

# EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS

115TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL TOPIC  
FINAL REPORT



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More than 30 community town hall sessions were held throughout 2023 on the 115th Arizona Town Hall topic “Equity for All Arizonans.” These sessions included nearly 1,500 participants who provided valuable insights and ideas and who committed to take action based on what they learned. They approached equity from a variety of perspectives relevant to their individual communities, experiences, and needs. There were many areas of broad consensus, as well as discussions and recommendations targeted to specific community concerns.

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy, in partnership with community experts and the Arizona Town Hall Research Committee, lent its time and talent to create a background report integral to understanding the topic. Participants receive the background report in advance of town hall sessions and utilize it as an essential element for successful consensus-driven discussions. The Morrison Institute and all those who worked with them on the background report created a unique resource for a fuller understanding of the topic.

Our sincere thanks go to the report’s authors for sharing their time, knowledge, and diverse professional talents.

Our deepest gratitude also goes to Liza C. Kurtz, Research Analyst, at the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, who marshaled authors, created content, and served as editor of the report.

The “Equity for All Arizonans” town hall sessions could not have occurred without the financial assistance of our generous Professional Partners. These Partners include general sponsors, Salt River Project (SRP), Arizona Public Service (APS), the Salt River Pima–Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC), and Blue Cross Blue Shield Arizona - Health Choice, as well as the numerous sponsors of the various specific town hall sessions around the state.

Contained in this single Final Report is the Highlights Report, the one-page Key Facts summary, reports from the individual town hall sessions, and the Background Report.

This report will be shared with public officials, community and business leaders around the state, Arizona Town Hall members, and many others.

Sincerely,

Gregory W. Falls  
Board Chair, Arizona Town Hall

[www.aztownhall.org](http://www.aztownhall.org)

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For additional links and resources, visit: [http://aztownhall.org/115\\_Town\\_Hall](http://aztownhall.org/115_Town_Hall)

# EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS

## HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

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# HIGHLIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY AND FUTURE LEADERS TOWN HALLS ON “EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS”

This report provides highlights from across the community and future leaders town halls. The full community town hall reports are also included within this publication beginning on page 11.

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

There was broad agreement on the general definitions of Equity and Equality.

- Equality results in treating everyone the same, regardless of their demographic, economic, cultural, educational, geographic, and other differences.
- Equity is recognizing that not everyone starts at the same point nor progresses through life at the same rate. It focuses on tailoring resources for people where they are at, thereby optimizing their potential and success. It allows everyone to get to the finish line, while still emphasizing personal responsibility.
- Equitable provision of resources can lead to equality.
- Equity is a concept that can be applied to the accessibility of any resource, such as education, housing, medical/health care, transportation, safety, technology, and many more. Inequity negatively impacts everyone, directly or indirectly, through lost potential contributions, future costs to remediate poor outcomes, and increased conflict. Equity is about feeling heard and is essential for a strong society and social cohesion. All the diverse sectors of a community must be adequately represented in its decision making. Optimizing equity is a complex and nuanced issue that requires weighing and balancing privileges and powers—current and historical. Equity takes time, continued focus, and effort.

*“Equity and equality are distinct in the sense that equity requires deploying resources in a manner that is tailored to each individual’s needs and takes into account where they are starting from.”*

*Excerpt from the Gateway Community College Community Town Hall Report*



Moderator Suzanne Pfister (Vitalyst Health Foundation) and panelists Carol Scott Berry (Phoenix Municipal Court), Neil Giuliano (Greater Phoenix Leadership), and Carmen Heredia (AHCCCS) give topic insights at the “Equity for All Arizonans” Background Report Launch, Phoenix.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE’S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

Equity is a verb; in that it requires action. If we invest in our people and communities now, then we won’t have to invest in remedial measures later. An equitable approach is needed to optimize our potential because it is the only way to harness the power of our collective knowledge and experience. Indeed, without equity there is no power for meaningful change. When individuals benefit from equitable opportunities and know they belong, they are more likely to participate in creating equitable opportunities for others, which benefits the whole community. We need to build a support system in which “we lift as we climb.”

Education, affordable housing, healthcare, healthy food, transportation, and security/safety were frequently discussed as priority areas for improving equity. To optimize the potential of people and communities we must ask them what they need. We must find ways to make services more available to those who have differing needs by exploring equitable and creative approaches that serve unique needs. Equity is fostered by providing individuals and communities with the tools to do it themselves. Schools and other educational organizations offer powerful opportunities to promote equity.

***“Equity is a verb; it requires action. If we invest in our people and communities now, then we won’t have to invest in remedial measures later.”***

*Excerpt from the Phoenix College Community Town Hall Report*

Employers and community organizations also have important roles to play. We need to tap the knowledge and expertise of those with lived experience.

There are multiple complex systems in place that tend to perpetuate inequities and serve the interests of the powerful. Communication to help skeptics understand the benefits of equity and to build broad support is important. Collaboration is critical. It is important not only to be inclusive, but also to give people a sense of belonging.

Many of the Community Town Halls focused on improving equity in a few areas of most importance to their community.

- **Early Childhood Care and Education** is an investment in the future prosperity of Arizona. The most growth and development happen in the first five years of a child’s life. All children should have the same opportunity to receive quality care and education. Currently, many childcare centers are understaffed, leading to waiting lists and childcare deserts. Equity is just as important for those who work in the field as it is for children, and we must work to meet the diverse needs of our childcare and education workforce.
- **Education** requires an equitable mindset to maximize the potential of all students. We need to close learning gaps, with a focus on students from disadvantaged groups and/or who have disabilities. We want every child to get exactly what they need to learn the best.



- **Environmental Quality** of communities is enhanced by ensuring “Tree Equity.” Trees are an important part of any community. They provide shade, cool the environment, contribute to mental health, make it easier for people to walk to work, and contribute to economic development. Trees increase property values. Green spaces bring people together and create a sense of place. They provide a connection to nature that improves the wellbeing of the entire community. This connection to nature is a basic human need. Green spaces should be considered part of the municipal infrastructure and should be planned systematically. Those planning to develop tree planting programs should talk with the communities that will be affected and take care to engage people broadly and ask good questions.

***“Equality simply cannot exist without equity. Equity benefits everyone in a community, not just those it serves directly.”***

*Excerpt from the Tucson Community Town Hall Report*

- **Foster/Adoptive Families** must navigate all the typical issues of childhood as well as various forms of trauma. They need support tailored to their needs, such as trauma-informed care, being treated with empathy and respect, and having an equal voice in determining policies and plans affecting them.
- **Healthcare** in the U.S. is some of the most expensive and inequitable in the world, with wide disparities in access, cost, and health outcomes. Equity is the most important part of reinventing healthcare today as communities are all different from one another. Data can help us determine when an equitable approach is most needed. Those affected need to have a meaningful voice in decisions. More community health workers and active community members are vital to reaching health equity.  
  
A focus on prevention needs to be embedded in our definition of healthcare. Funding early education, adequate maternity/paternity leave, and access to good nutrition allows for healthy development in children and in turn healthier communities. Cultural representation and more mentoring programs are needed to encourage young people to go to healthcare services.

Increasing cultural representation will encourage trust and ensure patients feel safe to communicate with their healthcare providers. Incentivizing medical students to go into primary care, and/or residents of rural communities to become health care providers could lead to more equity.

***“Housing is healthcare. Providing equitable housing services will improve health care and health outcomes.”***

*Excerpt from the Kingman Community Town Hall Report*

- **Information on Available Services** is provided by an array of organizations and agencies. Despite the plethora of connecting assistance these agencies offer, most community members do not know of the services and agencies that exist or where to find them. Processes are often fragmented and difficult to navigate.

Ideas for improving the awareness and utilization of existing services include using a single application form for multiple organizations and services; creating resource hubs in areas that are convenient and trusted within the community such as libraries, schools, community centers, large-scale stores like Walmart, etc.; staffing outreach with extended hours and on weekends; using mobile approaches to meet people where they are; using social media; train outreach employees and volunteers on content, processes, cultural awareness, crisis communication skills, and mental health basics.

- **Transportation** is especially critical in rural areas to enable access to essential services such as food, medical care, education, social services, etc. This includes safe and drivable roads and bike paths, flights, buses, sidewalks, and crosswalks. Roads are used by those who live in urban areas and who like to recreate or travel through rural areas. Funding formulas do not factor in or adequately value the unique circumstances of rural Arizona.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

- Improved community leadership and advocacy is essential. It's important to train medical professionals to work with lawmakers and community leaders to educate them and advocate for policy improvements.
- Invest in training, pay and benefits for “essential workers” charged with delivering equitable public services.



- Dismantle the disinformation surrounding the concept of equity and dispel the myth that it means providing services to people who choose not to help themselves.
- Provide training to social service, public health, law enforcement, and education personnel in trauma-informed care.
- Meet people where they are with resources through active listening to learn what they need rather than telling them what we think they need.
- Put more resources into prevention and early recognition of issues instead of focusing almost exclusively on correction and treatment after problems have erupted.
- Create a common language across public services to minimize the occurrence of misinformation, misdiagnosis, and confusion.
- Address “decision fatigue,” a result of the multiple decisions and numerous steps required to get needed resources that increases the likelihood people won't seek services at all.

***“The most creative ideas and successful solutions are generated through collaboration.”***

*Excerpt from the Flagstaff Community Town Hall Report*

- Invest equitably in transportation in rural areas to help residents thrive and improve access to multiple systems as well as supporting economic development.
- Ensure people attend venues where funding decisions are made and engage with all levels of elected officials.

- Direct extra efforts to populations that don't have access to information because of technology challenges, language, cultural differences, isolation, physical limitations, or neurodivergent conditions.
- Actively engage individuals, groups, organizations, and businesses in advocating for equitable opportunities for everyone.
- Ensure that we have the safe and secure communities required for people to feel comfortable speaking up.
- Embed community health workers in the healthcare system to address digital literacy, social prescriptions, nutrition, healthy lifestyles, and ongoing care.
- Include the history of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations in public school education.
- Bring everyone to the table and engage every voice, especially those who have never had a chance to be heard.
- Have funders offer a trust-based, community-involved process for developing the requirements for grants.
- Support policymakers who shed their political affiliations and focus on the community and educate themselves to broaden their decision-making perspective.
- Teach JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) courses in middle and high schools to help shape future leaders and reduce the likelihood of bullying and youth violence today.
- Ensure community intentions are aligned to make equity a value and a metric for success.
- Create one-stop family and community resource centers, central and/or satellite, that house multiple agencies under one roof.
- Support state representatives who advocate for marginalized communities.



## 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. Below are some representative commitments.

### I WILL...

- Spread awareness about the importance of high-quality early childhood education.
- Continue to speak up, connect organizations and systems, and advocate for change.
- Dedicate time and effort to promoting an improved transportation system in rural counties.
- Educate my community on the value of improving transportation as a social determinant of health that improves the quality of life for community members.
- Share stories about historic and current inequities and better understand systemic barriers to equity.
- Advocate for classes in nursing programs that integrate JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion).
- Be the resource for the next generation, inform friends and family about the many opportunities that may benefit them.
- Advocate for investing in people now to avoid the cost of remedial measures later.
- Be more mindful of communication and generational differences when communicating about equity issues.
- Be an example, be a leader and share my knowledge with others about equity.
- Invite people to events to increase the number of diverse and authentic voices heard.
- Commit to staying involved, partnering, and advocating at whatever level is needed to make progress possible.
- Be dedicated to creating equitable environments and support systems to increase educational attainment and economic mobility for all.



***“Equity is addressing different situations depending on what tools are needed for individual and collective success.”***

*Excerpt from the West Valley Community Town Hall Report*

# **EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS**

## **COMMUNITY TOWN HALL KEY FACTS & REPORTS**

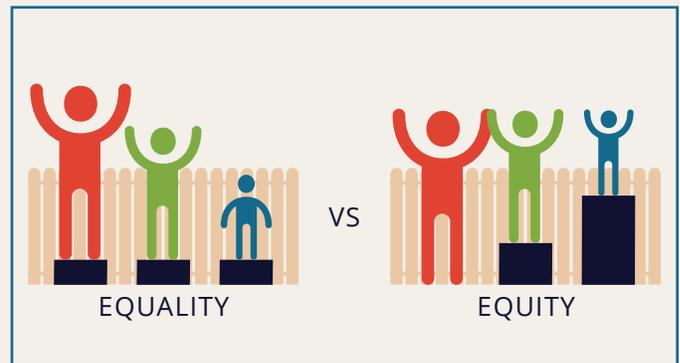
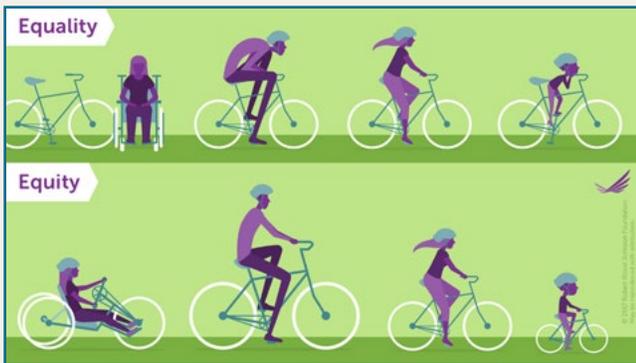
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# EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS

## COMMUNITY TOWN HALL KEY FACTS

### WHAT IS EQUITY?

Equity is related to, but distinct from, equality. Equality is the practice of giving everyone identical resources and opportunities, regardless of where they start. Equity, by contrast, acknowledges that everyone's starting position is different. Equity distributes resources and opportunities to provide everyone with a chance to succeed.



Research shows that the benefits of equity extend beyond improvements for any one individual or category of people. An equitable approach increases productivity, gross domestic product, and tax revenues.

### EXAMINING EQUITY THROUGH DATA

#### ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

In 2019, there were 80.1 providers per 100,000 residents in urban areas. In rural towns, the ratio was only 10.1 providers per 100,000 residents.

In some rural areas, the nearest medical care can be nearly 80 minutes of drive time away.

#### IMPACT OF HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION

One of the principal barriers to business growth for women and people of color is the history of denying equal opportunities for wealth accumulation.

Between January 2020 - February 2022, 215 Arizona startups received external funding. Only 31 of these companies were founded or led by women or people of color.

In 2021, 72.6% of white residents in Arizona owned their homes in Arizona. Only 59.4% of Latino, 56.5% of American Indian, and 40.8% of Black residents owned their homes.

#### ACCESS TO INTERNET

Reliable and secure broadband internet is essential for access to needed services and employment. Yet, many of Arizona's rural and Tribal areas do not have access to reliable broadband internet and therefore do not have equitable access to needed services or economic opportunities that are available in urban areas.

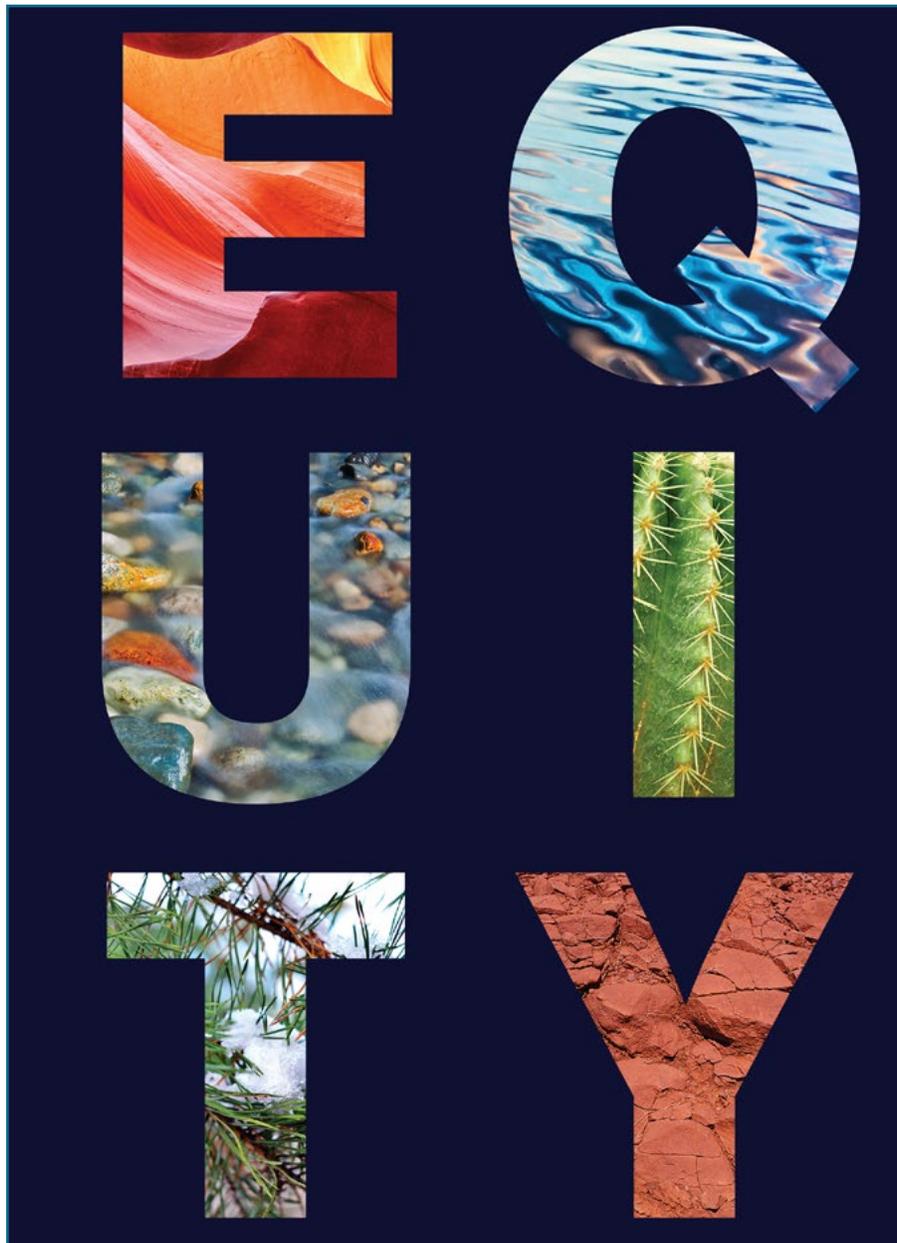
#### EDUCATION SNAPSHOT

County	8th Grade Math Success
Apache	14%
Cochise	18%
Coconino	18%
Gila	12%
Graham	26%
Greenlee	27%
La Paz	13%
Maricopa	30%
Mohave	19%

County	8th Grade Math Success
Navajo	21%
Pima	24%
Pinal	15%
Santa Cruz	20%
Yavapai	20%
Yuma	20%

# AzAEYC 5th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Education Public Policy Forum

February 11, 2023 – Online via Zoom



# AzAEC 5th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Education Public Policy Forum

## THE INTERSECTION OF EQUITY, EARLY CHILDCARE, AND EDUCATION

Equity means recognizing that individuals have different and specific needs and making efforts to meet the needs of all community members. Equity is a way of being and viewing the world that starts with ourselves, and it is the foundation of early care and education. Just as an Arizona farmer cultivates their crops to spur growth, we need to invest in the growth of our children. All children should have the same opportunity to receive quality care and education. Currently, many childcare centers are understaffed, leading to waiting lists and childcare deserts. Equity is just as important for those who work in the field as it is for children, and we must work to meet the diverse needs of our childcare and education workforce.

## WHAT ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS NEED TO KNOW

We must provide adequate resources and support to all early childhood care centers so that children of all economic backgrounds receive quality care and education. The most growth and development happens in the first five years of a child's life. Investing in this early period reaps benefits later on, especially for children from low-income households. Educators were deemed "essential workers" during the pandemic but are not always treated that way. They do not deserve to live in poverty and need competitive wages and benefits so that they do not require a second job to make ends meet, as many currently do. Access to mental health services that help educators address burnout and stress can also help attract and retain talented staff. Mental health services should be available for children as well. It is important that workers have a seat at the table in decision making and their concerns are heard and taken seriously.

Elected officials should visit all types of childcare centers to get a ground-level understanding of what early childhood care really looks like for workers and children in their communities. In-home childcare can help mitigate childcare deserts, and generally, investing in existing programs is a better use of resources than opening new centers. Early education programs on K-12 campuses are another promising option for communities with a dearth of childcare options.

## 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 AzAEC 5th Annual Arizona Early Childhood Public Policy Forum. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Advocate for equity in my early childhood education in Arizona
- Apply what I learn in engaging in a productive way, my community conversations in my area. Having an action plan.
- Be [an] advocate for children and [childcare] centers for better opportunities and resources.
- Become more involved in watching what our legislative body does around 0-5 care and education and share who is supporting (or not) this system through social media.
- Continue to build my story for the future of early childhood educators.
- Continue to grow as a youth development and early childhood development professional and become a better advocate for children and families within Arizona.

