal and professional settings. By doing this, we can overcome barriers that are created. These inequities, across personal and professional instances, can manifest in the areas of access, progress, communication, access to medical care, internet, education, and economic opportunities etc. Equality simply cannot exist without equity. Equity benefits everyone in a community, not just those it serves directly.

It can also manifest in generational trauma. Those that have been marginalized have additional trauma that needs to be addressed, and simply discussing equality is not enough. Equity in the *social construct* and legislatively/with regard to policy needs to be addressed in order to mitigate the negative effects it has on our personal and professional lives.

The difference between equity and equality is:

The difference is that equity takes equality one step further, and that you cannot have equality without equity. While everyone has equal value, it does not account for various backgrounds and perspectives and needs. Therefore, equity is the provision of *what* one needs in the *amount* they need it to achieve equality. Equity accounts for the subtleties and nuances of individuals, whereas equality is simply a level playing field, achieved by equity.

OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is necessary and incredibly important to optimize our people in that:

In order to achieve change, the social mindset/construct has to change, and we need to realize that the health of every individual and community is dependent on the outcome of all things and changes. To achieve an equitable approach, people need to be open-minded to make changes. If change is not made, it affects us all negatively. Dialogue and openness are key to start the discussion. We also need to recognize that obstacles do not solely lie ahead of disadvantaged or marginalized populations, but that obstacles also exist from the past that inhibit growth, and even embolden those that currently take advantage of the system as it currently exists.

For us to get to systemic change, we need to get to individual change, because all systems are made up of individuals. This will help us identify where inequity lies, and this will allow us to change things.

As an example, capitalism (and many other systems) is not built for change or equity. That is partly why individuals are the basis for change in these systems. Again, individual people making change will lay bare the inequities of the system and allow us to address those issues together. We can also see this manifested in the importance of voting (especially at the local level), as well as related to generational wealth. More wealth allows for more time to participate in your community and build that community wealth and connection, which leads to the optimized benefit of individuals, communities, and the state, by and large. This demonstrates that systems at all levels need to change in order to create equity and benefit everyone at all levels.

Within the change of these system, we need to see accountability, as well as policy related to change to ensure those changes are codified and enforceable. Optimized benefit for people will yield healthier people and communities, economic opportunity for all, relief from an oppressive system of inequity, and generally happier and more productive people.

An equitable society at the individual, community and state levels might look like communities with the resources they need, distributed appropriately, to meet the goals to mitigate negative effects of social determinants of health like substance abuse and mental health issues, but to also provide increased education, economic opportunities, reduction of poverty and decrease/remove the intense effect of past and future systemic issues, and to increase general safety for everyone. The real question at the end of this is: how do you look at the issue to create an equitable approach? Just the marginalized communities, the community as a whole? What is the standard to which we are holding people?

Like individuals make up communities, communities make up the state, and starting with individual units changing will have a cascading effect of positivity at larger levels.

IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest opportunities to use equity as an approach to improving our community are many, and include:

Start with the family and youth: Parents are responsible for their children, and they can help children be educated on and address inequities. If resources are available to parents for this, it can ensure that young kids learn the system early, and therefore they can develop better and have much better outcomes much earlier on in life. Minimization of stress as early as possible will mitigate negative long-term effects. YWCA, Girl Scouts, access to sports, access to arts, access to quality preK-12 Education, etc. make a huge impact on development, as does finding people with similar experiences for youth to connect to and grow with (i.e., mentorship). Of consideration here is, how do you connect to youth, especially when there are various levels of influence and layers to get to them? A combination of social media, marketing, education, etc. may work.

In addition to this, we should include the community in identifying core issues, so that, as a community, we can rally together to ensure our definitions and intentions are aligned, and therefore resource allocation is appropriate and effective. One way to create alignment is to ensure that equity becomes a value for the community and a *metric* for success. Using it as a metric for different needs (housing, wealth, transportation, general access, jobs, etc.) is critical.

Education funding is another key item. Per Pupil funding is inherently flawed, as there are significant variations of school quality across ZIP codes that are traditionally home to those who are already marginalized. Also, incentivization of teachers to teach in more affluent areas needs to be reduced, and those teaching in marginalized areas need to be compensated appropriately. Examples like United Way's Cradle to Career program should be emulated.

Measure impact, not success. Success can have variable definitions, but impact is nuanced person to person, and can be a truer measure.

