

# ***Equity for All Arizonans***

## **VIRTUAL WILDCATSTOWN HALL**

### **September 13, 2023 – Online via Zoom**

#### **DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT**

We can consider defining equity in terms of opportunity and respect. Regarding opportunity, we think about the opportunity to be able to access important services and/or elements of life, including access to education, economic mobility, and the ability to participate in the processes that govern how access is created and distributed.

Regarding respect, we mean the respect to acknowledge and accept that people start off from different positions for several reasons, which may be systemic or not. People also can work UP from those different positions to access services more readily, but even the rise to that position may be difficult or impossible based on where we started. It is the exception, not the rule, that people can elevate themselves to adequate access to basic services. We also need to minimize assumptions we make about people to begin to create equitable access to some of these specific resources.

Without looking at equity from these lenses, we can see issues arise in both personal and professional instances. Lack of equity can lead to issues that may include the manifestation of the “minority tax” where an individual of color or other descent than white is charged with leading the charge on equity or knowing more about it by virtue of their race or descent. This places even more additional work on them, with the assumption that it might be their pleasure to do it. It can also manifest as a double-edged sword, in that some programs may facilitate equity by giving additional opportunity to create equity but can also lead to a person having to defeat stereotypes associated with them if they were to have taken advantage of such opportunities. These need to be addressed directly to create equity and equality.

#### **OPTIMIZING EVERYONE’S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES**

An equitable approach is important because of the necessity in addressing basic needs. The need exists already for people, and at an increased level for those who traditionally have not had access to the opportunity to address basic needs. An example of that can be education. University of Arizona currently offers free undergraduate opportunities to Native American students at the university, which differs significantly from other opportunities. The importance of that access being created is critical to address those gaps and to optimize the potential of an individual, as well as the optimization of benefit to the respective communities on all levels, which positively affects our standard of living for all.

It is important because it makes a commitment to this community that people can be educated at the University of Arizona and receive other services. From a comparative standpoint, the focus on those that exist in this community and offering them the opportunity is more important than looking outside the community. You can get an utterly amazing return on that investment strictly by increasing access and making sure people are educated, healthy, and know their options.

This importance is also manifested in those that take this responsibility upon themselves to increase access for others. The positivity that comes from it, and the knowledge that we build to create more equity is extremely critical because it creates *more* opportunity for equity to be created for everyone. This importance is translated into empowerment for people to not only take advantage of services that they are entitled to and should already have access to, but to explore more chances to give back to others. It has the potential to be a circular economy of access, empowerment, and equity.

Lastly, this can also be translated directly into policy areas that are important, including economic development, equity in financial access, housing, and more, which all have extremely long-term implications for people.

## **IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY**

The greatest opportunities to use equity to improve our community are:

**Education:** This does not necessarily have to be limited to academic education, but also a general knowledge of programs that may exist within a community that were or are intended to address equity. A good example of this is during the pandemic with business resources. The program was truly intended for small business support, and yet the largest and most finance-savvy people were the largest percentage of people to take advantage of this. This can be attributed to lack of clear communication/education on the matter, as well as the lack of long-term initiatives to educate people about these types of resources. Timing can be everything, and a way to address this may be consistent communication and education on community services that are available, and the deployment of teams to educate people on programs that might be time sensitive. Early education is also of key importance, as it sets the educational standard for people to be able to access and consume helpful info.

**Accessibility:** Information needs to be made available to those who do not have access (or to those who prioritize other types of access to receive and process information). This may be based on various things including people with physical or mental disabilities, primary language spoken, or even age. As an example, elderly people do not engage with the internet as much as other generations. Those with physical handicaps have clear disadvantages in going to places to access information. Second language English speakers may not have the capacity to understand clearly the information being provided to them about resources that are critical to them. Due to these factors, accessibility of information is critical to address to that truly everyone has access to what is necessary for them to not only survive generational issues such as pandemics, but to thrive by being able to take advantage of those programs that exist to positively affect their daily lives.

**Housing:** Access to housing can ease generational pressures on people that have not had equitable access to it previously. It can also generate long-term generational wealth for those communities that previously have not had access, which leads to long-term prosperity for that individual, community, and the community at large.

**Perspective:** A barrier to equity is the way we think about resources. Most of the time, we think about it as an “either or” which means if one person gets it, or one group gets it, then there is no longer access for me, or another individual or another community. Eliminating this perspective and creating the expectation that there is something for everyone, and that equity leads to overcoming barriers, is an ideal way to look at resource distribution, that scarcity is flawed, and that we all benefit from equity.

## **NEXT STEPS AND ACTION**

Sometimes an issue is that inequity is not experienced by everyone. Bringing those to light that may have had firsthand experiences with the systemic inadequacies of the system would be extremely helpful in addressing equity and creating clarity and connection to those inadequacies. Understanding current examples of them and their history is critical to understanding and advocating for equity.

We talk about policies that need to be created and amended to make this happen. At all levels, the government may need to take drastic steps to ensure these changes happen to address equity. Considerations include raising taxes, additional federal funding, better allocation of financial resources to address critical infrastructure, necessities, and equity; are all ways to address this. A critical piece to this is that governing laws guide the cultural nature of society, and currently, the laws facilitate a culture that is steeped in inequity. Focusing on healthcare, education, and financial and economic development are key.

Voting as individuals, becoming more knowledgeable about candidates, and casting votes to ensure people are elected who reflect those values that increase equity in a pure way can also help address the issue.

Lastly, focusing on positive outcomes. When everyone thrives, we *all* thrive. We all should do this together.

### **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 Virtual Wildcats Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

#### ***I WILL...***

- Remain an active voter.
- Continue to share stories about historical and current inequities.
- Continue to respect other people's health journey.
- Commit to better understanding systemic barriers to equity for all in our community.
- Continue to offer my time and knowledge and will expand upon that by ensuring the comprehension and understanding of who I may be connecting with.
- Commit to advocating and actively seeking resources to share information about available resources with underserved communities.
- Commit to educating my community in the policies and voting patterns of our leaders in elected office to encourage understanding and the ability to decide if this person is actively representing the community and voting in alignment with the communities' stance on important issues.
- Share what I learned today with those in my spheres of influence to increase awareness of the issue of equity and what we can each do individually and collectively.
- Not miss an opportunity to engage in conversation on equity for all in our community and the importance of working together for all our benefit.