- Continue to learn more about advocacy and will plan to attend next year's Early Childhood Day at the capital.
- Continue to learn more about how I can advocate for the families that need early childhood education.
- Continue to research public policy and expand my knowledge on how to effectively advocate for both children and early childhood educators.
- Continue to talk about the importance of early education and what we can do [in] order to help early education professionals.
- Educate myself in order to be able to help childcare providers learn about the importance of advocacy for their own benefit.
- Implement a more engaging and productive way to communicate with the community.
- Invite my state representative Nancy Gutierrez to [my program].
- Create and write my narrative to illustrate how important full benefits and worthy wages are for early childhood workers.
- Support increasing benefits for teachers.
- Make sure to continue promoting the knowledge of equity and its impact in the ECE field.
- Provide support to my Family Child Care Providers and decrease childcare deserts.
- Share the knowledge I gained with friends, family, and community.
- Share the statement that ninety percent of brain growth and development develops in the first five years with families I work with.
- Share what I learn today with other coworkers [and] teachers.
- Share with my coworkers what I have learned.
- Spread awareness about the importance of high quality ECE for children and the importance of higher wages, mental health resources, and healthcare for providers.
- Take out the time to write my true passion and needs in ECE and take that to the lawmakers on Thursday as well as invite them to my center.
- Learn more about the needs in my community.

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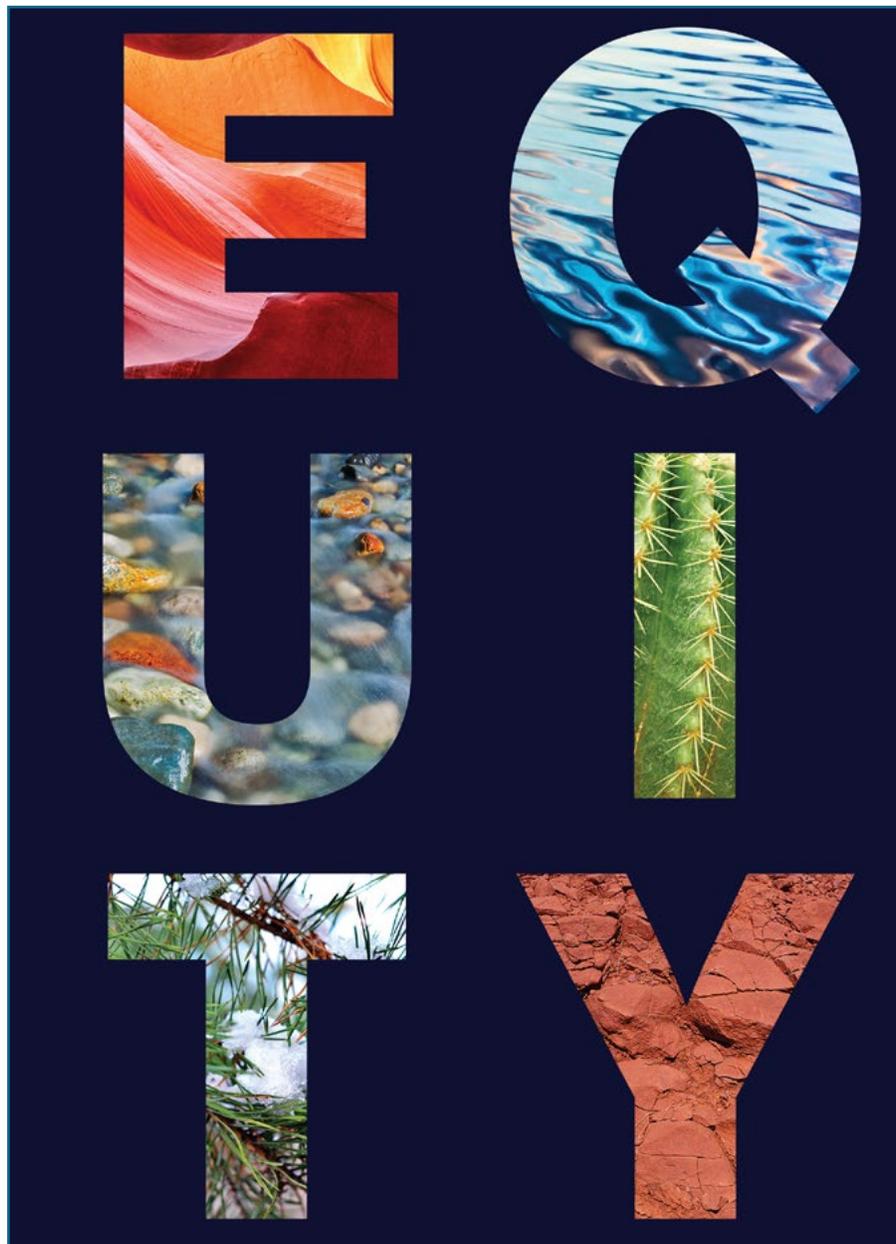


**azaeyc**

Arizona Association for the  
Education of Young Children

# East Valley Equity Consortium - Equity in Education

March 31, 2023 – Mesa, AZ



# East Valley Equity Consortium - Equity in Education

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Equity is critical for maximizing the potential of all students and to close learning gaps with students who may come from historically disadvantaged groups. While equity is important for race, that is not the only group to whom it should apply.

For example, an equitable approach is important to individuals with disabilities because we often don't know what they can become and limit their potential if we don't provide equitable support. If we allow ourselves to think only of their disabilities, we don't allow them to be the best they can possibly be. An equitable approach allows them to reach their full potential.

There is a lot of confusion about the definition of equity. Many confuse it with equality which is very different. We need to have a deeper conversation with parents, legislators and others about the importance of equity for maximizing student potential—especially for those students who have disabilities or who come from historically disadvantaged groups. One description that helps people to understand equity and which most will agree to is this: “We want every child to get exactly what they need to learn the best.”

A big challenge is simply getting people to understand what equity is and why it is so essential to public education. We should provide clarity about the definition of equity, and why it is so essential for an institution that serves students with many different needs. We need to fight through the “noise” around the term of equity and dismantle disinformation.

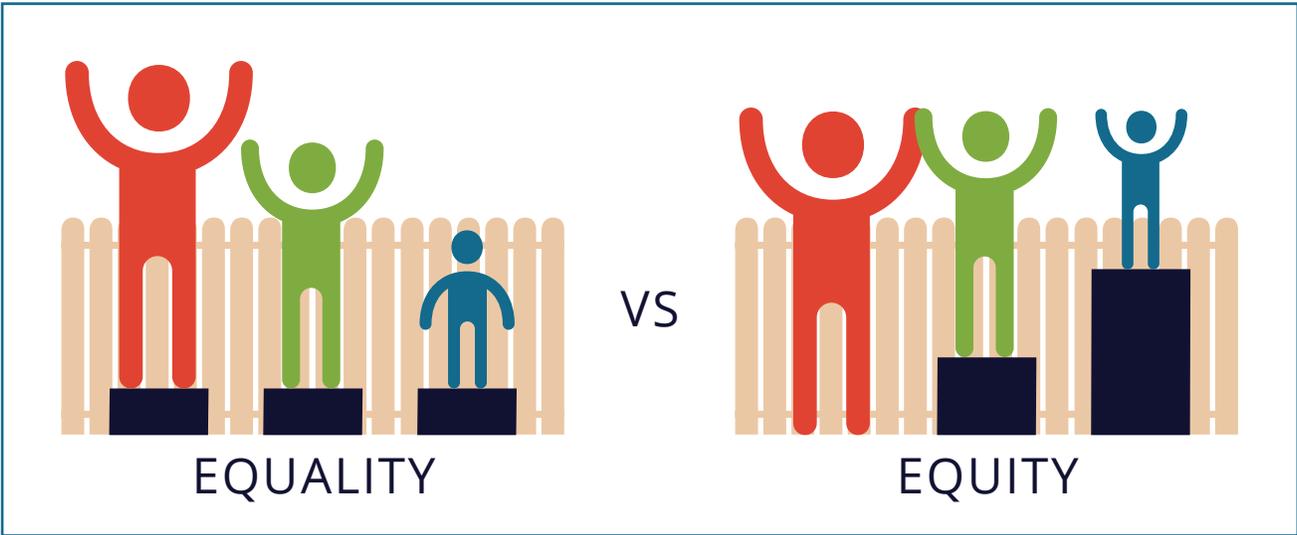
It's important to think about where and how the information is being communicated. We need to provide information to people in the places where they are and, in a way, they are able to receive and understand it. This means, for example, that we should use storytelling and social media as part of our communication efforts.



**Access the complete background report, which was prepared by the Morrison Institute for Public Policy, by using the QR code. Or, visit our website at [www.aztownhall.org](http://www.aztownhall.org).**

# Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents (AZAFAP) Community Town Hall

July 24, 2023 – Online via Zoom



Source: Image adapted from Annie E. Casey Foundation's interpretation of Craig Froehle's original illustration. Created for Arizona Town Hall "Creating Vibrant Communities" Background Report.

# Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents (AZAFAP) Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equality and equity are not the same thing. Equity helps meet people where they're at and allows their needs to be met on a more personal level whereas equality is just a base standard of providing resources with less availability for individual needs. Equity allows individuals to get what they need.

Like all parents, adoptive parents are left to fight for needs of their kids. However, people who are not foster/adoptive parents—including teachers, administrators, and hospital staff—frequently don't understand the plights of adoptive/foster families and may oversimplify issues and push back. Many of the support services don't understand the effects of trauma, which is frequently misdiagnosed as "behavior." Foster/adoptive parents understand that additional patience must be given to their kids who are navigating typical issues of childhood in addition to other traumas. Moreover, caregivers often experience secondary traumas because of the issues they're helping their children navigate. If others had a better understanding of trauma, it would help create equity for foster/adoptive families.

Children who are in foster care and in juvenile detention are navigating two systems that are not led with trauma-informed care. This can be exacerbated by race, as many foster/adoptive families are a mix of races. Families are often offered a seat at the table, but not always seen as an equal team member which makes families feel like they're not being heard. It makes families feel like their voice is not heard as equitably as other families.

Foster kids have health insurance through the state. The quality and expertise of care in the state's healthcare system is not equitable. It's challenging to find providers who have the expertise necessary to care for kids and families from the foster care system.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Foster/adoptive families frequently take part in programs that are designed to provide help and resources, but they feel like their voices are not heard even when they work to provide honest input. For example, one family has a seven-year-old boy who has been diagnosed with an eating disorder. However, there are no programs available for kids under the age of 10 and most are developed for girls. Despite many attempts at getting care, none is available. This is an example of inequity of care. Children with disabilities are also frequently overlooked despite a large number of them having afflictions such as fetal alcohol syndrome and other serious, treatable conditions. It is particularly important for communities to offer equitable services for those who have disabilities. Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and mental health services are not equitable, especially after age 18. And there is a vast inequity for children living in group homes with paid staff.

It would be useful for programs to help inform foster parents about early psychological care for their children. For example, personalized one-on-one time is imperative for attachment and understanding of relationship development in children. If caregivers were able to provide healthy psychological care early, there may be fewer children in the system later down the line. One idea is a program that allows high-school students to practice caring for younger children. Another idea is to bring back classes into public school like home economics that will help young people learn simple life skills and basic psychological care. Mental

health and trauma tends to be focused on older children. But early detection and care is necessary to develop healthy kids. There is not an array of choices and levels of care, especially for people who are older than 18 and have spent their life in foster care.

Inequity breeds burnout in adoptive/foster parents. Foster/adoptive parents frequently feel burnout when they continually feel like their voices are not heard. In order to foster kids who come from more difficult backgrounds, foster parents must have broad experience. Part of this burnout also comes from the feeling of constant pushback from schools and administrators. Foster/adoptive parents must also learn self-care and be encouraged to practice it frequently. We must also hold the community accountable for caring for all people, including children regardless of their background.

## **IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY**

Networking is necessary for families to depend on each other for support and personal resources. This social fitness helps alleviate foster/adoptive parent burnout. Another inequity is seen when looking at the difference between foster and adoption. Resources dwindle for adoptive families versus foster families, which is frustrating because the kids still have the same needs, but parents are not necessarily offered as many resources. Post-COVID, there is a huge change in the way people connect with each other within the system, and it has been harder to get people to become involved. One participant noted that as part of the original process for becoming a foster/adoptive parent, it was required to join a support group. That is no longer the case, and likely contributes to dwindling participation.

An improvement would be a more equitable approach that treats parents like a “team member instead of the babysitter.” This would help people stay on longer and encourage longer-lasting care for foster/adoptive kids. Additionally, some families would like to see some formal meetings between caregivers and parents early in the process in order to help the child heal. Even the term “placement” dehumanizes the role that foster/adoptive families play in a child’s life.

## **NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS**

These conversations need to happen in large groups that include foster/adoptive kids because problem-solving discussions tend to happen in silos. This makes it difficult to take a holistic approach to successful fostering and adopting. Also, it’s difficult to create one-size-fits-all solutions because each child has vastly different individual needs. That alone makes it difficult to find equity.

Another issue is that government entities don’t always work well together. For example, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Department of Child Services, Department of Education, and Behavioral Health Services are all working individually without a mechanism to know if each individual family is being treated holistically and with equity. There seems to be a great deal of disconnection, and those who are most affected are adoptive/foster families. One idea is to implement the Mockingbird Family Model. In this model, there is an opportunity for families to connect in small groups to provide support like respite for caregivers, social activities, and resource sharing.

Many have worked with an ombudsman who is supposed to be a liaison between government entities and families, but even that role is not well-known to families. However, it would be helpful if the ombudsmen or a similar role could also help facilitate cooperation between government agencies creating wrap-around services, which is very helpful for kids. One way to accomplish this is if various entities were able to combine financial resources and implement cooperative services. Culture change within the systems and across systems is imperative.

Other opportunities for improvement are to create a platform for foster/adoptive caregivers to address needs, hopefully influencing stakeholders and policy makers. We must also encourage education, healthcare, and juvenile justice systems to integrate trauma-informed care to understand trauma and its effects on individuals. This should include medical care providers as well as mental health care providers and educators. It would be useful to create common language within the system that helps bridge the gap between all systems acting upon the foster care system to encourage supportive care for families. Lastly, education about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) should be expanded to include all foster/adoptive families and should be made known to teachers and other childcare providers.

## 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 Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Continue to speak up.
- Continue to try to connect organizations and systems.
- Continue to advocate for change.
- Continue to be an advocate and raise awareness for systemic disparities.
- Keep learning to make a better parent for my kids.
- As an employee of AZAFAP and a trained Social Worker I will continue to provide connections, support, and services to foster, adoptive, and kinships families.
- Share this summary with my foster connections in my part of the state.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



Arizona Association for  
Foster & Adoptive Parents

# Transportation Equity in Rural Arizona Community Town Hall

August 16, 2023 – Pinetop, AZ



*The greatest priorities to use equity as an approach for improving the transportation needs of rural Arizona are funding, education, and collaboration.*

**SPONSORED BY**



# Transportation Equity in Rural Arizona Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

People in Pinetop-Lakeside and across Navajo County choose to live here and love to live here, and there are many strengths and advantages of being in a rural community. In some ways, residents understand and live with some of the challenges, but they also need the equitable resources necessary to meet unique local and county needs.

Transportation equity impacts many aspects of the community since transportation connects people to get to the places they need to be. Transportation includes not only road conditions but also buses, sidewalks, biking, crosswalks for students, and flights and the airport. Reliable transportation helps people get the services they need like healthcare, education and college, groceries and food, public safety, social services, and court services and criminal justice. However, those who need to get to services can't because of the lack of more options for transportation. Transportation inequity creates barriers for people in the criminal justice system to meet their court obligations.

One of the inequities is that transportation resources stem from the amount of funding counties and cities get based on taxes. This includes the Highway User Revenue Fund (HURF) which is distributed across the state based on population and a city-implemented Transaction Privilege Tax (TPT) in Pinetop-Lakeside of which a half cent goes towards transportation. To add to the challenges, around 55% of the residents are not counted towards these funding formulas since they do not live in the city year-round, and the homes are second homes rather than primary residences. The state funds are not equitable because they do not address the unique community needs in Navajo County around transportation options, accessibility, and mobility. The per person distribution does not reflect the road usage and the miles people travel in the community, and it doesn't consider the weather conditions or the part-time residents.

The state legislature and lawmakers need to step up and invest equitably in transportation in rural communities like Pinetop-Lakeside and across Navajo County in order to help Arizona residents thrive.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Transportation is interconnected to many other parts of living and working in Navajo County and in rural communities. Equitable transportation is the bridge to building strong communities and contributes to the workforce and jobs, services, and connecting with others. For example, transportation gets people to a health or mental health provider which supports the individual resources they need to succeed. Additionally, transportation can help us break the barriers with tribal communities and leverage tribal strengths in contribution to overall community success.

Snow, weather issues, and accidents can shut down the roads, and potholes may mean people avoid going out to avoid damaging their vehicles. These issues can stop people from getting to work or stop people from getting where they need to go. When the roads were fixed, visitors and residents seemed happier and more willing to go out and do more in town. One other barrier that needs to be addressed is "decision fatigue" which happens when someone needs to make multiple decisions and take multiple steps in order to get somewhere likely increasing their decision not to access needed services.

Equitable transportation would also bring economic development to communities and individuals—improving access to education and to the healthcare system. By improving transportation, commerce also improves. Adjustments in the transportation system improve public safety and emergency management. Residents live in a fire zone, and access to roads and bridges for evacuation routes is critical for public safety. A focus on equity makes sure we optimize everyone, not just counties like Maricopa, which have more resources and funding. Improvements to transportation can bring more population, build the community, build businesses, and lead to success for all.

The current formulas are not equitable because they do not account for the uniqueness of tourism and business and the actual, real needs of our community. The funding formula needs to ensure the necessary dollars and resources for rural communities. Stronger, better supported, and more investments in transportation options can improve the well-being of our residents and community.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest priorities to use equity as an approach for improving the transportation needs of rural Arizona are funding, education, and collaboration. We need to increase the types of transportation available to our citizens including biking, buses, and other ways of transportation that improve access, mobility, and opportunity. These projects also need to link local employment and the workforce and incentivize employing local citizens to help contribute to these transportation solutions. To maximize our efforts, we should consider a region-wide approach where cities, towns, and counties work together to get the funding needed.

We want to leverage our partners across different departments, organizations, and throughout the community. We need to create a grassroots effort to demand creative solutions from our lawmakers, policymakers, and community members. We need to collaborate with citizens to help them become informed advocates on behalf of this issue with legislators and town representatives.

For example, faced with the challenges of road conditions, the town of Pinetop-Lakeside posted the Arizona Department of Transportation survey link on their website and encouraged community members to give feedback. This made a difference in helping the state understand the issues that needed to be addressed and consider the resources and support necessary to make a positive impact.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Here are some actions that should be taken to address these opportunities:

- The regional transportation committee members will help make sure people show up to where funding decisions are being made and mobilize our group of core people to make their voices heard about transportation equity.
- The legislature needs to modernize the revenue stream and the allocation formula for these funding sources. Lawmakers can update the selection process for the distribution of funds and allow more flexibility in determining how to use those funds based on local and regional needs.
- All of us can show up and bring our human stories of the real impact of these funding sources on real Arizonans. For example, years of collaboration and advocacy led to investments that helped construct a crosswalk for local elementary school students to ensure they can safely cross the street each day to get home from school.
- Those of us in the community closest to the issues need to engage with mayors, boards, councils, and local representatives, and ask for them to fight for us so they can understand what rural Arizona faces and what rural Arizona needs.

When we unite our efforts and work as a team, we can succeed.

## INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

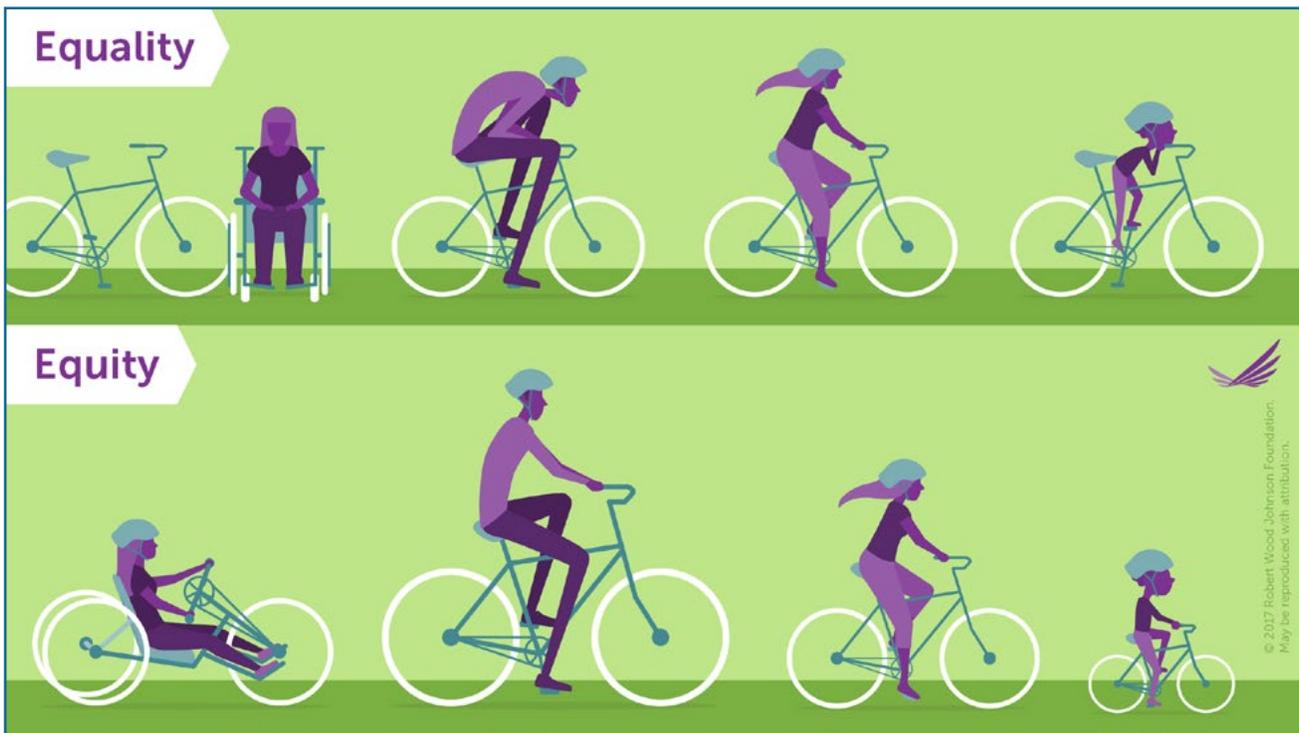
Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Transportation Equity in Rural Arizona Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Participate in community programs.
- Promote and encourage others.
- Share with my organization.
- Reach out to elected representatives at all levels.
- Get involved with my local regional transportation board.
- Comment publicly on projects related to transportation.
- Advocate to state legislators to modernize revenue streams.
- Work with ADOT board to keep our needs on their agenda.
- Utilize my position in Pinetop-Lakeside community services to engage and educate and channel their comments to the proper entities for the most impact.
- Make sure the public understands the issue and why it needs to be addressed.
- Dedicate time and effort to promoting an improved transportation system in Navajo County and collaborating with key partners.
- Strive to educate my community on the value of improving transportation as social determinants of health and improving our community members' quality of life.
- Work to educate the community on the importance of pedestrian ways.
- Open up to the White Mountain Regional Transportation Committee to a broader spectrum of people.
- Work with others on a regional comprehensive system for transportation.
- Dedicate my time to increase public education regarding transportation equity and involvement needs in the community.
- Reach out to become active in transportation solutions for our rural county.
- Join a talk force or a committee on transportation solutions for our rural county.
- Continue to educate and collaborate.
- Not assume that co-workers, neighbors, and other community members understand the inner work required.
- Make sure I am having conversations with other people I encounter and educate them on real transportation issues to help them understand the real challenges.
- Continue to encourage our local government officials to fight for our communities.
- Spread the information I have learned on transportation equity with the White Mountain Apache Tribal council.
- Collaborate on ways to educate our communities about connecting with surrounding towns.
- Engage my local leaders and share what my organization does to help my community.
- Advocate for change of revenue streams and allocation via equity.
- Talk to legislators about rural transportation needs and how to increase funding to rural communities.

# Virtual Wildcats Town Hall

## September 13, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*I will commit to better understanding systemic barriers to equity for all in our community.*

# Virtual Wildcats Town Hall

## 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 ACTIONS

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.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Exploring Equity through a New Global Classroom: A Community Dialogue and Panel

September 18, 2023 – Tucson, AZ; and Online via Zoom



# Exploring Equity through a New Global Classroom: A Community Dialogue and Panel

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is needed to optimize our potential because it is the only way to harness the power of our collective knowledge and experience. Indeed, without equity there is no power for meaningful change. Equity is not the same as equality and an equitable approach is about prioritizing those who have been underrepresented. We are not all the same and an equitable approach recognizes our differences. It empowers those whose voices have not historically been heard in the decision-making process by broadening opportunities to take part in. An equitable approach brings people along rather than leaving them behind. It shows people they have a place at the table and their perspectives are valued. An equitable approach helps us see the larger picture, conceptualize the full spectrum of ways we can enact change, and dismantles the echo chamber that might otherwise drive policy. To implement an equitable approach, we need to remove barriers that exist for those of all backgrounds, make information and opportunities more accessible, and ensure all members of our community have the support they need to participate in community institutions and activities. Failing to successfully incorporate all the members of a community excludes them. In order to achieve equity, all of the diverse sectors of a community must be adequately represented in its decision-making or the pursuit of equity will result in a mere façade.

The University of Arizona's Cultural & Inclusive Experiential Learning Opportunities (CIELO) Program prepares students to use equitable approaches to improve the community by facilitating participation in global learning by students who have traditionally either been excluded from such activities by financial and/or social or familial constraints or by lack of awareness of the opportunities and resources that might have allowed their participation. It then instructs students about the communities they visit and supplies experiential learning opportunities that allow students to get to know the people and places they visit. These experiences teach students the importance of connecting with the people and communities in which they provide services to ensure they learn from the people they intend to help, including about what those people need and want and what their expectations and goals are. This ensures the students give aid in ways that truly are needed and wanted, but also teaches them to put aside their egos in performing service, allows them to gain humility, and encourages them to grow in ways they can take back to help their own communities and forward into their careers. CIELO programs demonstrate for students how to intentionally incorporate the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the ways they work, study, travel, and live.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

The actions identified included the following:

- Acknowledge the land in conversations, be respectful of all.
- Incorporate CIELO strategies to expand access and participation in the UA Law College's Tribal Justice clinic and other UA programs.
- Encourage the incorporation of equity and inclusion into health care educational curriculum to teach mindfulness of people's diversity of backgrounds and perspectives and to drive improvements in healthcare inclusivity and ensure people feel cared for.

- Students who have taken part in CIELO will share their experiences with others and bring the relationships they made through CIELO into their lives and the institutions and organizations in which they are involved.
- Educators will talk with their students about CIELO, share information with them about recruiting events, and encourage them to apply.
- Think about equity and opportunity at home in our own communities and in other places when traveling.
- Work to expand access to and awareness of CIELO's programs.
- Spread the word about the CIELO programs and global and experiential learning.

## 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 Exploring Equity through a New Global Classroom: A Community Dialogue and Panel” program. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Continue to create experiential service-learning courses.
- Continue to advocate for classes in nursing that integrate (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) JEDI.
- Share CIELO opportunities at recruitment events and encourage my Science Ambassador students to apply for CIELO programs.
- Explore the possibility of bringing additional resources to a program like CIELO.
- Avoid reinventing the wheel and serving underrepresented students.
- Share with my UNLV 101 classes as an opportunity to take advantage of.
- Spread the word to my friends about the CIELO program and the experiential learning that it offers and bring what I've learned to my classes and discussions.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Gateway Community College Community Town Hall

September 19, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



# Gateway Community College Community Town Hall

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## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity means creating a level playing field and giving people the resources and opportunities, they need to be successful. Equity and equality are distinct in the sense that equity requires deploying resources in a manner that is tailored to each individual's needs and takes into account where they are starting from. Not all people have the same resources. Sometimes, equity means meeting people where they are.

Everyone has been impacted by equity both personally and professionally. We are part of a support system in which “we lift as we climb.” Examples of equity include providing financial support, educational opportunities, and other tools and resources to individuals who need them to achieve their personal and professional goals. As a specific example, a student who needed additional support to develop their math skills might benefit from a unique form of instruction.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Adopting an equitable approach to allocating resources and opportunities is important for purposes of establishing a solid foundation for people and communities. Different people and communities require different types and amounts of resources, including infrastructure, housing, healthcare, employment, and educational opportunities. By responding to these unique needs, we can optimize overall benefits for our state.

Schools and other educational organizations offer powerful opportunities to promote equity. Employers and community organizations also have important roles to play. In striving for an equitable approach, it is important not only to be inclusive, but also to give people a sense of belonging. When individuals benefit from equitable opportunities and know they belong, they are more likely to participate in creating equitable opportunities for others, which benefits the community as a whole.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Many different stakeholders have important roles to play in taking action to adopt an equitable approach to allocating resources and opportunities. For example:

1. Our governor, mayors, and other local leaders should gather data about the needs of individuals, local communities, and our state.
2. Business leaders, leaders in the religious community, and leaders of community organizations should cooperate to champion equity in their communities.
3. Parents and students should communicate their concerns and priorities regarding creating equitable opportunities in education, and they should partner with education leaders and teachers to make those opportunities a priority.
4. Citizens need to be actively engaged in advocacy to create equitable opportunities for all.

## 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 Gateway Community College Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Be more involved in advocating for myself and my community.
- Be more confident in what I need.
- When I am able to give back, I will make sure that my community is taken care of with the things they lack.
- Network with Arizona Town Hall to give more young people the opportunity to learn the importance of getting involved in their local communities so that they can create their voice to enter their ideas.
- Be the resource for the next generation coming up after us.
- Be more active in our community and be vocal on our opinions.
- Become the richest man on earth, first trillionaire. And donate all my money to the needy.
- Commit to being a role model for others so that they can reach out to me whenever they need help.
- Learn about opportunities that help students and youth and give them the same opportunities that I have.
- Advocate for myself and others.
- Teach the importance and difference of equity and equality to my community.
- Continue to advocate for equity by informing peers about the many resources available to them.
- Take steps toward ensuring equity and equality in the current programs I oversee for the city.
- Take the opportunity to help others become the best versions of themselves.
- Be more aware of my surroundings, willing to step up and take a chance.
- Make people feel more welcome.
- Find 2-3 non-profits and our government affiliated group to get involved in within this next year.
- Advocate for myself and others in hopes to create a change to include others.
- I will grow and become aware in situations that involve my community.
- Lend a helping hand when I can and advocate for myself and my community.
- Vote for a leader that can help close the divide.
- Be open to opportunities and change my own life. Being supportive is also a big one as well.
- Be more involved and practice advocating for myself and my community.
- Show up and give back to my community by being an ear for everyone who needs support.
- Write and call my local representatives since they represent me and my voice to a greater audience.
- Attend community events and learn more about what is happening around my communities.
- Spread the word about the topic of equity and encourage others to talk about it.
- Be the resource for the next generation.
- Inform friends and family about the many opportunities that I believe will benefit them.
- Do more research on equity to have a better understanding of the topic and better help in advising others about the topic.
- Share information with others that might benefit them.
- Take risks for personal and professional growth.

- Commit to speaking up when I need help.
- Participate in more town halls to voice my opinions.
- Take a deeper look into the bills we vote for and how they impact our communities.
- Do more to learn about equity and the best way to apply it to underrepresented communities.

## IN COLLABORATION WITH



**GATEWAY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Equity and equality are distinct in the sense that equity requires deploying resources in a manner that is tailored to each individual's needs and takes into account where they are starting from.*

*In striving for an equitable approach, it is important not only to be inclusive, but also to give people a sense of belonging.*

# Phoenix College Community Town Hall

## September 20, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



***Equity is a verb; it requires action. If we invest in our people and communities now, then we won't have to invest in remedial measures later.***

# Phoenix College Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is a fair share of everything that is needed—in education, affordable housing, public buildings. Equity is giving people what they need so that they can be successful in achieving their goal. Equity recognizes that everybody starts at different places. It is tailored to specific needs. If people need clothes and everyone is given the same size that would be equal, but if they are given the size that fits, that would be equity. Equity gives people a fair chance to be successful even if they haven't started at the same point. Equity allows people who start climbing the ladder of life at a lower rung to get boosted up a little. Equity entails generational concepts, parental impact, and the concept of privilege.

We all play a role in deciding how equity will impact society. People who have things may not realize that they have more than their fair share until after they have lived life and understand how things work. Then they must consider how to implement adjustments to make things more equitable.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equity is essential for a strong society and social cohesion. Equity requires that all people's needs be taken into consideration. To optimize the potential of people and communities we must ask them what they need. Education, housing, health care, and safety are important for everyone, not just the privileged few. People with enormous potential to contribute to society may be held back by a lack of resources, including lack of access to information about resources.

Equity is a verb; it requires action. If we invest in our people and communities now, then we won't have to invest in remedial measures later. To get support for such investment it is important to get people in our communities to recognize the value of equity to the community, as distinguished from the individual. We can do this by focusing on the opportunity cost of failing to invest in making conditions more equitable. If by failing to promote equity we create conditions where people do not produce as much, then the community loses out on the benefits that would otherwise be produced.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

To achieve equity, we need to start with safe and secure communities, because without safety people aren't comfortable raising their voices and advocating for what they need. Communities that are steeped in violence, drug addiction, and similar conditions are disenfranchised, but those are the communities with the greatest need and those communities need a voice. We also need to make sure that children and people with disabilities have a voice.

There are great opportunities to use equity to improve our communities in educational institutions such as elementary, middle, high schools and colleges, and low-income communities. We should look at competitive settings. Knowledge is power. As women have taken lead roles, our culture has changed. People can be informed through representation. Community safety is important. Start with youth. Equity takes time. We are here to plant seeds. Housing is important. Language is important. We should be aware of the language we use and walk carefully as we seek to achieve equity.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

It starts with us. All of us. We should bring awareness to others, those we elect to public office, from school boards on up. We should hold people accountable when they are not being equitable. We may have similarities and differences, but we should respect one another.

It is important to know what level of government has responsibility for an issue of equity, and to bring our concerns to that level of government. Take, for example, the issue of affordable housing. We should contact our elected officials, write letters, and make phone calls. If we have an issue with the police, we should go to our city council. If we have an issue with special education for a child with special needs, we should go to the school district or school board.

We can also use social media to raise public awareness of the issue. We can collaborate with one another, bringing groups together to join their voices, share different perspectives, and assure that it is not just a single cultural perspective that is expressed or considered. Finally, we can vote for public officials who represent our views and support equity.

## 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 Phoenix College Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Research ways to help my community with equity.
- Walk away being informed how people have different chances depending on their location.
- Bring awareness about what we learned.
- Spread the word on equity.
- Spread awareness on what it means to be equitable.
- Share with my family and friends on the importance of equity in my community.
- Commit to educating my community about equity and how it affects us.
- Help educate others on the importance of equity on an individual level.
- Learn to be more intentional with brave language.
- Include the importance of equity in my advocacy trainings I hold in my community.
- Keep advocating for safety in our communities, especially in communities where resources are limited.
- Meet with my legislator to speak about issues that are affecting college students.

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**PHOENIX COLLEGE**  
A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**  
Metropolitan Phoenix

# West Valley Community Town Hall

September 20, 2023 – Avondale, AZ



*Equity is addressing different situations depending on what tools are needed for individual and collective success.*

# West Valley Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is addressing different situations depending on what tools are needed for individual and collective success. Equity is using what you need, not necessarily what you're given. It defines individual needs and provides the tools accordingly. In contrast, equality is using the same tools and expecting a uniform result, which is not realistic.

One of the greatest impacts to immigrants and their families is equity because needs are unique to everyone. For example, it is important to give English language learners the tools to first learn the language, so they have a better opportunity for success in other areas of their education.

Another example of equity is making sure everyone understands the collective goals while also considering individual needs. Institutional policies must be updated to allow for more equity. An example of this is recent book banning in certain communities. When this happens, it is vital for external organizations to step in and help make sure students have access to restricted information. Another example is when a small local business doesn't have the credentials to become a vendor on the community college school campus. In this situation, it is incumbent on the administration to update policies that would allow those businesses to participate and fully represent the community.

Though equity is individual, some people don't know what they need and have not been given the chance to explore their needs. In this case, equity is empowering people to explore what their needs are so their needs can be met respectfully and individually.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equity introduces the ancillary idea that there is no such thing as "one size fits all." Arizona has many rural communities and many Native Tribes. With that comes a lot of funding that allows those communities to improve education in the most remote areas of the state. Individuals must be met where they are both geographically on the broad spectrum of learning abilities. Teaching methods must be adapted to meet the needs of each individual community.

The first step to realizing equity in Arizona is to recognize basic human needs like housing, nutrition, and transportation. Frequently, these seemingly simple things are a barrier to success for people, especially in marginalized communities. But it is important to note that help comes from various sources. Holding events like this (Arizona Town Hall) allows people to express their opinions, which promotes self-reflection.

It is also important to examine the approach rather than just the definition of equity. In the example of education, one must ask the question, "Are we trying to achieve equity or are we trying to achieve learning?" With respect to this question, it is essential to recognize that compromised rights and standards can inhibit success. It is necessary to optimize purpose-driven people, especially when they feel disenfranchised. It is also vital to admit that logic cannot be realized until the emotion is removed from the conversation. However, commonality must be considered throughout the process.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

One tool that helps with the understanding of equity is history. The federal government's policy of "Separate but Equal" did not work because it ignored equity. Creating hierarchy within communities is counterproductive. It is absolutely necessary to allow each person to have psychological safety in an environment where they are inspired to express their needs.

In general, everyone wants to be successful, and society wants success for others. However, to encourage this, it is essential to remove assumptions from the quest to obtain equity. Doing so does not allow for people to have their needs met on an individual basis.

## 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 West Valley Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Commit to creating trust and a safe place for my staff and colleagues to feel free to express their opinions, needs and wants.
- Communicate my understanding of equity vs. equality to my peers who are curious or may not entirely comprehend its meaning.
- Talk with others about equity and ways to achieve it.
- Try to figure things out myself. I love the feedback of others, but if I can open that room for someone who might have a burning question, that would be my equitable approach.
- Start to look at the little things for people I know and address their needs in a way they will grow.
- Partner with academic faculty to create inclusive program standards while maintaining academic integrity.
- Work to ensure equitable funding for department budgets.
- Create a student panel for the empower (student with disabilities) group at Estrella Mountain Community College. If we hear the needs of students, we can start to address them.
- Try to tell other people what equity means.
- Try to be understanding of what others may need.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# UA College of Medicine-Phoenix Community Town Hall

September 21, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



# UA College of Medicine-Phoenix Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is allowing everyone the opportunity to achieve the same goals tailored to their own needs. When you don't do that, the cycle perpetuates itself. Examples are medical school admissions and access to nutrition. In the case of underserved communities, this means removing roadblocks to allow each person access to equity. Investing in culturally diverse programs may be a more effective way of achieving equity.

Disparities have been forced against many people; However, more equity has been achieved in communities where disparities are being addressed. To achieve this evolution, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary. Whole person care and meeting the needs of people where they are is necessary to achieve equity. An example of this is healthcare professionals and patients who are not multilingual. In cases like this, they cannot communicate with each other. Language inequalities and a shortage of medical literacy means patients typically don't get as much of the information as they need to maintain good health. Implementing roles like a *promotora/Community Health Work/Community Health Representative* into the healthcare system could move the medical community one step closer to equity. A promotora is a lay Hispanic/Latino community member who receives specialized training to provide basic community health education into the community without being a professional healthcare worker.

Equity seeks to meet people where they are and allows for individuality. It is known that some students and patients don't have the same opportunities as others. Some think it is redistribution of resources, but they fail to see that equity is an investment in people allowing them opportunities that will allow them in turn to contribute to the communities in which they live.

In general, equality is giving everyone the same thing regardless of needs.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equity is the most important part of reinventing healthcare today. If people from underserved communities were given higher education, and went back into that community, they could effectively improve the community and promote a cycle of health and education. Funding early education could be a good step to starting this early and sustaining it. Providing adequate maternity/paternity leave also leads to better early childhood education outcomes which in turn leads to higher rates of high school and college graduation. Similarly, access to nutrition allows for healthy development in children and in turn healthier communities. Patients would also find more equity in healthcare if they were to receive basic healthcare education early in life.

The USA has some of the most expensive health care costs in the world. This is primarily because of health insurance companies. This system needs to be reinvented. Medical and dental healthcare is treated separately; integrated healthcare is necessary. Electronic Health Records (HER) overhaul would also help with this. Incentivizing medical students to go into primary care due to the country-wide shortage could lead to more equity. It is also important to increase cultural representation to encourage trust and ensure patients feel safe to communicate with their healthcare providers.