Execute, not theorize. We need to execute, not just continue to theorize how to fix things. Once we understand the opportunities, we need to address them with whatever means we can. This needs to be realized at institutional levels and structures by being representative of the communities that they serve, and that resources are allocated correctly from someone who truly understands those communities. An example of this is mis or under representation in groups that are tasked with identifying resources or programs for communities. With appropriate representation, we can reduce duplicative programs, and ensure dollars are going further for programs that actually have a positive impact or effect.

We need to look at housing. Rent is too high, prices continue to rise, and access to housing keeps contracting. There are many programs to help, but access to those programs is spotty and even unreliable. People need to be met where they are in order to address those issues. Homeownership for marginalized communities is an important step to developing and maintaining generational wealth.

Access to healthcare is key, also. Again, increasing access and meeting people where they are is crucial, and ensuring that institutions (like hospitals, fire departments, etc.) respond and react quickly to people who need help.

Access in general: transportation is huge. Whether it is owning and operating a car, purchasing a car, having multimodal transportation available, good roads, public transportation, etc. are all key in achieving access to healthcare, medical care, jobs, internet, and other important pieces that have resounding implications for accessing basic services critical to life.

NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Actions that should be taken include:

- *Identify needs:* Go into the community and ask them what their needs are. Starting at the grassroots level is key so we understand where the needs are and what they are. The local level is where everything starts. Understanding these needs firsthand will ensure that they can be addressed appropriately as demonstrated by those with the needs themselves. This has implications for many systems, one of which is voting. Understanding the needs or disenfranchisement of voters at the local level is necessary to address the issues and ensure people know how to vote, where to vote, if they can vote, and that their vote matters. This level of understanding would have an effect not only on voting, but really any existing system you apply it to. Identifying needs surrounding issues like healthcare, housing, education, etc.) and applying an equitable solution to it would be ideal. These equitable methodologies do exist, again, as an example, from the United Way and their concept of “impact for all.” Basically: understanding the need from those who need something, using experts to address it, and community to execute, is key.
- Give parents or family units the resources that they need to fulfill the needs of the community. Involve political leadership in exercises like *this*. Involve private industry CEOs who want to have an impact. Include directors of organizations or departments that have impact on the community... but also recognize that many government organizations report and respond to political bodies, and that lobbying of those political bodies is integral to success. Upending “traditional” policy norms is integral to ensuring equity takes the spotlight that it needs.
- Cultural exposure is of paramount importance so that people are not disconnected and can empathize with those who may appear different to them. We should share empathy with everyone, not only with those who most resemble ourselves. Different experiences and background should unite us, not divide us. This will also make people feel heard, which is intrinsically important.
- Those that work in the public sector need to be cognizant of opportunities and how to actually create and deploy programs that have concrete and long-term funding to assist those who need

it. Again, community-based, needs-focused approaches that are executed *by* community members will have a significant effect.

- When you see something, say something. Commit to calling out inequity or unfairness and helping others around you.

Those actions should be taken by:

- *Everyone*. It goes to the core of the community. This means individuals and organizations (schools, nonprofits, government, etc.) Everyone in their respective roles (whether it's a parent, a student, a child, a teacher, a politician, etc.) needs to stand up and take a proactive approach to helping others in their communities. This will lead to collective action.
- Individuals need to be actively involved with local agencies doing the work that makes equity possible. We also should network and seek pathways to implement. Also, those who need help should seek help. We should make it OK for them to seek help in the first place.
- For organizations, we want to see more inter-agency communications (i.e., the City working with the County, working across lines). There also needs to be enhanced communications between communities and support organizations, and making access to programs that they offer *readily* available is key. The community members need to be a part of administering those programs.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Tucson Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Commit to continue recording at Arizona Town Hall Sessions to facilitate these discussions.
- Continue to identify ways as an individual and public servant to have civil discourse on behalf of marginalized populations.
- Practice equity in the community
- Be an example, be a leader, show others my knowledge in equity and equality.
- Spread information through my community/peers. I will help in any way that I am.
- Educate my kids and lead them in the correct way.
- Equity vs. Equality
- Continue to be a social activist although my 90th birthday is in two yrs.
- Use my position of education to intentionally educate others on equity, why it is important and debunk common misconceptions about equity.
- Invite more people to join me at these kinds of events and/or forums, to increase more diverse and authentic community voices.