Underrepresented communities and communities of color frequently do not send as many people to medical school. Cultural representation and more mentoring programs are needed to encourage young people to go to medical school. For example, Goodwill has a program called "SPARK" that mentors students from an early age to work toward higher education. Students from underserved communities should be given greater opportunity to attend school and give back to their communities.

Some examples of how it is critical to reach equitable outcomes are:

- Some tribal members do not have electric utilities in their homes. Therefore, they rely on firewood for heating, cooking, and cultural practices. During the COVID pandemic, many of those members could not leave their homes due to tribal executive orders. To answer this need, a relationship with trucking companies and the forest service was made to ensure delivery of wood.
- Students in certain communities do not have access to dental care. In response, those communities relied on non-traditional resources like the military to meet some specific needs of the community.
- Extending mobile health care into rural communities will also make for more equitable healthcare.

There is documented evidence that when racial and cultural congruence is achieved, there are better healthcare outcomes for patients. Embedding Community Healthcare Workers (CHW) in the process could be helpful. For example, when a patient checks out, a CHW could meet with the patient to make sure all their healthcare needs are being met and help focus on next steps. Lack of digital literacy is also a barrier to equitable healthcare. Education in this area is necessary.

The idea of social prescriptions would be helpful. For example, prescribing a nature walk, socializing, or enjoying art could help with overall health. This has been used in some European communities and has been met with success.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

More CHWs and active community members are vital to reaching health equity. We all know funding for healthcare in the US is broken. Policy changes and understanding of government action could help people better realize how their healthcare works and in turn how they can affect change. Additionally, policy changes are needed to improve overall care.

Group programs for things like nutrition could help. Keeping healthcare in silos has proven to make an already difficult system more difficult. Providers also need to know better how to talk to patients. Micro-interventions could be implemented and there is room to implement this into all healthcare aspects. Our healthcare systems are very complex. Integrated healthcare is necessary. Community Health Workers (CHW) and Community Health Representatives (CHR) involvement must be included at all levels of healthcare since they are well-suited to communicate needs of the community. Communities are all different from one another, so it is necessary to meet the needs of each community on an individual basis.

We *all* need to do something—we must get out of our bubbles and talk with one another. We as professionals in our fields and general members of the public should talk to lawmakers and encourage improvements and changes.

Education continues to be a pivotal component of the health of a community. We should use career days and mentorship programs to give young students a glimpse of what is possible for them. MyCareerAdvisor.com is a good resource for students to use for understanding career options.

To fix the healthcare system, we must find the root cause of the lack of equity. A start is to admit more students into college from underrepresented communities. We hope that the University of Arizona campus expanding and implementing more programs will ultimately teach medical students how to interact with other medical professionals and in the end streamline healthcare practices. School zoning should not be based on tax brackets, which ultimately silos communities and negatively impacts health and education opportunities because of the vast socioeconomic differences. Improved community leadership and advocacy is essential—it's important to train medical professionals to work with lawmakers and community leaders to educate them and advocate for policy improvements. Using online tools to talk to lawmakers is a good way to achieve that. Providing food pantries with fewer barriers to nutritious food should also be utilized. Direct community engagement should also be encouraged and utilized. The Arizona Town Hall forum should be

mandatory for medical students in each year of medical school. Medical students being exposed early to common issues and potential remedies will lead to improved doctor-patient relations and an overall healthier and more productive medical community.

## 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 UA College of Medicine-Phoenix Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Learn the process of resolution writing to submit for policy change.
- Integrate health care systems out in the community and with an emphasis on cultural humility.
- Have a “Career Day” in our community.
- Visit the “SPARK” program at Goodwill.
- Be a healthcare advocate for all Arizonans.
- Fulfill my professional responsibility and continue to share the need to get involved.
- Plan more meaningful discussions, events, and projects directed to health equity.
- Follow up with my colleagues and community patients to start primary care offices. I will also follow up with Suzanne at Vitalyst on that idea.
- Mentor primary care students from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Continue to fundraise for health equity issues.
- Attend meetings about healthcare legislation that impact the community.
- Work to encourage future medical students to engage in future Town Halls forums.
- Continue to learn.
- Advocate for equity touching all learners including trainees and faculty of medical schools.

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# Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Community Town Hall

September 28, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*An equitable approach to rural residents requires more efforts to provide both the resources and the knowledge of how to use them.*



*Everyone is responsible for advancing equity, and those at the top have additional responsibilities as leaders.*

# Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

In rural areas, there are greater challenges in meeting the needs of community members. An equitable approach to rural residents requires more efforts to provide both the resources and the knowledge of how to use them. It also requires creative approaches to best meet their needs. As one example, rural set asides for federal grants would support a more equitable approach for rural areas.

For foundations and others who provide grants, an equitable approach means supporting smaller nonprofit organizations who do not always have the resources to apply for grants or who cannot qualify to even apply for grant funding. Providing creative, and accessible support to apply for grants, such as Local First's Economic Recovery Center, is an important way to support smaller and rural nonprofits as are other efforts that relax the requirements for grant funding.

An equitable approach can also help individuals who are isolated and experiencing health or financial concerns. An equitable approach should consider how services can best be provided to those with health issues and for those who may be experiencing homelessness.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Data can help us determine when an equitable approach is most needed to optimize the potential of people and communities. For example, the social vulnerability index is a set of indicators that helps to identify what areas are most vulnerable based on historic and current challenges and helps us to identify where we can provide a greater and more equitable focus to create more positive outcomes.

This concept of using data to "geomap" where communities have the greatest needs was successfully as part of the COVID pandemic to target outreach and to improve health outcomes for those communities who needed it the most. This approach continues to be a successful approach to improve health outcomes, especially when done with community and culturally appropriate partners.

Collaboration and partnerships are key. We need to explore how best to motivate successful collaboration and partnerships that explore equitable approaches to healthcare and other social determinants of health, including equitable approaches to financial and economic opportunities.

We are in this together. And we each have an individual role to play. We should be courageous in going to new places and experiencing new opportunities that allow us to learn, to collaborate and to better help our communities work together.

One person, one step and one conversation at a time can help us to spread the knowledge to those in our communities about the value to all of us of using equity as an approach for successful community outcomes.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

- Everyone is responsible for advancing equity, and those at the top have additional responsibilities as leaders.

- Equity should be wrapped into strategic planning and goals, vision and mission statements, workplace policies and procedures, and hiring practices. For example, The Public Health Association is working on an official statement that address systemic racism.
- It's important to use various educational and communications strategies.
- Social media is important for sharing evidence-based information about the positive impact of using equity as a tool for community improvement. Community health workers also play an important role as do business groups and organizations like Arizona@Work. Business groups are instrumental in creating resiliency and positive change. Youth are also important; we need to engage and empower youth in all of these efforts.
- We need to continue to bring likeminded organizations (including faith based, veteran and business organizations) together for more effective collaboration.
- We also need to leverage our library systems and other data related organizations.

## 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 Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Work with public-private partners and ASU to share key learnings, findings, and recommendations based on our collective work during the pandemic.
- Find one group to partner/collaborate with.
- Continue to engage with Arizona Town Hall. Through community town halls, I have been able to hear voices that can often be overlooked.
- Be more “mindful” of communication and generational differences when communicating about equity issues. One size does not fit all.
- Carry the message to my outlets in the state including workforce and economic development and local elected officials in our region.
- Make sure that additional outreach efforts are undertaken to encourage underserved communities to take advantage of grant programs administered by the Arizona Department of Agriculture and USDA.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH SERVICES

# Prescott College Community Town Hall

## October 2, 2023 – Online via Zoom



**At Prescott College, diversity, equity, and inclusion is not just a statement, it's in our nature. Just as a thriving ecosystem requires the partnership among its diverse species, humanity only thrives when diversity is respected and protected. To us "diversity" isn't limited to cultures and backgrounds, it honors the different perspectives and world views that allow us to connect with each other and lead together.**

# Prescott College Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equality means everyone gets the same thing. Equity means everyone gets what they need to succeed.

The graphic of three people looking over the fence, standing on boxes of sufficient size to enable each to see, illustrates the concept of equity. Equity lies in providing boxes of appropriate size and height to those who need them to see over the fence.

One example of how equity has played out in peoples' professional lives is actors of color. For many years, the only roles available to such actors were roles that called for typecasting of a person of color. More recently, roles of all types have become available to actors of all types. Actors of color can be cast as leading characters without regard to their race.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

The greatest opportunity to improve equity is by addressing the most inequitable situations. An example is the conditions on the Navajo Nation, where many people do not have running water or utilities, and many more people died from COVID-19 as a result.

Basic human needs essential for survival should be met first for everyone. Education is a close second priority because of its potential to empower people. For example, teaching students of color about their ancestors, their cultures, and their heritage has been correlated with a higher graduation rate.

The concept of equity is layered with the concept of privilege. We live in a society where various privileges and opportunities flow from wealth and power, contributing to inequity. For example, snowbirds and wealthy people may own several homes that they occupy only part time, contributing to the shortage of affordable housing and homelessness. People in power, who are usually privileged, may not want to give up their power and privilege, and thus may oppose measures to increase equity.

Optimizing equity is a complex and nuanced issue that requires weighing and balancing privileges and powers. There are multiple complex systems in place that tend to perpetuate inequities and serve the interests of the powerful. Education can be a powerful tool, both in empowering those who suffer inequities and increasing understanding about the intersectionality of the issues, such as benefits from being on indigenous lands and from institutions founded on slavery. Even our identities are intersectional. None of us is reducible to a single category—we may be oppressed in one circumstance and privileged in another. We should note that inequity is not limited to race and wealth. It also extends to gender and sexual identity.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

We recommend that the following actions be taken:

1. The Arizona Department of Education should be directed and empowered to educate people about inequity.
2. Prescott should hold a Town Hall event to discuss the affordable housing shortage and help people understand the consequences of their actions, such as the relationship between Airbnbs and the reduction in availability of student housing.
3. Similarly, there should be greater awareness of our colonial history and its impacts to indigenous peoples.
4. Utilities and communities should collaborate to identify areas that lack essential utilities.

5. There should be more and better public transportation in rural areas.
6. Individuals concerned about equity issues should collaborate with other organizations to maximize their impact.

## 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 Prescott College Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Commit to educating those around me and helping to bring more awareness within my own community about these subjects.
- Take steps to learn about the Indigenous communities and histories of the land I live on, wherever I go in North and South America.
- Commit to nourishing my community and beyond through love, food, and dialogue.
- Try to be more upfront with people in what I need for my education.
- Commit to learning the specific colonial and indigenous history of the state so I may better understand my part in this story.
- Become more active in local organizing and see how I can participate more in my community, ex by going to school board meetings, etc.
- Continue to volunteer at The Coalition for Compassion and Justice (CCJ) in Prescott and reach out more there, getting a better understanding of people's experience and perspective who are homeless in Prescott and surrounding areas.

## IN COLLABORATION WITH

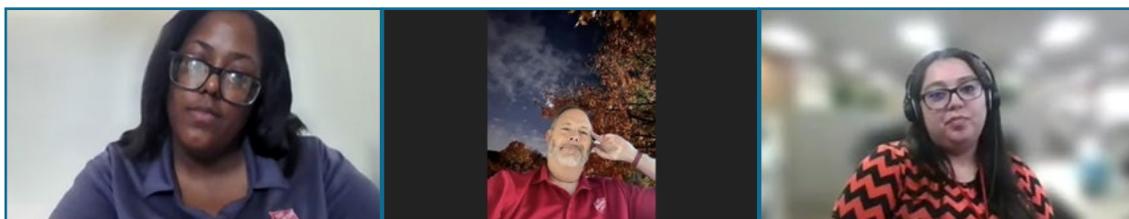


# The Salvation Army Community Town Hall

October 10, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*Equitable support is providing unique support to meet the unique needs of a population or group. It's meeting people where they're at.*



*In sum, society, our country, and the world would all benefit from an earlier and more equitable approach to children and their families.*

# The Salvation Army Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is supplying extra support so people can raise themselves out of a low-income position, address a disability or otherwise address limiting factors so that people can participate more completely and reach their full potential.

The Salvation Army has a presence everywhere and is known for connecting people to the right service—providing connections to equitable support which is different from “equal” support and doing so in a nondiscriminatory manner. Equitable support is providing unique support to meet the unique needs of a population or group. It’s meeting people where they’re at.

For example, in a year with record temperatures, it means providing extra shelter, water and support for those who do not have a place to go in the heat and who are willing and ready to receive assistance. For those who do not want services, it may be directing them to those services or places that can provide assistance.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE’S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equitable approaches are important for education and career opportunities specifically for those with disabilities, differing socio-economic status, as well as for differing genders, races, ethnicities, and sexual orientation. A socio-cultural approach that allows children to leverage their background and that fosters a connection to their teachers and peers will help children succeed.

We could have even more impact if we start earlier in our school systems with equitable access to education and opportunities. Using technology would be one way to positively impact more children as would other tools such as creative approaches and even encouragement that builds their belief in themselves—a belief that they can succeed.

Children and their families should have an opportunity to be heard so that we can equitably address access to education and professional opportunities as well as participation in community and faith-based events. We should not discount someone because of their gender or disability. We should look for ways to make services more available to those who have differing needs and explore equitable and creative approaches that serve unique needs.

We need to provide people with opportunities to participate fully in their community. Croc centers have been immensely helpful for providing equitable opportunities to children and their families. While highly successful, we may be able to have even greater positive impact through additional community needs assessments that allow community members to be heard and to provide feedback.

In sum, society, our country, and the world would all benefit from an earlier and more equitable approach to children and their families.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Politicians, parents, educators, employers, spiritual leaders the media, and those we are trying to help all have a role in taking the actions needed to address opportunities for equitable approaches that will optimize the potential of people and their communities. When addressing changes and assigning responsibility, we need to balance equal parts of empathy and accountability to inspire and leverage leaders.

It takes continuing education on everyone's part. We need to continue to get the word out on the services that the Salvation Army and others provide so that people will know where to get services that meet their needs. We need to involve stakeholders, including those we serve, along the way.

The media is a huge player in education and getting the word out. Sadly, the media tends to focus on the bad news. It would be helpful for them to provide more positive messages, but the question is, "Why should they?" We need to find more ways to incentivize the media to provide more coverage of positive stories. It can help to have a relationship with the media. We also need to find alternative ways to reach the community with information, whether through individual and direct efforts or social media, because there are many resources that go unused.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for changing the focus on the stories and the messages we communicate. We can start with a methodical and long-term effort that includes supporting and subscribing to local media. Our efforts should include providing examples to others of how we are all connected, and how an equitable approach has a positive impact on the entire community. They should demonstrate why we all need to play a role. We can also provide them with examples of how they can apply equitable approaches.

It's important for us to participate in local elections and to find ways to ensure that our voice is being heard. It starts with us.

## 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 Salvation Army Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

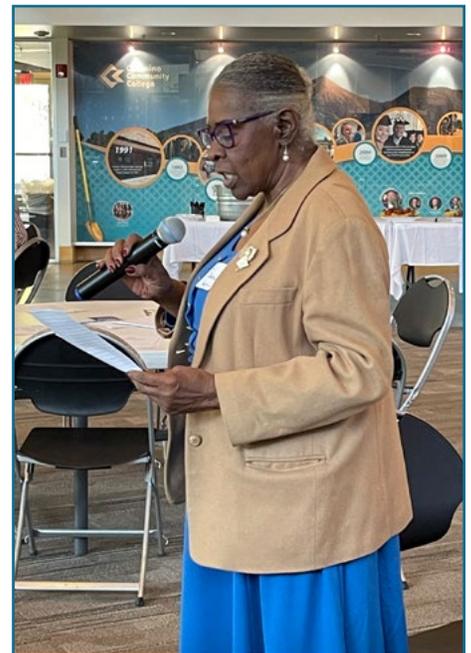
- Vote.
- Discuss this with my students and vote.
- Discuss equity and equality with my father and stepmom.
- Continue to educate myself on the issues of equity and equality and will continue to vote.
- Specifically patronize minority owned businesses.
- Attend upcoming town halls and continue the conversation.
- Follow the Lord and the standard He has set as to look at the value of people regardless of status. To serve and communicate with people to empower people to be the change.

## IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Flagstaff Community Town Hall

October 11, 2023 – Flagstaff, AZ; and Online via Zoom



*The most creative ideas and successful solutions are generated through collaboration.*

# Flagstaff Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equality results in treating everyone the same, regardless of their demographic, economic, cultural, educational, geographic, and other differences. Equity is fostered by bringing diverse groups together to increase the understanding of each group's needs and aspirations. As leaders, it is incumbent upon us to meet people where they are and recognize that people do not always know how to reach us nor feel comfortable doing so. This is especially important for those in low income and rural areas, as well as historically marginalized groups. Equity is fostered by providing individuals and communities with the tools to do it themselves. This allows for the maximization of potential at all levels, increases engagement, and builds a sense of accomplishment.

Philanthropy must be trust based. Direct efforts to what people tell us they need rather than what we think they need. In Flagstaff, for example, safe, comfortable, and affordable housing continues to be a recurrent theme.

Educational and recreational resources and opportunities are not equal across Coconino County. School counselors perform a vital function by helping students see what can be available to them and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. Teachers serve best when they recognize differences in how their students learn. Programs like Open Space, Kids Café, and Rec on Wheels offer recreational opportunities across a broad area and often additional services such as a free lunch and health and wellness education.

We also have individuals "living in the gap" between eligibility for public support and financial security. It is incumbent upon many of us to recognize our privilege and be sensitive to those who are just getting by or falling through the cracks.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

It is of the utmost importance to optimize the potential of every individual, group, and community for us to thrive. This requires starting with meeting basic needs and providing educational opportunities that build our strengths. Creating a level playing field directly impacts how people interact with the community, nonprofits, and government.

The availability to everyone of health, wellness and outdoor activities enables connections and builds potential for participants. The Buffalo Park Accessibility Trail with universal access fitness equipment is the result of a state grant that helped repair and resurface the trail. Community gardens, such as the one at the Hal Jensen Recreation Center, allow everyone the opportunity to garden, raise plants, and raise healthy food.

Leaders need to bring everyone to the table, especially those who have never had a chance to be heard or contribute. We must find a place for everyone to feel that they belong and are valued. Decision making needs to be story-based and built upon trust. Grant making organizations need to be flexible enough to support changing needs, unanticipated events, and special opportunities.

What we have always done is not working. Yesterday's solutions may not address today's problems. We must hear every voice and think outside the box. Ask the community before establishing rules and setting priorities. The most creative ideas and successful solutions are generated through collaboration. We are always stronger together.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest opportunities happen every day as we meet people and share learning and teaching moments. Meeting people where they are, identifying their needs and concerns and understanding their relationship with healthcare in the broadest sense. This includes medical dental, mental and behavioral health as well as housing, food security, and access to green spaces.

A focus on prevention needs to be embedded in our definition of healthcare. This includes providing ongoing support and training to healthcare providers such as trauma response, triage skills, cultural competencies, public health, and the newest treatment modalities. School nurses and counselors must be available in every school, all day, every day. Early detection and response are the key to reducing the extent and duration of issues. Consider the Medical Reserve Core of the Coconino County Health Department as well as a volunteer medical core. Ensure that treatment modalities are integrated with native healing practices.

COVID brought us telehealth, which still accommodates some patients, while others need in person meetings with providers. More than ever, we recognized the impact of the social determinants of health when testing and vaccinations needed to be accessible to everyone. Health literacy and advocacy took on significant roles and will continue to do so.

Our best opportunities lie in partnerships and collaborations, which are happening more in Flagstaff. An example are the plans for an indigenous cultural center. Community gardens bring people together to grow healthy food. There is inequity in the mental and behavioral health area that can be addressed by bringing people together to share their experiences and learn about available resources. Collaboration is the key to achieving the best outcomes because we learn from each other and are better able to support our shared values and approach healthcare from a holistic perspective.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Community conversations, surveys and town halls are a good place to start. The information gathered must be shared with community leaders, elected officials, government agencies, nonprofits, and healthcare providers. The most important action to be taken at any level is listening and listening to a diverse population. Be sure to get all voices into the conversations.

Neighborhood conversations that bring together those with different views to recognize common interests can reduce fractionalization. Democracy does not work if people do not participate. Citizenship involves responsibilities and obligations as well as rights.

Flagstaff has limited services for substance use, detox, and mental and behavioral health. City leaders need to look at how these situations impact public services, public health, and community vitality.

Funders of nonprofits and government agencies need to offer a trust based, community involved process in developing guidelines and requirements for grants. Visit the service providers to understand their challenges and appreciate their impact.

Collaboration between nonprofits makes funds go further and recognizes that most situations involve multiple issues. Programs like Front Door help people get directed to all the services they need with one stop. There were numerous approaches offered to increase equity for all Arizonans such as:

- Restructure healthcare billing and reimbursement to allow more time for meetings with patients.
- Diversify decision making by including young people on boards, commissions, and task forces.
- Level the playing field by distributing resources and dollars based on need, not local taxes.

An overriding theme was we should not be looking to some other group, agency, organization, or government to address the issues and opportunities identified in these discussions. Instead, **“There is no ‘they’ when it comes to responsibility for action. It is us!”**

## 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 Flagstaff Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Share ideas learned at this Arizona Town Hall with others whom I interact with.
- Commit to listening to the voices of the unheard.
- Reach out to people I do not know to ask them questions.
- Advocate for equity in personal and professional conversations.
- Be reinvigorating some of my own work and encouraging sustained resiliency in pursuit of equity in the communities I serve. This work can cause a lot of fatigue, and practicing both DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and MHFA (Mental Health First Aid), etc., is hard heart work... I need to refuel and revitalize!

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



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Health  
Choice



# Vitalyst Virtual Community Town Hall

October 12, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*Equity provides custom resources that address unequal opportunities so that individuals have access to due to their diverse circumstances. One size does not fit all.*



*Areas that should be emphasized for equity are education, healthcare, and business/finance/economics.*

# Vitalyst Virtual Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity provides custom resources that address unequal opportunities so that individuals with diverse circumstances have access. One size does not fit all. Having a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible is essential. Equity is a personal, professional, societal, and political responsibility. Universal design is necessary to provide the most access possible and allow everyone the same opportunity to lead a healthy life.

Aligning equity in various areas requires fairness and opportunities to rectify the wrongs that are happening through injustice. Recognizing differences that others have is crucial.

Healthcare can vary based on socioeconomic status. The difference in the types of health insurance and the cost vary significantly between individuals covered and creates a large inequity among people. The healthcare system is also difficult to navigate.

Each city and town in our state operates in a different way. Federal funding differs from state or county funding. Local groups and networks may block messages if they do not agree with the message or the outreach. Equity conversations help but may not reach those who need the outreach.

Having an equal opportunity for financial resources is key. Stating that funds will only address a particular group is not equal nor is assuming that agencies only assist a certain population segment. In this state, there are barriers that impede agencies' ability to work equally across all groups.

We want to be able to bring justice to those who need it the most based on their circumstances. We don't all have an equal playing field. There needs to be education and access for all.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

To improve our communities, we must start with identifying the people in our community and what equity looks like for them. The 2021 Census for example, did not capture sexual orientation and gender identity. Without data on the baseline population in our state, funding, planning and initiatives cannot address our specific needs. If the system doesn't count or acknowledge certain groups, those groups do not matter in the system. Many of our systems are not equitable. Areas that should be emphasized for equity are education, healthcare, and business/finance/economics. Listening to those in need is crucial.

There is a lack of trust in the system. Many people in need do not know whom to trust. They may be used to being promised something that is not delivered. It is crucial that we bridge gaps to be able to help those in need. Families are struggling to trust the programs that are designed to help them due to vulnerabilities being reported. Trust needs to be built upon and moves slowly.

There needs to be clarity (specificity) on the gaps and prioritization so that measurable impact can be made on equity. Resources must be available.

We need to push to bring community members' comments into the discussion. Too many people fall through the cracks. Other issues can distract people from focusing on equity in our communities.

Collaboration is important. The City of Tempe is having Health and Human Services, Fire Department, and Police Department work together to address equity issues and come up with solutions.

We need more resources for community conversations to discover the inequities and hear from people how these could be addressed. Society and business want data and cost-effective analysis; life experiences must also be valued.

There is currently a shortage of providers. Without the workforce available, people in need cannot be helped. Wage compaction in Arizona is prevalent and economically impacts many.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

- Policy makers need to shed their political affiliations and focus on the community. There should not be so much red tape attached to funding that agencies cannot do what they need to do to help others.
- Leaders in all fields, businesspeople, politicians, academics need to become aware, educate themselves and others, influence policy, regulations, laws and reparations, influence opinions, and broaden perspectives.
- Spreading awareness in the community is key. Having town halls is very important. Certain populations that are growing older need mental health care. Something as simple as a dropdown menu could help them navigate the system.
- Small nonprofits help in our communities, in particular, to address inequity with very few resources. Having funding available that these nonprofits can utilize would help them do their work more effectively. Real people need help today and they can't wait.
- A focus on teaching JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, inclusion) courses for middle school and high school would also help shape the next generation of Arizona's. There should be a community-based volunteer requirement for students to learn about disparities and areas of opportunity.
- Paid parental leave would help support parents supporting their children and families.
- Understanding what each of our roles are and need to be is important. Coming together to discuss these issues is crucial. It is essential that each individual has a voice they can share with others on their needs, especially our elected officials and leaders. There needs to be influence from the ground up.
- Sharing local successes broadly should be done more frequently. Keeping it local can maintain funding within our local areas.
- Children should be taught while young to hardwire equity. Equity courses should be taught within the school system.
- While government law may have been written with good intentions to help certain groups within the population, part of a law then labels someone as guilty even though they have not been charged with anything. Transparency is missing in laws, policies, and in the healthcare system.
- Politicians should be required to help our charities a certain number of hours a year to learn and listen to their constituents.
- Giving children opportunities to collaborate and providing access to opportunity and resources would be impactful.

## 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 Vitalyst Virtual Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Commit to creating trust and a safe space for my staff & colleagues so they feel free to express their opinions, needs, and wants.
- Commit to being mindful of equity and to vote for legislators that are demonstrating that commitment.
- Expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members - equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.

- Commit to promoting and voting for policies that create more equitable conditions for families (Child Tax Credit, Paid Parental Leave, etc.).
- Perhaps do a subgroup on finance, education, and healthcare.
- Continue to work and advocate for systems change to advance community level equity.
- Expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members - equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.
- Encourage friends to run for office.
- Be intentional about centering the voices of community and analyze ways I can help reduce barriers to equity.
- Support more grassroots organizations that are fighting for equity in our communities.
- Try to educate and advocate for a non-profit board of which I am a member on equity issues and challenges (but our board is diverse so may be “singing to the choir”); we can still look for where improvements can be made.
- Continue to work with the state’s rural hospitals reinforcing their commitment to health equity.
- Listen more to the communities to learn how they want to resolve their issues and concerns.
- Continue to attend Arizona Town Hall events to allow me to hear diverse perspectives.
- Spread the info on social media and in my church.
- Attend more Arizona Town Halls.
- Be more proactive in spreading information on the importance of equity and notifying others of these Town Hall meetings.
- Continue to work with community organizations who are committed to creating and maintaining equity.
- Look into everyone’s organization and follow and support them however I can.
- Commit to centering equity in the data collection process, both in the gathering and in the distribution.
- Make equity a major consideration when deciding who to vote for in upcoming elections.
- Work in community and with emotional intelligence to transform toward equity.
- Join an equity work group.
- Serve on other similar groups and subcommittees like advocacy and expand my definition of equity to consider the various roles of our community members – equity for those who are delivering services and equity for those who are the recipients.
- Commit to joining this team on any of the action items resulting from the town hall.
- Continue working with hospitals to promote health equity measures from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).
- Inform people about the grassroots organization Civic Engagement Beyond Voting (CEBV) that was started by people alarmed about what is happening in the legislature and read their newsletter called the Legislature Weekly.

## SPONSORED BY



# Tucson Community Town Hall

October 12, 2023 – Tucson, AZ



*Equality simply cannot exist without equity. Equity benefits everyone in a community, not just those it serves directly.*

# Tucson Community Town Hall

## 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

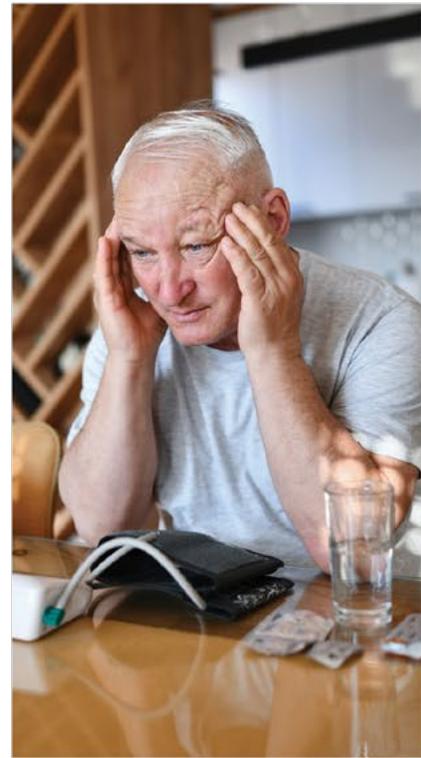
Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Tucson Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *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 can.
- 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.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH





# Connecting Families to Community Resources

OCTOBER 2023

FINAL REPORT

 **SWATH**  
South West Arizona Town Hall

# Compilation Statement

## Southwest Arizona Town Hall Forum

### Connecting Families to Community Resources - October 13, 2023

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The Southwest Arizona Town Hall (SWATH) met on October 13, 2023, at the Yuma Regional Medical Center Administration Building to discuss *Connecting Families to Community Resources*. More than 125 attendees discussed the need for equitable information and resource access across Yuma County to assist residents with their needs. SWATH partnered with First Things First to request community input on existing resources and resource connections in Yuma County, what Resource Centers could look like, and how these centers could be designed and sustained for equitable outreach and utilization.

#### RESOURCES AND CONNECTIONS IN YUMA COUNTY

Yuma County develops connections between organizations by providing resources to the community through word of mouth and through organizations that connect individuals to resources for specific needs such as those looking for childcare, work, and early childhood development. Local taskforces, coalitions, and organizations, specialized in their area of focus, provide connections between organizations serving their particular segment of the community. Social workers in organizations such as schools, the hospital and the health department often do this work. The Greater Yuma Economic Development Corporation, the Salvation Army, County Libraries, the public-school systems, WACOG, churches, and the Yuma County and City governments are examples of entities that connect various organizations and resources to the community.

There are several examples of specific entities connecting residents to resources. Kofa High School connects industry leaders and students through information, licensed certificates, and access to jobs via their medically based CTE programs. The Transitional Living Center and Recovery (TLCR) program provides linkage to resources and a catchment that provides food, resources and assistance to people transitioning from prison back to the community. The HOPE Center assists any parent who asks for assistance. Their staff can complete an assessment and refer the individual out to services. This center also works together with the EasterSeals Blake Foundation. Arizona@Work connects with partners such as unemployment insurance, veterans' services, farm worker agencies, and more. Sunset Health informs their patients about resources, holds parent meetings, advocates for patients, sets up transportation services, networks with other agencies at health fairs and other events, visits assisted living homes and offers blood pressure checkup and COVID testing.

Despite the plethora of connecting assistance these agencies offer, most community members are not aware of the many services provided due to existing silos of information. Families often do not know of the services and agencies that exist or where to find them. Many families going to social workers in the high school ask for assistance in specific areas. This frames people into niches when they could have benefited from a broader range of services. While there is a broad knowledge of calling 911 in an emergency, in general, families do not know how to navigate the system and are treading water. A user- friendly center platform for non-emergency resources would assist county residents with this navigation challenge.

Each agency struggles to know who offers what resource. Currently, these organizations often use internet tools and their individual connections when the issues their community members face go beyond their specific resources. However, referrals involve detailed information of various agencies in different areas that often confuse and overwhelm community members.

Extending leader networks and sharing information is essential to know who is at the table and what resources they provide in Yuma County. Collaborative solutions are the best option for the broader community. The ultimate goal of developing these connections is to instill a culture of having entities reach out to be included in resource guides and resource fairs rather than those individuals tasked with building the resource guide having to track down organizations providing resources.

Development of connections between organizations needs to involve educating leaders in organizations about the importance of building relationships with other entities. Communication and networking provide the greatest opportunity for developing those connections. A centralized place, for a broad range of organizations to meet, network and share, through meetings or the creation of an association, would be the most effective way to facilitate and maintain connections especially for organizations and individuals that may already be stretched thin. Organizations also need a way to follow-up with each other once referrals or resources have been provided so that they can better understand whether the connections are being made and resources are being utilized. Some events that are already making connections are events such as town halls, WACOG events, and Yuma leadership training. These types of events are necessary to build those relationships. Hurdles to accomplishing those goals often include the time and timing of events.

Once these connections have been made by organizations the challenge is connecting information to individuals being served without overwhelming them with the plethora of resources available. There are many platforms in Yuma County that offer different assistance. Several online guides are available in separate locations. It is crucial that this separate information be brought together into one location. A combination of formats for the resource guide is critical to meeting people where they are at. The formats need to also take into account and be provided in multiple languages, specifically in Spanish, as many community members are not comfortable communicating in English. Some examples of formats include technology, such as QR codes, on the college's digital boards, student handbooks, Parent and Student Vue events, school district websites, social media, bathroom stalls, and front desks of schools when families register for the school year. These are venues that people can readily access. Having an app on the phone that people can search for quickly and easily would also be a great resource. It would be a useful tool to place a resource guide in the computers on the rigs so that the fire department on the street can share resources with the community. Having a community guide would be beneficial for employers to share with their employees to help employees be "present" at work. Concerns about safety and security distract employees. A community guide would also be beneficial for public agencies, like Fire and Police, because they work with community members at vulnerable moments in their lives.

Trust is an issue. If households do not trust you, they will not admit to a need nor reach out for assistance. Therefore, it is key to build the relationships for a soft hand-off of the information, potentially by in-person conversations at public venues such as the county fair, Friday night markets, school sporting events and community resource fairs. For this and many other reasons, a warm hand-off of resources and advocated follow-up needs to be used with families to ensure they can access the resources they need. Often during a crisis or emergency, people may not think clearly and are overwhelmed at needing to call a list of different agencies for separate services. To provide the necessary soft hand-offs, there should be educators and counselors, who could ensure crucial information gets to those who need it most. Students are comfortable sharing with counselors as trusted adults in their lives. The development of Family Resource Centers needs to be at locations, such as libraries, that reach the broader community and where resources are already being provided. Being intentional about advertising is critical to ensuring the community members in need are aware of the resources. Student organizations can help facilitate the distribution of information, and existing programs and events can be used to further those efforts.

However, not all community members have access to technology or are comfortable using technology. Our county population includes those who cannot afford a cell phone and would not be able to scan a QR code. Therefore, tools need to be provided at locations people can easily access and there needs to be a focus on getting people to go to the places that have those tools. There are different mechanisms that work for different generations. Some need paper copies and others need internet. Organizations should consider asking people who in their family would be the best person to talk to.

An example of an organization focused on bringing the resources to a central location is First Things First who has partnered with 211 organizations to be able to include updated and accurate resource information across the state. However, First Things First focuses on young families with children from birth to 5 years old and as such, there needs to be consideration in expanding the focus to other areas of the community as well. For instance, the City of Yuma is planning to offer a downtown center that could serve as a potential hub for resources.

A community survey could be conducted through an existing infrastructure, such as the City of Yuma. Many current activities appear to focus on older visitors and their interests and a broader outreach, in particular for the middle-aged residents, needs to be included.

Additional consideration needs to be given to the fact Yuma is also near the border and has many multi-generational homes. There is a feeling that the resources are only geared toward central Yuma. Some people do not have the courage to step into certain environments like the hospital and library. The focus needs to be to meet people where they are and invite them to have a voice at the table with multiple opportunities to meet at multiple different locations. We need to create engagement opportunities and create an inclusive environment without intimidation. Businesses such as barbershops, nail salons, daycares, dollar stores and grocery stores could be places to connect and have partners with the community to provide resources and workshops. Businesses could be the entry to providing information. Those owners need to be part of the discussions to build capacity and resilience for the community. This format has been explored through barbershops by connecting people to skin cancer screening. Non-traditional community places could be good partners to build those connectors and a referral network. The Chamber of Commerce, agriculture growers and civic organizations would also be good connection sources.

## **RESOURCE CENTER CONSIDERATIONS**

Yuma County is excellent at coming up with ideas to meet needs. The challenge is getting these ideas off the ground and out into the community. Resource Centers in our community could have both a physical and digital presence. A brick-and-mortar facility is traditionally thought of as the epitome of a Resource Center; however, such a Resource Center could also include the compilation of resources into a digital format for those who do not want to seek out services in a particular location. Resource Centers could start small and grow organically and exponentially to serve our county, although this process will take time. Organizers need to be patient and build trust. Referrals to Resource Centers could begin within the community through school counselors, school social workers, and churches. Having a digital app, an at-home option, would support those who do not feel comfortable going out. Trained individuals throughout the county could provide a broader ability to share resources available. A rotating group of people educated and skilled at navigating through the system can provide the warm handoff that individuals and families need.

One format for the overarching organization is an independent entity with a largely virtual presence, but with its own employees and volunteers, and an advisory board, in partnership with local organizations. This format is likely the most effective way to communicate and share information, provide networking opportunities, facilitate resources, locate centers, and research and develop the body of resources available. This type of entity would also ensure continuity and longevity. County and City governments should be heavily involved and have buy-in to the entity and its centers. Additionally, the potential use of grant-funded locations would benefit with extra numbers of visitors. A central Resource Center could also provide a solution to the issue of funding for organizations in providing individual services as it combines multiple resources under one set of staff.

A Resource Center could be one large facility or many little ones in different locations. In building Resource Centers in Yuma County, a critical first step is to change the name from Family Resource Centers to Family and Community Resource Centers to broaden the scope. The importance of creating all-inclusive Resource Centers is to ensure more than one agency could be under the same roof. This prevents users from getting lost, as is the potential if they need to drive or walk to another location for additional or different resources. Further, making a list of the core services needed could help with setting up a Resource Center. Health, wellness, and employment could be those core services that then could be added to based on expressed need by the community. Examples of potential expanded needs include food stamp services such as SNAP and childcare services.

It is important to know about in-kind support that already exists that can be leveraged to provide a facility and staff. Rebranding what is already in existence will be necessary so that people can receive outreach and knowledge of where to go for necessary resources. A potential source of staff could be social work students who are looking for internships or learning experiences. Arizona@Work offers paid internship positions. If it is not feasible to staff a Resource Center with all agencies at all times, a possible alternative is hoteling stations as a way where different agencies can use the same location at different days and times to help our communities.

A model of creating a one-stop Resource Center is the Yuma County Health Department that is located in one place as is the Regional Center for Border Health in Somerton. One possibility would be to create one main Resource Center as a hub that serves as the main location for all services and resources with possible smaller Resource Centers in other locations. Different agencies could have a space within this one location. A one-stop center should be open to those who need resources at different hours or on the weekends. Alternatively, the community could establish many Resource Centers in locations that already provide some services. This model placement of the Resource Centers needs to be at locations where individuals have easy access. Looking at a combination of freestanding entities, a mobile unit and facilities connected with existing organizations is possible. Adding a mobile unit would ensure access to the Resource Centers for remote community members.

The biggest challenge to establishing these Resource Centers is finding the funding to set them up. A possible solution is collaborating with organizations such as libraries, schools, and even well-known fast-food corporations who already have the infrastructure in place. These Resource Centers need to be friendly, welcoming, and warm. Schools are another option because they are trusted within their communities and are already a resource for families; however, schools need to be careful due to risks to student safety and as such do not open their doors to the greater community. People think of schools as Resource Centers, but not everyone has children or feels comfortable in a school setting. Therefore, they would need to be supplemented with additional or different locations for Resource Centers. People who need resources at different hours also need to be considered. Additional options include existing community centers, such as the MLK Center, the Clymer Center, and more, which are already used by Parks and Recreation to reach out to the population. Health clinics, churches and senior centers also provide great potential locations. Libraries are friendly and welcoming environments and there are eight locations throughout Yuma County.

Transportation is an issue in Yuma County and resources need to be provided where people are located. Resource outreach should be located at places where people are already going. Since Yuma has deep roots in agriculture, one option is to offer mobile services. It is important to have Resource Centers in every part of the county with extended hours and weekend availability. For remote locations in the county, locations like the Dateland Library which is connected to the Dateland School and Dateland Post Office need to be considered. These existing centers could be used as a resource for various agencies.

Ultimately, the question in determining the location of a Resource Center needs to consider existing foot traffic at established locations and the space available to expand use. It is helpful to look for organizations where people already gather to ensure the ability for spreading the information by word of mouth and visibility. Resource Centers should serve every member in the community with needs to include those who are homeless. Offering a mobile service would bring the resources to where community members are located.

Since the county is reaching out to all the population, Walmart stores could be an ideal but non-traditional location to consider for Resource Centers since many community members go to Walmart. The area around Walmart stores could store different agencies.

Any Resource Center needs to be a venue where people feel safe and feel that people care about them. Locations should consider accessibility, comfort, and security – it should be centralized, easy to get to, and safe. Locating family Resource Centers at existing community hubs like libraries, health centers, and schools should allow for the greatest use of available resources. Doing so also allows each community to pick the best location for its population and greatest needs. The resources provided should cover a broad range of needs. Any organization that takes on the physical space for the family Resource Center needs to be comfortable giving up space for the needs of the center. It cannot be hidden or limited to a corner. For best practices, we should reach out to already established family Resource Centers.

The next challenge after establishing Resource Centers, is confirming their value through community member usage. We need to build the trust necessary to ensure community members will use the Resource Centers. Going to locations that are not traditionally thought of as locations for receiving resources may provide opportunities to connect with community members in need who would not seek out assistance alone. An example might be in Somerton there is a boba shop where a lot of people hang out. Young people go to Starbucks in San Luis and go to the gym to hang out and release stress. A taskforce could host pop-up family Resource Centers at popular community events and places, such as parking lots of local restaurants, near busy bus stops, at local parks, such as the Joe Orduno Park that hold large yard sales and other events, and events like Friday Night Munchies and First Friday's downtown. The community could start the Resource Center first as a 'pop up style' to become established and then work toward sustainability and finding stakeholders. A task force can tie in social media such as TikTok as it is now used across generations. It is important to market and promote resource information with different variations for the different generations such as flyers and social networks.

An additional challenge is reaching those community members who are isolated. Considerations should include partnering with Helping Hands and Catholic Community Services who often reach into this segment of the community. Families in need look for resources right away in the same location, such as food, services, healthcare, and more. Promotoras and other community health workers are trusted individuals who visit homes, reaching these isolated community members and providing information on what people need. Neighborhood specialists could help connect specific sections of the community with resources and build trust with families. Coordination with mobile services and a coordinator or neighborhood specialist would help empower the capacity to bring services to the communities.

## THE PROCESS

A resource hub could help assess what the needs of the individual or household are. Emergency situations can be volatile and require immediate attention in one area with then bridging into other areas that would benefit the household. As such, Resource Center venues should be a soothing, calm environment with comfortable seating to make people feel welcome.

Potential classes should be scheduled based on the requirements of the geographical location needs. A survey should be taken and include the modality preferences. A list of questions should be asked to help direct individuals to the right resources for them and applications available. The County Library offers a similar assistance. Modalities will need to be available to those with disabilities as well.

The development of materials for Resource Centers should begin with speaking directly with the community. The Resource Center should provide the resources community members need. Information, services, and/or materials that will need to be covered at an effective family Resource Center include: food assistance, cash and financial, child care, transportation, domestic violence, medical, mental health, rent assistance, early childhood, behavioral health, job prep and resume writing, pet care and needs, volunteer opportunities, programs available for students, legal assistance, social security, long-term/short-term disability, and the transition to Medicare. Two areas of particular importance to Yuma County are in the areas of mental health and job assistance.

In addition, there will need to be some support for unique needs. For example, families and children that need assistance navigating the McKinney Vento Program, which is for displaced minors that are out of parents' care/home and do not have a fixed residence. A Resource Center should include information centers that take materials that already exist from organizations providing services and should ensure a feeling of equal importance between organizations reflected in the materials.

The materials and the individuals staffing a Resource Center need to be able to assess individual needs of community members that come into the Resource Centers and provide accurate and detailed directions to access the available resources, so the community member doesn't waste time traveling to resources that aren't applicable to their needs. The established entity should gather information for all the organizations and determine what resources they offer. The entity could create a physical and online directory, but it would be best and most helpful to develop a SDOH (Social Determinants of Health) System, or something similar, where families could answer a series of questions and be directly connected with organizations to meet their needs.

Follow-up also needs to happen with families who have received referrals or have used resources to make sure their needs have been met or whether there might be new or different needs. In addition, "first points of contact" need to better understand what resources are available and know that when they make referrals that connections are actually being made.

Organizations could also provide direct links to applications when appropriate or helpful. Centers should also be collecting data on a regular basis to determine whether needs are being met within the community they serve and whether there might be new or different needs that are not being met. Surveys would be a good way to collect data on what is needed within a community. Surveys could be collected at center events or through other means. Family Resource Centers (FRCs) may also best provide a central location to bring those resources to the community members rather than sending them to other locations.

Having one application that people can fill out and can be forwarded to separate agencies would help our community without the need to complete several different forms. In this way, different agencies can learn of the needs that a family has and can reach out to provide services. People need help with filling out applications for various services that a one-stop shop could provide in person. Experts who know the correct way to complete forms can help community members in need. Forms that lack the correct answer can have repercussions to the individual who may miss out on needed services or benefits.

Having one form to complete instead of many would truly help individuals who need various services. There are areas in Maricopa County where one form is being piloted and shared with other agencies who can follow up with applicants. There is also software that can help reach many agencies and require only one form. Cybercom is a language service that can assist those needing information in different languages. There is a Redcap data system that connects families to resources and partners with the Yuma County Health Department. This system supports staff that call families directly on the phone. There is an initial intake with demographic information and needs and then a follow-up is conducted within a month and then two months to ascertain if the household has been able to access the resources needed.

A kiosk station could be made available in several locations to provide availability of resources and consistency. A determination survey could help direct individuals to available resources. Adding specific directions with maps (color-coded) and “warm hand- offs” to individuals that can provide help would be of assistance. A visual map instead of lists would give the community members a more effective guide. Landmarks are continually used to help direct people to locations. Large font would help as well.

Accessibility is an issue and can take various forms. This needs to be considered when focused on reaching the entire county population. For these reasons, materials should be presented in multiple formats and be tailored to the community, both in the information and the formatting, like the photos used for flyers. Formats need to be tailored to different types of individuals, in multiple languages and presented in written format, both digital and paper, as well as in presentations and in-person conversations with community members. Digital formatting can include community calendars, websites, and hyperlinks located on a central website - all with the goal of widening the reach. Additionally, using social media like TikTok, would be a good delivery method. Flyers, pamphlets, and informational booklets could also be used.

The county and the library, along with schools could help share materials with individuals. Adding a tab for community resources on websites would be a form of communication online. Testimonies or shared stories are also valuable in showing how they/others benefited from the resources. A toll-free number for the Resource Center would ensure access to Resource Centers by community members. Billboards could also be effective about getting the word out when the centers first get started. All advertising should also be colorful and eye-catching. One-sheets would also be really helpful – one for each type of service or age group with a QR Code sending them to a website with resource and organization information.

One-on-one meetings with community members in connection with facilitators to tailor the information to the individual would assist with sharing information. Such meetings would begin with a needs assessment, connecting that individual with the then applicable resources and following-up with a survey to ensure that the Resource Center can continue to adapt to the needs of the community.

More direct communication with other people will help build trust. People want to sit down and talk with someone to feel heard and valued. During the pandemic people had to do things virtually and many are tired of interacting through technology and crave personal interaction.

Another potential resource would be peer-to-peer support through Resource Centers to help build support systems for impacted community members. This would require sufficient space in the Resource Center to provide those community gatherings. This space would need to be child friendly and needs to be a welcoming non-judgmental atmosphere. The services provided by Resource Centers need to be advertised to the broader community. Some potential places for the advertising to be placed would be break rooms of large employers, highly trafficked areas such as bathrooms, and billboards.

One of the most effective forms of advertising would be accomplished through empowering families to help other families, from those who have utilized the Resource Center and then taking the information they have learned to others in their network. The advertising of Resource Centers can be grounded in word of mouth from those who have used the Resource Centers. Community members who have used the Resource Centers will best be able to spread the word if they are able to have takeaways from the services received at the Resource Centers.

Staffing is always a concern, so the assistance of technology is critical to be able to connect to outside resources and potentially even make the connection for the community member to the next step. Staffing may be supplemented by internships in connection with those working towards degrees in related fields such as education and social work. Partnering with local higher education institutions to identify potential candidates and bring on interns that are interested in social work and non-profit work is an option for potential staffing.

Staff need to be actively engaged in the community and be trained in what resources currently exist. Those who will work within the family Resource Center will need to be very knowledgeable about what is available, from the front desk representative to the director. Understanding how to navigate it, getting notices on the latest updates that have been made, and hosting regular meetings with users of the guide and those organizations that are included in the guide to ensure that staff is up to date on how the individual organizations operate is key. These staff should be also diverse, as various age groups would feel more comfortable talking with someone from their own age group.

Training should include cultural awareness or competence and should touch on mental health basics. Empathy or sensitivity would be an important part of the training program. Having training on how to work with others is so crucial and should include being empathetic in order to interact appropriately with others.

Crisis communication skills are key to defusing situations so that people can process what they need in a traumatic circumstance. Trauma-informed communication techniques are essential, in particular when people are in an emergency situation. This helps people know how to interact with diverse community members that have gone through difficult experiences in life.

Not utilizing appropriate communication skills can lose the person who is seeking assistance. De-escalation training is important to be able to work with others so that people can be at a mindset so they can share what they need. The restorative practices should include conflict resolution training. Training for staff also needs to include training in ethical boundaries, including FERPA, confidentiality, customer service training and self-care.

To help with the above goals, training could also include the teaching of various communication methods – certain methods seem to work better than others do.

Training should be for employees and volunteers. Training would be conducted in both directions – by the established center entity to the organizations, employees and volunteers, and by the organizations to center employees and volunteers. Group training would likely be the most efficient method and should occur as needed related to turnover or growth. However, training should be determined based on the needs of each community center and should be flexible. Staff and volunteers should be trained initially, and the training should be refreshed annually. Realistically, training never really stops for anyone who is working within the Resource Center. The county requires a certain number of hours of training to be done on a regular basis.

## STAKEHOLDERS/TASK FORCE

Everyone in the community needs to be involved at various levels and to varying extents to ensure the success of Resource Centers. The task force mentioned during this town hall should be involved in building this program from the ground up. The sooner they are brought on board, the better. Holding a summit would be a good start. Bringing stakeholders together as a taskforce or forum can provide a venue to share the benefits that go to the community and those benefits that will then be reflected on the agency or business or educational institution.

There is an investment and a return on that investment. This should be tackled at different levels, including the advocates, the community, and the agencies. This would allow for a streamlined and continuous process. The task force would also work on understanding the operational processes and complexities of each organization and the resulting challenges. Part of that process would be identifying how we overcome those challenges.

The task force should operate as a board with at least one hired position. The board and director would oversee bringing agencies together and looking at the data. Additionally, the task force would need to show data with the beneficial results of the work when resources are available to families. A good example of this format is the Foundation of Yuma Regional Medical Center Board. Under this structure, community members serve on the board with a paid director to carry out the activities designated by the board. Members of the board become primary stakeholders and have the buy-in in directing actions to serve the community.

However, specific important outside stakeholders to consider include: City of Yuma; County of Yuma; medical providers; elected officials; lawmakers; school officials, government officials, community leaders, local media, the key organizations already offering services, such as First Things First; the county health department; the food bank; businesses large and small; medical professionals; Rotary clubs; service clubs; faith-based organizations; veteran services; Arizona Complete Health; AHCCCS; Banner; Yuma Regional Medical Center; higher education institutions, especially those fields that have required internships and trainings; school districts; law enforcement; court systems; military; those agencies that see the most people (police, fire, Emergency Medical Services); children's services; housing; the Department of Public Services; Arizona Public Service; Yuma County Area Transit (YCAT); Southwest Arizona Human Resource Association; restaurants (fast food and other); homeless that are willing to be involved; the LGBTQ community; and families.

Households in Yuma County are the customers of large businesses. People will go to businesses who serve their needs well. This connection needs to be made known to businesses so that they buy back into the community. Walmart has health hubs where you can receive different healthcare services. There is buy-in and use from the community. This could represent a model and experience in serving the greater community and could possibly have funds. These members could be invited to the table to obtain buy-in.

One coordination process for the stakeholders as a steppingstone to more involvement would be to use existing stakeholders' websites by placing a hyperlink to Resource Centers for further resources. This would be an effective and easy way to spread the word and connection of Resource Centers. To ensure visibility, this information would need to be on the first screen of websites.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Staffing sustainability of the Resource Centers should be encouraged through volunteers from stakeholder organizations, such as schools. This ensures long-term buy-in from individual community members. Once established the Resource Center will need to be sustained. Ensuring continuity and sustainability can be done through establishing buy-in by organizations through peer pressure; everyone else is doing it so we should too. To sustain the buy-in, it will be important to share the why through testimonials from community members who have benefited from the Resource Centers. The testimonials can be presented both digitally, such as social media, and in presentations to leadership. Presentation to the community is necessary to expand knowledge of the Resource Centers by the community, while presentations to leadership of stakeholders ensures continued buy-in.

To do all this work there will need to be staff for the Resource Center along with the paid executive director. The paid positions would need to be funded, not just initially but also sustained into the future. Hired staff (several positions) would be needed to keep information up to date. There needs to be a team with specific roles that have accurate information. First Things First has a taskforce of volunteers that are currently updating the resource guide, but it will likely need to be shifted to paid personnel to ensure sustainability. People that represent and share the lived experience of our county are probably the best recruits to pull from to understand the circumstances and help those people in need. Another source would be to use our existing pipeline of students as a source of potential recruits for careers. This is a structure already in place that could be more greatly utilized.

As such, funding will be a big piece for ensuring sustainability. Funding this entity and these centers is the most significant challenge. To begin with, organizations who already have budgets for these types of activities could use those funds to help fund the entity and centers. This would also be true for human capital. In addition, grant funding will likely be essential. Connecting with stakeholder organizations with the process of grant writing will keep stakeholders engaged in the process. Many organizations have philanthropic entities that could provide funding or grants. The staff could seek out further grants to keep the Resource Center funded and sustained. There are grants that can be combined and partnered on that can fund and sustain various agencies. Collaboration on grants is key to obtaining these funds. It is also possible to reach out to elected officials at the national level for needed funds.

Being structured as a resource hub, the Resource Center can act as a place where collaboration is accomplished, and agencies do not compete for funds since the agencies are together under one umbrella. A regional grant that shows collaboration and greater coverage has more opportunities to be chosen. Keeping a regional focus when submitting for grants will give us more opportunity to receive funds. We will need data and metrics to establish needs and track progress. Another alternative is to mirror the high schools' social media to fund certain programs.

Linking grant money from Resource Centers or other umbrella organizations to providing services and volunteering with the Resource Centers would also help to ensure sustainability. This is coupled with the advantage to the organization of the exposure at the Resource Centers. The next step to tying the obligations to the grants is to establish a set schedule of when the organizations will come in to provide services at the Resource Centers. This step is necessary to ensure that community members can continue to come back and rely on the availability of the resources beyond their initial visit. Agencies could rotate monthly to service the Family Resource Center and provide resources on certain days of the month to sustain continuity.

The other aspect of ensuring sustainability of Resource Centers is to ensure continued buy-in from stakeholders. Collaboration with community members is important and surveys should be sent to agencies to ensure that the information listed is accurate.

Leveraging existing resources and focusing on growing employees from current residents can be very beneficial to Yuma County and can sustain Resource Centers through staffing. There should be talks in the middle school and high school levels informing students of careers that are available to help others in Yuma County and provide incentive to stay in Yuma County. This exposure helps students focus on what they want and what they have options for in the future in public service careers.

To encourage sustainability of information access in the community, new businesses could be given a resource guide at their start up.

There are a number of areas that can assist with utilizing and sustaining equitable information to the Yuma County community. It is important to recognize that the faith community can reach more people than we realize. They can help share resources in their announcements, counseling, and activities. Networking with private and charter schools can also assist with information sharing.

In order to leverage resources as a community and build engagement, we need to establish an outreach plan including social media (i.e. TikTok, Instagram, etc.), print, radio (i.e. Jennifer Blackwell), email, and more. To gain momentum, we could host a contest for community members to create an eye-catching logo for the Family Resource Centers. This will create community buzz and spread awareness. Face-to-face communications are the best way to connect and ensure stakeholders continue to be engaged. Additionally, stakeholders are also more likely to stay engaged if the general community is engaged. Specifically, data needs to be shared with stakeholders to keep them engaged together with the stories of who was helped and how they were helped. Data in numbers is needed but stories touch people's hearts. Being able to transition people from those being helped to those helping others has a great impact on the community. A survey could be conducted to see how connected people feel to the community and share with community stakeholders so they understand how they can help.

Monthly or yearly meetings and trainings for Resource Centers' staffs will be necessary for sustainability of the knowledge base necessary to keep Resource Centers effective. Along with consistent outreach by Resource Centers to organizations that Resource Centers are referring to, it is important to ensure providing the most up to date information. Stakeholders will continue to see the value if they know their organization's information is accurate.

Yuma County is known for its collaborations that are successful and help our community members. Finding solutions to an equitable way of sharing important information on resources will help our residents to a better quality of life.

## **SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH**



# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Lake Havasu City Community Town Hall

October 16, 2023 – Lake Havasu City, AZ



# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Lake Havasu City Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equality is not the same as equity. Providing equitable access to opportunities and resources creates equality and benefits the entire community.

Equity is giving equal opportunity that matches the person's needs. Equity distributes resources and opportunities to provide everyone with a chance to succeed. It incorporates fairness and value and applies to all socio-economic levels.

Equity looks at where someone comes from and how we can provide individual services and resources to them that would be most helpful to their success. It means meeting people where they're at—meeting them with grace and providing them with what they need to succeed. It also means providing education that will help their success and filling the gaps that create barriers.

Equity has impacted the Lake Havasu City area in many areas including inequitable access to housing, transportation, and childcare as well as inequitable access to medical and other services. Inequitable access to these resources prevents people from maximizing their economic and professional opportunities.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is important. Without an equitable approach we are missing important opportunities to have people reach their potential. Providing unique services and opportunities for individual improvement and advancement provides a better society for all.

Technology is one example. Equitable access to technology can help people to get jobs, needed resources and even basic needs like groceries.

The goal should be to reach everyone in different and unique ways as needed to reach their full potential. Too often we do not do this. Rather, instead of trying to let people reach their full potential, we lower expectations. We should reverse this trend. Losing isn't failure. Failure is just an opportunity to learn and improve.

For people in at-risk communities, equitable support might include providing life skills, education, economic opportunities, and classes that will help them to be productive members of society.

The measurement to determine what each community needs should come from the local level. Communities need to look at what we have and how best to uniquely support our people. Funding from government should be done in terms of a long-term investment in the potential of people and should allow communities greater say in how to equitably meet needs such as housing.

One size doesn't fit all. An equitable approach takes this into account.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest opportunities to use equity as an approach for improving healthcare outcomes include:

1. Educating the community about different aspects that will make healthcare services better and more accessible.
  - a. For example, educate people about the differences between emergencies vs. urgent care.

- b. Enhance or support parent education and engagement through the schools—such as the differences between telehealth, the emergency room, and urgent care as well as preventative care options.
  - c. Use broad communication strategies to educate the public.
  - d. Incorporate education that focuses on prevention measures.
  - e. Improve outreach about existing services such as mobile health care. For education and outreach, utilize patient care workers, community health workers or peer support specialists.
  - f. Depoliticize health care discussions, including around vaccinations.
  - g. Provide education to providers about trauma informed care and ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences).
2. Improve provider rates, which will lead to more prevention.
    - a. Explore more grant funding to offset the cost of services.
    - b. Look for ways to improve access by reevaluating bureaucracy and eliminating redundancies such as referrals.
  3. Have a concerted effort to attract and retain providers.
    - a. Growing our own: Recruit people who already have roots here and provide educational opportunities, including for support staff.
    - b. Specifically target recruitment of mental health and dental providers.
    - c. Providing more preventative care by lowering the requirements for the licenses needed by providers. Alternatively, because this education is very expensive, explore providing additional financial support for obtaining these licenses.
    - d. With respect to clinical providers: there is a high turnover due to the cost of living. Look at how to address the housing problem.
    - e. Enhance programs that recruit and retain more instructors and providers.
    - f. Increase vocational training in local institutions to add to the pool of providers in all areas.
  4. Transportation is a barrier or an opportunity for improvement. Providing transportation options for those who can't afford to drive to Phoenix would make health care more equitable and accessible.
  5. Prioritize gaps in service: Enhance funding for providers, provide educational opportunities for providers and those in the pipeline, enhance education and incentives around preventative care, and provide support staff at the school level (counselors, nurses etc.).

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

1. We need to educate the public about the difference between services, such as telemedicine and the ER. This could specifically include an app or service on mobile phones. It also includes flyers and infomercials in office waiting rooms and other areas, including back to school nights.
2. We also should try to create a uniform resource guide available to everyone.
3. To grow our own in the healthcare fields, we could host a Career Day for high school students about careers in the healthcare fields and available grants, etc.
4. For solutions we need a Top Down/Bottom-up approach.
  - a. This could include schools getting people together to determine what they need and then providing this to decision makers and elected officials.
  - b. Prioritize resources based on needs with more conversations similar to this and drill down to specific recommendations).
5. Create a collective impact approach to apply for federal and other funding.

6. Involve public private partnerships for outreach and education.
7. Housing: The Arizona legislature needs to give back local control for short term rentals
8. Provide Incentives for families to live near senior citizens.
9. Local leaders and collaborators should look for ways to collaborate including transportation across jurisdictional boundaries.

Specialized teams or work groups could be established that are comprised of people knowledgeable in the area and members of the public. They can then provide recommendations to leaders and stakeholders.

Equity is not just about the services themselves. It is how we communicate services so that everyone can learn about them.

Everyone should act as a team instead of in silos. These actions and priorities are everyone's responsibility.

## 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 Lake Havasu City Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Share the information I learned today with our partner agencies and in our community health associations.
- Research Telemed with insurance company.
- Fund a group interested in working on marketing and advertise.
- Continue to work with community stakeholders to improve our community. The connection made will facilitate my efforts.
- Find opportunities to collaborate with community providers, services, and organizations.
- Take gained information back to my employer.
- Educate my team about equity vs. equality.
- Discuss how we care for members and employees.
- Try to move the work of the coalitions I attend to bring everyone together.
- Share the information learned in this session with all who will listen.
- Continue to collaborate with community organizations to provide equitable services for all!
- Speak with the Director of Mohave Community College about opportunities within the community.
- Connect with community partners to create systemic change and increase awareness of the needs in Lake Havasu City.
- Commit to staying involved and being a partner and advocate at whatever level needed to make progress possible for our community.

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# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Bullhead City Community Town Hall

October 17, 2023 – Bullhead City, AZ



# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Bullhead City Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is meeting people where they are at. Different people have different needs and may be at different stages of their journey. Equality is giving the same thing to everyone.

Equality gives everyone equal opportunities to reach new potential such as with education assistance. Stripping away titles is another equality principle when it comes to getting input. Equitable provision of resources can lead to equality.

The difference between equity and equality can also be influenced by perceptions. For some, there can be concerns about what is fair when it comes to equitable principles.

In rural areas there are many opportunities for more equitable approaches. For example, People in rural areas are often tasked with wearing more hats to accomplish the things that need to be done due to lack of resources. There are also greater transportation challenges than in urban areas that impact the ability to get people to the resources that will make them successful.

In sum, equity is looking at what needs an individual or a community has and how best to meet their needs.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach allows us to identify what individuals and different communities need so we can better provide the unique resources they need to become successful. Having a responsible and relevant connection to local needs allows us to better serve them. Having relevant resources available to clients also better suits their needs.

When people value themselves and their jobs and are given opportunities and resources it increases their availability to perform efficiently and increase productivity for the individual, the community, and the state.

There are specific areas such as housing and grants where this approach would benefit the community. Youth is another group where an equitable approach is helpful.

We need to give youth the tools and education to develop critical thinking skills to overcome obstacles. This includes involving parents to support youth in overcoming these obstacles. Self-advocacy and coping skills also will allow youth to better self-express and grow effectively.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

Many of our limited resources are being used on repeat patients with mental health issues. The problem just gets pushed around instead of looking at the root cause. We could better use prevention tools and resources to more equitably address these challenges.

To better address prevention, we need to provide more education and communication about the resources that are available and how community members can best access and use the community resources we have. This includes providing social and emotional development education to parents and caregivers and healthcare challenges relating to youth that focus on prevention. Focusing on proactive measures to treat issues before they become insurmountable is critical. When we don't do this - we create more health care costs and an increased burden on our overall economy.

Adding more personnel would also create a more effective approach to solving our community health issues.

From the top down, we need to have new and creative thinking that meets people where they're at, moving away from traditional models and creating diversity at the highest levels so we become more diverse and flexible in finding solutions to the challenges we have.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

We need to grow our own with more medical tracks in high school. We also should focus on making higher education more affordable.

Public transportation is available but very challenging during the summer heat, we can create more shade and other options to make it easier to take public transportation in the summer.

A destigmatization campaign to reduce the stigma around seeking would help immensely in addressing mental health. We all can be a part of such an effort.

As a community we need to come together to create unified and more easily accessible community resources, so people know how to access them.

We need increased access to healthcare, healthcare providers, detox centers and even housing. One example for creating more housing is building affordable housing for students and teachers –an effort that creates a hand up instead of a handout.

We all need to come together to create change. It begins with creating awareness both through individual connections and other broader communication efforts. We also need to identify stakeholders and those with authority to create change—bringing them into the discussion and the effort to create change.

## 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 Bullhead City Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Be the Change!
- Work with the community members to start a committee for affordable housing, barriers to education, barriers to employment and healthcare to address community needs in these deficits.
- Help bring more community stakeholders participate in the next town hall.
- Think about health equity, in young children, youth and family can affect change.
- Do my best to help others to gain the resources and knowledge of what they have available in our community.
- Share the information I learned and see how we can help on the local level.
- Continue to challenge the status quo, continue fighting, and pushing.
- Listen and learn more from the community in order to support change from my level.
- Educate myself further on issues that affect more than myself and the community as a whole.
- Commit to bringing together the various resources of communities together to “force multiply” their efforts and effectiveness.
- Open my mouth and share the knowledge I have with members of the community where I meet them.
- Listen to my client’s needs.

- Assist them in locating resources.
- Advocate for needed resources.
- Continue to support others.
- Make a difference.
- Engage with more resources that can address needs of the elderly.
- Identify the needs of individuals and rural communities.
- Talk to management about attending a Town Hall meeting.
- Push for better solutions for healthcare.
- Continue to advocate with my agency to bring increased mobile services to community members, including integrated care.
- Commit to working on community outreach and bringing resources together.
- Discuss new ideas.

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# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Kingman Community Town Hall

October 17, 2023 – Kingman, AZ

*An equitable approach is super important, especially for Mohave County where people have to work harder than other more urban communities to obtain a better quality of life, specifically with housing, transportation, social and court services.*

## 2021-2025 AZHIP PRIORITIES



"Arizona Health Improvement Plan Summary Document, 2021 – 2025." Arizona Department of Health Services. June 2021. <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/operations/strategic-initiatives/azhip-2021-2025.pdf>.

# Creating Access to Resources in Rural Arizona Kingman Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is meeting people's needs and meeting them where they are. It means distributing resources to everyone in a way that provides opportunities on an individual need's basis. It allows everyone to get to the finish line together while incorporating principles of personal responsibility. It is providing equal opportunity to access the tools for success. It increases the opportunity to overcome both known and unknown barriers, addresses social determinants of health and takes lived wisdom and experiences into account.

It may mean extra services to veterans or students so they can succeed, services to families—especially those with children—or investment opportunities and support for small business. It also means additional investment in rural areas of Arizona for transportation, housing, and other services.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is super important, especially for Mohave County where people have to work harder than other more urban communities to obtain a better quality of life, specifically with housing, transportation, social and court services.

Listening and hearing what people really need can help to create a bridge to the resources needed as can reducing the stigma for seeking assistance. It's important to let people know about programs that do exist and we need additional resources—including in our schools.

Programs like the WIOA (Workforce Investment Opportunity Act) program that specifically targets the needs of those in the program and provides services that allow for economic mobility are important. These types of programs provide additional access to education which is an investment in the community that helps the overall community economy.

To have a more equitable and successful community, we need to revisit historic and "old boy" systems that do not provide equal opportunities for success. If we don't allow everyone to come to the table, we are not going to succeed as a community. We need to create a culture that is attractive to young people and that invests in their success. We need to maximize our resources to support all of our children because they are our future. We need them for our community to be successful.

**In 2019, there were 80.1 providers per 100,000 residents in urban areas. In rural towns, the ratio was only 10.1 providers per 100,000 residents.**

**In some rural areas, the nearest medical care can be nearly 80 minutes of drive time away.**

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

We should focus on growing our own--giving equitable opportunities to local people to become health care providers. This type of action and others, such as scholarship waivers, can help fill the void of serviced providers. We have serious shortages of doctors, nurse practitioners, optometrists, specialists, and other healthcare providers and this is impacting the ability of our community to thrive.

Barriers to care also include red tape, such as when health care cards are changed that create access challenges. With a lack of local providers, there are challenges with having to travel out of the county for services. It would be helpful to have agreements with other states for services since it is sometimes easier in this tristate area to get to service in neighboring states.

Housing is healthcare. Providing equitable housing services will improve health care and health outcomes. Our aging population is especially impacted by these issues.

Expanding outreach, using prevention tools, and providing more mental health services and rehabilitation services would help address many of our needs—including the rise in suicides. We have major issues in our community with substance use and mental health. Yet, those who need help are not able to get the help they need in a timely manner. We need to address changes that are needed with our healthcare systems—including major barriers and challenges with Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

1. Access to resources.
  - a. Investigate and research local resources to provide a holistic approach.
  - b. Educate providers about resources.
2. Collaborate and partner.
  - a. Work with partners who can provide resources to reduce transportation barriers.
  - b. Convene stakeholders, community leaders, government councils and community members to get buy-in and to use their influence to make a difference.
3. Find a way to effectively address the “good old boy” system.
4. Individual action: It begins with each of us.
  - a. We all need to treat each other with love and care.
  - b. Live a healthy lifestyle and employ self-care.
5. Looking at changes to laws that govern about how wages impact access to Medicare and Medicaid to make it more equitable.
6. Insurance companies could work on how to get people cross state lines to get services when it is more convenient.
7. Incentives to get doctors to come to rural areas—even if just for a day or one day a month.

## 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 Kingman Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Spend time helping people who are elderly.
- Organize meds or visit talk to the elderly so they aren't lonely and stay happy.
- Use my skills, talents, and voice to be an agent of change.
- Talk about inequities and do my best to work toward equity.
- Work with an organization on writing.
- Continue to advocate for my community in any way possible.
- Whether that is more community outreach, collaboration with other entities or offering my own services.
- Better educate myself to do as much as I can to help in the areas I can.
- Reach out to additional resources to educate myself on the subject to further assist the community and state I reside in.
- Commit to learning more about Mohave Community College's current offerings.
- Work to find a member of our healthcare community that is interested in joining Kingman Economic Development Commission to include their perspective as we look at moving forward so we can build better together.
- Be dedicated to creating equitable environments and support systems to increase educational attainment and economic mobility for all!
- Keep the needs of the community in mind while trying to serve as many as possible with the available resources.
- Continue to have a vision of an equitable future.
- Advocate for others' needs.
- Speak out against misinformation.
- Continue providing services to those who are in need.
- Continue to gain new knowledge to use in the behavioral health field.
- Be a resource for others and assist all others to get the help and care they may need in the field of healthcare.
- Find areas and information in the community to better relate and discuss equity with others in the community.
- Work on bringing in new housing developments specifically for low income and workforce housing.
- Work with businesses to provide high paying jobs and identify training MCC can help provide.
- Continue to advocate for system involved youth opportunities in education, employment, healthcare, and community involvement.
- Speak with the members of my community about the issues in Kingman.
- Continue to work towards fair and equitable services including Housing for SMI Clients.
- Provide JEDI (Justice, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) training to community members.
- Be part of the community discussion and help find solutions.
- Continue to be a resource through our "no wrong door" policy and connect individuals in need with resources.

- Take what I have learned tonight and utilize it within the judicial system.
- Address my concerns and community needs so we can be heard and have some changes made.
- Continue to advocate for my community.
- Work with people so that we can achieve equity in our area.
- Be the Change.
- Do the next right thing.
- Help as many people as I can.
- Lead by example.
- Type up my notes.
- Give Phone Number to the KRMC research director for the upcoming CHA.
- Embrace a positive future.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



***Housing is healthcare.  
Providing equitable housing services will improve  
health care and health outcomes.***

# Equity and Identity Future Leaders Town Hall

October 18, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



*An equitable approach is vital to our community, state, and country.  
An equitable approach helps society, changing one person at a time for  
the benefit of the community at large.*

# Equity and Identity Future Leaders Town Hall

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## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is giving people what they need so they can be the best person they can be. It provides people with opportunity and gives those who need more what they need to succeed. It is finding that sweet spot where everyone has what they need to meet their full potential. Equity helps uplift people and can include providing Pell grants, food stamps or other resources that put people on the same playing field.

Equality by contrast is providing people with the basic rights that everyone deserves.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

In a capitalist society it is challenging to be equitable. Nonetheless, an equitable approach is important to reach those who have the greatest needs and to make opportunities to succeed more fair. An equitable approach elevates all members of the community to a higher level. Without an equitable approach, people in need will crumble while those above will thrive.

An equitable approach is vital to our community, state, and country. An equitable approach helps society, changing one person at a time for the benefit of the community at large.

The people of our state have immense potential and we should choose to invest in our communities. This investment will propel us into the future of education innovation and a more ideal society.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

Equity in practice is giving people proper representation and voice, including in education, health care, employment services, housing and throughout local government. It provides opportunities to those who need it, including children and those who identify as LGBTQ+.

We can improve our community if we stop taking away the rights of those who identify as LGBTQ+. It is not only not equitable to take away their rights, but also not treating them equally. Equity means providing housing and resources to the LGBTQ+ youth as they often are kicked out of their homes because their parents do not support them. Instead of taking away people's rights, we should have compassion for them.

Phoenix is a diverse city and would be a great starting point for using equity as a principle whether for housing or through other methods. Phoenix can lead equity efforts and be an example for the rest of the state. Thrift shops, YWCAs, and food banks are all examples of places that are equity based and help improve communities by establishing communities that combine all these aspects.

We all have the opportunity to help our community using equity as an approach for doing so. We can find these opportunities at every level of our state. This starts with education, participating in democracy, and calling on our elected officials to legislate for the better good and purpose of equity.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

There are a multitude of actions that can be taken to address the issues we are facing--primarily it means focusing on equity as a whole. For example, we can advocate for an economic bill of rights which would outline the basics of equity that every person deserves. Those in government should also acknowledge the importance of social justice as an important concept within governmental systems.

Our elected leaders have the power to address these issues and they work for us. We have the power to address these issues at the polls and by making our voices heard. Voting is very important—especially for people who care about people and everyone’s rights as opposed to those who are just in office for power. People are more important than power. We need to hold our state representatives accountable for advocating for marginalized communities. We should have them abolish bills that do not have integrity and that do not support marginalized communities who are targeted.

Providing testimony about firsthand experiences is important as is protesting. We need to all have conversations about the rights and needs of the LGBTQ+ community and be allies and supporters wherever we can.

Over policing has traumatized marginalized communities. Focusing on community services over policing is important and can promote more equitable communities. The government has historically favored those in power over everyone else. To make up for this, the government should provide additional housing and job opportunities for those who need it.

State and local government have the power to change communities on a micro scale. Cultural leaders also have immense power in our media heavy society.

We are the generation of the future. We are the government of the future. We are the future.

## 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 Equity and Identity Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Give platforms to marginalized groups.
- Turn my art into saleable pieces which will take a while, but I will do anything in my power to get to that kind of skill.
- Look at others in an equal way even if they are not like me. I will help and stand with them.
- Be kind and respectful every day.
- Do a good turn daily.
- Keep doing my best.
- Stand up for myself towards injustices, and even for my fellow minorities in order to make changes, even if it is on a minor level.
- Stand up for what is right and what I believe in. I will not give in to bigots.
- As a marginalized youth, speak out for those in the community like me that cannot speak for themselves.
- Help stand for those who are treated unjustly or those who cannot stand on their own.
- Connect with my community to provide ways to amplify our voices.
- Advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and equality.
- Stand up for myself and others around me.

- Be kind to all the best I can!
- Vote for the people who will help the community and want change, especially vote for the people who support LGBTQ+ rights.
- Vote for the right people, donate to LGBTQ programs, and unionize for LGBTQ rights in the workplace.
- Unionize my workplace.
- Continue to help those I need to.

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ARIZONA COMMUNITY  
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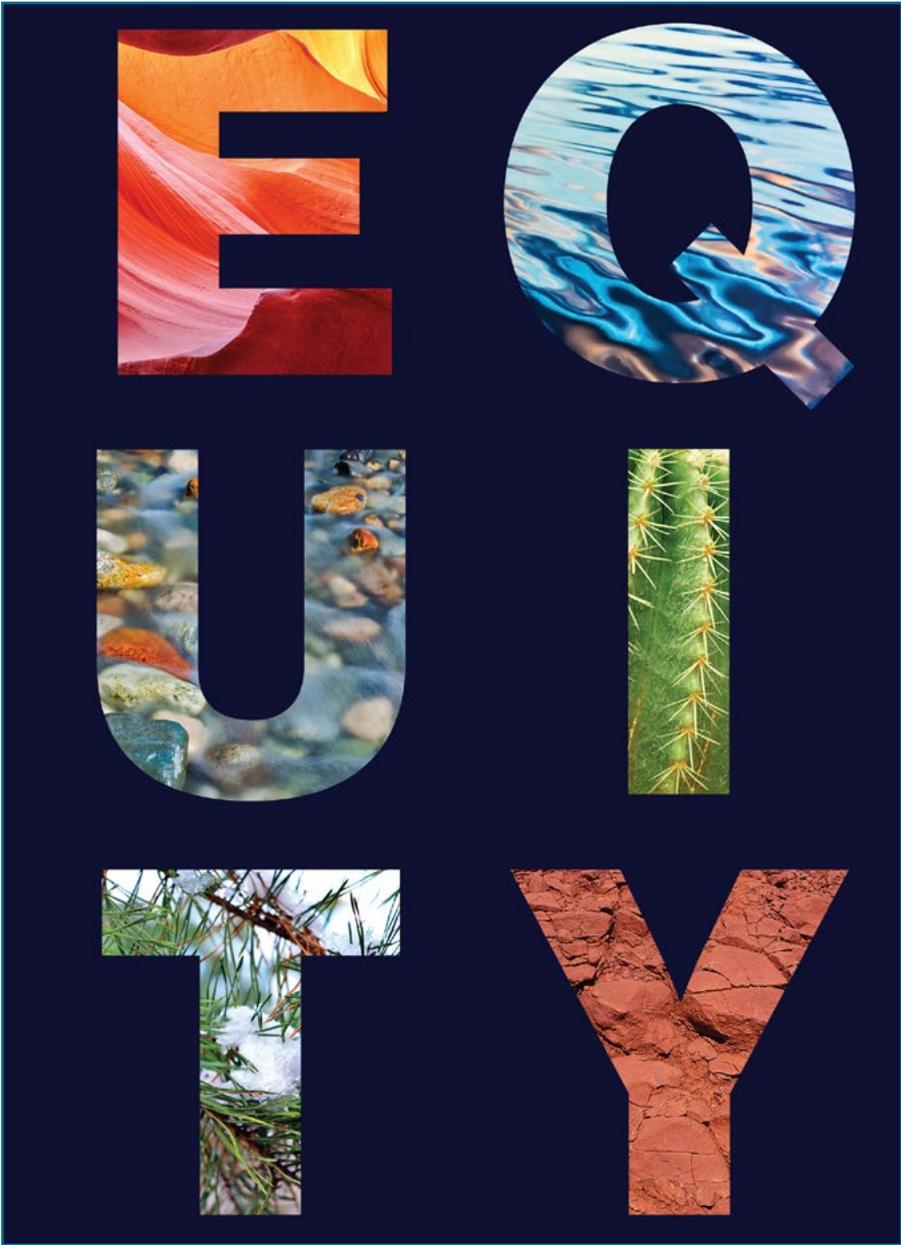
Kellenberger + Tollefson  
Center for LGBTQ Philanthropy



*Focusing on community services over policing is important  
and can promote more equitable communities.*

# Mesa Community College Future Leaders Town Hall

October 18, 2023 - Mesa, AZ



# Mesa Community College Future Leaders Town Hall

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## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is recognizing that not everyone starts life at the same point or progresses through life at the same rate. It focuses on tailoring resources to those diverse needs. Equality is making available a range of resources and addressing systemic barriers. We all have personal and professional experiences that reflect the diversity of these challenges.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Taking an equitable approach to resources distribution not only takes into account and accommodates diverse needs, but it also requires there to be open process and consideration of a range of ideas. Equity isn't just about identifying areas of need but also listening to each other on how society can better distribute resources on a systemic level for the sake of the greater good.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

Opportunities for improvement are present especially in areas vital to individual and collective development such as education, workforce/career development, housing, immigrant rights. The challenge is in finding ways to lower barriers across the board and address inequity in resource access and distribution amongst the different demographics in Arizona.

## IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Equity in Southern Arizona Community Town Hall

October 19, 2023 – Nogales, AZ



# Equity in Southern Arizona Community Town Hall

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## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is realizing that because we all come from different backgrounds, we need different resources to succeed. Our identity and the way in which we were raised have a direct influence on the way we think. Equity refers to being given the appropriate tools to achieve their goals because everyone has a different starting point and cannot access the same resources. Equality, on the other hand, is being fair and treating everyone equally, regardless of their background. Realizing this might create a deeper sense of justice.

Inequity has caused different challenges in our community. Examples can be found both in education and immigration. For instance, children living in similar areas might receive a different quality of education because of the background and the conditions of their families. Not all young people are given the same opportunities, and some families have had to fight to be given equal access to the education that their children receive. Another example of inequity relates to the treatment of immigrants. Oftentimes, speaking a different language becomes a reason for treating people unequally. Beyond linguistic limitations, it's important to listen to each other as well as work with respect and understanding other people's positions.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

It's extremely important to have an equitable approach. To really overcome the problems in our community, it is important to understand where we come from. An equitable approach is also important here in Nogales because it's a unique community. Many do not appreciate the fact that this is a bilingual community, and many people end up having to move somewhere else to get a job.

An equitable approach is also relevant when it comes to funding priorities. We are spending lots of money on war right now, while there are people here who would benefit from increased funding in education, healthcare, and mental health. An equitable approach is realizing that bureaucracy is an additional challenge to the well-being of a community. It's important to make sure that everyone has the same opportunity, for instance, with education and jobs. Making sure that we are promoting opportunities to everyone in the community, making it easy for people to know of resources that might apply to them. It's important to take everyone into consideration when making decisions. For instance, students need to have the same opportunities, especially when it comes to students with disabilities.

Having an equitable approach could have a great impact on building not only a better state but also a better nation.

## IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

There are different opportunities to use equity as an approach to improve our community including employment, education, and housing. One of these is employment opportunities. For instance, people with a felony or substance use history face significant challenges in finding a job. Those in recovery might start feeling motivated to start from scratch and get a job, but once they start to look for one it's like they crash into a wall. It's difficult to find good employment opportunities that are willing to take them.

Another group that might benefit from an equity approach in employment opportunities is women. There are few opportunities for mothers who don't have childcare—this is different from what men go through. A woman needs to work harder because she must work but also needs to take care of her children. Salaries for women are not high enough, and many of them are overqualified for their positions, but they end up accepting it because they need to take care of their children.

Education is another opportunity to use an equity approach. It's important to give good opportunities to students, from kindergarten to college. Oftentimes times students struggle because they don't have the support or resources needed to plan the next steps to go to college. We need to have better access to resources such as scholarships.

We could also use an equity approach in the way we treat older generations. We oftentimes overlook the knowledge and abilities that older generations might have and how they could contribute to our society.

The government has a big role to play in addressing equity. There are too many policies that have been created and enacted without understanding how they affect people on the ground. Reaching equity means understanding that people own all the knowledge. Politicians need to see from the point of view of each person when they create policies. Government and grantmaking agencies need to be consistent with their help and show true support. They should not disappear after a grant period ends, they should provide follow-ups and be persistent in the support they can give. Collaboration is important to achieve equity. We need to work together with the county and the state to solve issues together.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

There are different opportunities to apply equity. First, collaborate and talk to each other. Agencies and organizations should work together as a team. It's important to share all the available resources and spread the knowledge because you never know when a family member or a friend will need it. Social media can make this easier.

Each of us can play a role in addressing equity. Let's have an open mind, understanding that things can change at any point and that things could be improved if we want to. Equity starts from our family and our communities. For instance, let's have more patience with older community members. They might need more help understanding how technology works. There's always a way to help people in need, and in case you don't know how to help, just listen to those in need and see what role you can play. Once we start addressing equity individually, it can have a domino effect, where everyone will be able to contribute to a better future.

***"This program impacts people to take action for change."***

## 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 Equity in Southern Arizona Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Continue to seek more opportunities in our community.
- Promote a culture of equity—being aware and creating awareness of how to improve our environment.
- Utilizar la informacion lacual tengo e implento para informar a la comunidad donde pertenece.
- Continue to show empathy and resources to my community. I have hope for this community that it can get better.
- Teach the comments with my family and friends.
- Continue to advocate and support.
- Learn about our communities' inequities to give the next generation an opportunity to be the next Martin Luther King Jr.!
- Share the new information and new ideas to improve equity in my program. Change begins with me!
- Change my thinking about different people (race, behavior, etc.).
- Never criticize people for how they act.
- Cambiar para ser mas empatica con mis semejantes y empezar a cambiar mi pensar para mejorar nuestra comunidad.
- Respect everybody no matter what race or what thoughts they have.
- Cambiar mi pensamiento conductual, para poder aceptar a las personas sin importer sus preferencias cualquiera que fueran.
- Ser equitativa.
- Otorgando informacion de los programas que esten en mi conocimiento.
- A cambiar mi entendimiento y empaticar con las personas a mi alrededor, asi como las personas ajenas a mi o nuevas en mi vida.
- Hay muchas acciones como colaborar, ayudar, tener empatia, comuncar con nosotros y la comunidad, dar tu opinion, y promover los valores. Todo inicia con uno mismo.
- Hold listening circles to better understand problems and solutions for our community's access to mental health services.
- Help the community as a young person in school.
- Try to seek and find the answer to making equity with all my school mates.
- Ayudar a la comunidad en todo lo que pueda aportar.
- Hacer grupos de ayuda para las personas de la tercera edad.
- Ayudar a madres que son amas de casa.
- Share my knowledge on the standards for culturally linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) to other agencies and friends to allow everyone to understand with icons not just words.
- Utilizer la informacion que recabe sobre mis comunidades para disenar planes de accion.
- Spread the word to people I know and the youth.
- Encourage youth to speak up on thoughts they have about the community and how it is equitable for all.
- Educate my family and friends over the differences between equality and equity.

- Sharing information about disparities in the community over social media.
- Empezar por nuestra sociedad y redes sociales, así llegar a más gente para participar en todos los programas.
- Start at a basic level, make an impact at my school.
- Be the voice of many students so that the problems most people talk about may subside when students get to adult life.
- Run for county supervisor.
- Participate in different spaces where I can help our community.
- Empezare siendo más empática con las necesidades de las personas en nuestra comunidad, instruyendome y educandome y de esta forma contribuir a una sociedad más estable en todas las áreas y niveles de la sociedad.
- Ayudar poniendo mi granito de arena en lo posible. Hay mucha necesidad en muchas o todos los aspectos económico, educación, y en la salud.
- Be more involved in community events and volunteer.

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Wickenburg Community Town Hall

October 26, 2023 – Wickenburg, AZ



*Equity means basic fairness. Everyone should have the same chance of getting what they need to live.*

# Wickenburg Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity means basic fairness. Everyone should have the same chance of getting what they need to live.

Seniors are not always treated equitably. For example, some seniors who worked forty to fifty years have retired without the means to afford the necessities of life, such as food, medicine, utilities, and health care. Some rely solely on social security, which was not meant to provide fully for retirement.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

People who scramble just to get food on the table don't have time to optimize their circumstances by pursuing education and training for better employment. People who are the most in need, including those who are the sickest, have the hardest time making their way in life. Government programs that might help them are difficult to navigate, with sometimes conflicting procedures and requirements, and it can be difficult for people to navigate the system and get the help they need.

To optimize their potential, some seniors rely on help from family members and friends. Some seniors who need help could benefit from volunteer assistance, to navigate complex systems and online resources that can be confusing or difficult to access. Seniors can also look out for one another, offering help in case of emergency or to assist others in need.

Foundation for Senior Living is an example of an agency that assists seniors in need. For example, one FSL service coordinator was able to help a client suffering from cancer to reduce their monthly drug costs from \$1,000 to \$0.00.

Seniors living in a rural area like Wickenburg do not always have access to the kind and quality of health care they need, particularly specialists. Although the Wickenburg hospital is pretty good, it does not have all the departments and resources that are needed to provide all the medical care that is needed in the community, and often must transport patients to Phoenix or other Valley cities. Seniors also have unmet needs for transportation, and the public transportation systems available are not adequate to meet those needs. These are areas that could be improved.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

There should be better coordination and sharing of information by the various governmental entities that serve seniors. In some cases, the private sector is providing services, such as navigator services assisting with insurance coverage, but people don't know about these programs. The various agencies and individuals who provide services should coordinate and collaborate more effectively. They should get together to hire a coordinator or ombudsman to provide better coordination and sharing of information.

The Senior Center provides transportation services within Wickenburg but does not transport people to other locations. They do not have the funding and other resources needed to expand their service. A shuttle service between Wickenburg and Phoenix or other Valley locations would be very helpful, even if this service ran only once a month. Transportation is inadequate due to the lack of funding.

Arizona has the financial resources to provide transportation for seniors but lacks the political will to commit the necessary funding.

## 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 Wickenburg Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Try to help more people.
- Help my friends and other seniors to get the help they need.
- Be there as a friend or helper to get them needed services. We should all be helpers to each other.
- Do the right thing by helping others and finding help for others!
- Help others by talking to people and praying for them.
- Find community services to coordinate with to provide assistance.
- Strive to be more actively involved in my community.
- Continuing to help my fellow friends at Foundation for Senior Living (FSL), after a friend was complaining about dizziness and nausea, I felt it was my duty to help her. Helping out friends in need is where we can start.
- Continue to volunteer.
- Help people in my community.
- Vote for the things that matter.
- Do the right thing.
- Keep helping seniors get help as a service coordinator. Someday I will be a senior and would love to have help when I need it.
- Help people who need help and food.
- Help our elders, whether assisting with grocery shopping, helping walk their dogs, or cleaning.
- Help our elders through Meals on Wheels for those in need.

## IN COLLABORATION WITH



*A shuttle service between Wickenburg and Phoenix or other Valley locations would be very helpful, even if this service ran only once a month. Transportation is inadequate due to the lack of funding.*

# Greater Phoenix Leadership (GPL) Community Town Hall

October 30, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*The most important group to address these issues is us.*



*We get the best ideas and outcomes through interactive, diverse discussions.*

# Greater Phoenix Leadership (GPL) Community Town Hall

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## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

We may recognize equity more in later life and understand the privilege we have compared to many others. We begin to see the factors, barriers and determinants that impact accessibility, health, life expectancy, and economic opportunity. The disparity of data between communities within a 30-minute drive of each other is startling. Data needs to be shared between agencies to find the distinct approach that will create equity, which is maximizing the potential of every person and group. We can create positive outcomes through programs that provide opportunities for the massive portion of people who do not have access to home ownership, rehabilitation after incarceration, essential health care services, healthy food, and other aspects of a decent quality of life.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

There is immense value in health, stability, safe and healthy living, and the establishment of routines that lead people to a better life by providing home ownership. It is hard to talk about equity and democracy when you are in survival mode. There are opportunities everywhere in housing, transportation, equitable resources in rural Arizona, and being able to meet people where they are. There is a caution about the potential for this to be a polarizing topic, especially in today's environment. Changing and reframing our messaging is very important. By listening and seeking to understand and focusing on being the best version of ourselves in every conversation, we can all find places in our work, personal, and community lives where equity needs to be addressed. Think about our families and how we tailor our approach to each child. Equity, diversity, and inclusion have become formulaic, can have a negative connotation, and are considered by some as socialism. We must empower every voice to be heard. We get the best ideas and outcomes through interactive, diverse discussions.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

There has been collective engagement through public, private, and civic collaborations. Government does not seem to see equity as their responsibility, and certainly not alone. The call needs to go to NGOs (non-governmental organizations), corporations, and others to look at our processes especially as they pertain to accessibility to resources and services. Throw out the old if it is no longer effective and reinvent processes. The Native communities need to take responsibility for equity within their communities, particularly when they are not comfortable with outside intervention. It is hard to think about equity when you are isolated, struggling to provide clean water, food, and safe living conditions for your family. Educational opportunities that teach people critical thinking and the skills to take on complex problems are particularly important. The most important group to address these issues is *us*.

## 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 Greater Phoenix Leadership (GPL) Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Challenge the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statements of different organizations and people.
- Vote.
- Keep talking about equity. A helpful framework I have employed in previous work settings, from analyzing public policy to developing hiring practices - asking the question, "Who is left out? Who are we not reaching?" to identify equity issues that could be barriers to accessing opportunities and resources.
- Be more cognizant of opportunities to raise awareness of equity.
- Be more empathetic towards others who have diverse or opposing views when discussing sensitive topics and try to focus on commonalities.
- Continue working with the Greater Phoenix Equality Chamber of Commerce & the Human Relations Commission for the City of Phoenix. Simple conversations have the ability to change the world.
- Create new awareness, conversation, and opportunities around equity issues regardless of my career or industry.
- Explore project collaborations with anyone on this call.
- Continue to do the Braver Angels work.

## SPONSORED BY



# Community College Perspectives on Equity for All Arizonans

October 31, 2023 – Online via Zoom



*An equitable approach is important to optimizing student potential.*



*Equity is more than just assuring that people have tangible resources. It considers historic circumstances, including past conduct that has harmed some populations.*

# Community College Perspectives on Equity for All Arizonans

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity means removing barriers that prevent individuals from pursuing their goals. If we consider the body politic as an entity, and individual community members as part of the body, equality would simply give each member the same, whereas equity looks holistically to see what each member needs and provides it accordingly, so that each member of the community contributes to the whole body of the community. Equity would look at each individual situation and draw the needed resources to them. This necessarily requires us to consider how well our society provides for the needs of daily living across the board.

In Arizona there are some challenges to assure that people are treated equitably. This begins with a livable wage, a sum of money that would support a family of four. In some rural communities, for example in Page, there is a lack of available housing, because Airbnbs are not regulated, and for other reasons.

A holistic view of equity involves a many-layered approach to the topic. Equity is more than just assuring that people have tangible resources. It considers historic circumstances, including past conduct that has harmed some populations. It includes not just the seen but the unseen, including the ability to exercise rights and freedoms. It begins with the needs of individuals to feel safe and secure, the base layer of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and goes on from there.

## OPTIMIZING THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is important to optimizing student potential. It is equitable to enable students to connect to the information they need to access resources including housing, food, and jobs. The information needed to maneuver complex bureaucratic systems is extremely valuable but not equally accessible to all. Some students, for example first generation college students, may have less familiarity with or access to informational resources, and as a result they do not obtain the same level of support as other students who have better access to information.

Housing is a critical resource for students, particularly in rural communities. Without stable housing students have difficulty taking advantage of educational resources. The shortage of housing affects both students and faculty and may result in people leaving communities where adequate housing is simply not available. The proliferation of Airbnbs has changed the nature of some communities, using up the supply of affordable housing and making the communities less family friendly. These properties tend to be owned by those who are economically well-off, which increases the inequity of the housing shortage.

Access to high-quality, high-speed internet is another critical resource that is not equitably available. Without access to broadband internet, it is impossible to apply for jobs and access certain other resources. People sometimes struggle to access those resources, particularly in rural communities.

Some individuals suffer from food insecurity. Food pantries at community colleges are increasingly used not just by students, but also by faculty and staff. Students struggle to meet all their own needs, and some cannot afford to continue in school because they cannot obtain affordable housing, enough food, access to needed services, and other resources.

Ultimately students want faculty to care about them and their general welfare. Retention of both faculty and students is an important consideration for most community colleges. A system that is set up to promote caring interactions between faculty and students is beneficial to all concerned.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPTIMIZING STUDENT POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITY

Faculty could benefit from learning more about DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs implemented by industry. For example, some companies offer internship programs that might provide pathways for students to individual success.

We should look at changing the whole structure of educational systems, which have been based on inequitable treatment of marginalized populations. Colleges should adopt a policy that implements a holistic approach to inclusion, engagement, and respect. They could use the social determinants of health model adopted by Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and to determine whether the use of the tool could be expanded to populations other than AHCCCS. This tool could be used to examine the circumstances that affect their faculty and students, provide opportunities for engagement,

Colleges could take steps to simplify the language used in connection with programs, to reduce barriers to access. Sometimes form overwhelms substance and the utility of programs that are intended to help students is diminished.

Institutions that want to get around DEI issues create a retention center. They would do better to make information and resources more accessible and available to populations of students that face the greatest challenges.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

No single entity or agency is or should be responsible for addressing issues of equity and opportunities to optimize potential using equity. But we do need a plan to address the issues, and that plan should encompass the many diverse types of actions that could be taken to address the opportunities. For example, we currently have a shortage of teachers. We can see billboards along I-10 recruiting Arizona teachers to move to Texas. Similar outside forces affect other conditions. We tend to think that the solution is something that should be addressed by the Legislature, legislators have not been responsive or effective in dealing with these issues. It is usually necessary and helpful to address such issues rapidly and through the efforts of individuals and institutions other than the Legislature.

There are a variety of reasons for lackluster legislative performance. Elected officials have an interest in obtaining and maintaining their positions of power. Arizona's electoral system does not encourage broad participation in primary elections, which results in a situation where elected officials feel responsible only to the minority of voters that caused them to be elected. In rural and Indigenous communities, voting is a huge problem for those who do not have a mail delivery address. A solution may be to change the system in ways that make it more responsive to marginalized groups.

Equity is a powerful concept that can be brought to bear in favor of programs that improve conditions for those communities that are under-resourced or that face other challenges that put them at a disadvantage relative to other communities. Getting additional resources to these communities can pay huge dividends.

## 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 Community College Perspectives on Equity for All Arizonans programs. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Continue to use my platform as an author and scholar to call attention to injustice and to advocate for equitable approaches to educating and supporting college students.
- Request permission to post the minutes of this session to our community college mailing list and draft an article for sharing.
- Look for opportunities to remove barriers in accessing education through removing unnecessary red tape.
- Continue to listen thoughtfully, and to care.
- Commit to use my platform as a method to provide solutions, space, and collaboration that advance historically excluded communities with educational access.
- Continue to support our high school students' transition to college.
- Support candidates and legislation based on the degree to which they further equitable outcomes.
- Continue to learn what impacts my community and educate others on various platforms I am active on (social media or as a blogger/writer).

## SPONSORED BY AND IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Arizona Sustainability Alliance Community Town Hall

November 1, 2023 – Mesa, AZ



# Arizona Sustainability Alliance Community Town Hall

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## DEFINING TREE EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Tree equity is a relationship to the natural world and the health of our communities. Trees have cultural significance for all communities. Tree equity involves global access to trees and planting of more trees in areas where they are lacking. The lack of trees in certain areas reflects the lack of investment in infrastructure, and the history of redlining. Neighborhoods that are less wealthy have fewer trees. But all people should have access to shade and the health and cooling effects of trees. Your zip code should not determine your health.

Trees provide shade and cool the environment; they provide a connection to nature; they are important to health, mobility, comfort, psychological benefits, and lifestyle. People choose neighborhoods based on factors that include tree canopy. Trees are an important part of our community infrastructure.

We should be aware of the factors that encourage or discourage the planting of trees. Sometimes trees are perceived to interfere with the functionality of a space, such as school facilities. Sometimes there is concern about maintenance and watering. People are more likely to support the planting of additional trees if the issues are framed in terms of shade and temperature reduction.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Trees are an important part of any community. They provide shade, cool the environment, contribute to mental health, make it easier for people to walk to work, and contribute to economic development. Trees increase property values. Green spaces bring people together and create a sense of place. They provide a connection to nature that improves the wellbeing of the entire community. This connection to nature is a basic human need. Equity considers that everyone has basic needs that differ based on their circumstances, and everyone deserves to have those needs met.

Green spaces should be considered part of the municipal infrastructure and should be planned systematically. To best address tree equity issues, it is important that people understand the terms (such as equity) that are being used and look at the data before taking action. It is also important to understand the historic context that led to the current situation. Those planning to develop tree planting programs should talk with the communities that will be affected and take care to engage people broadly and ask good questions.

The best approach will involve combining the efforts of interested individuals and organizations. Government at all levels (national, state, tribal, and local) should partner with individual leaders, concerned citizens, and students. These groups may include people who are interested in related issues, such as heat deaths. In fact, if every student in Arizona planted one tree before graduating from high school that would result in thousands of trees per year being planted.

We should consider using incentives to encourage people to plant trees and provide for teaching the basic skills people will need to care for trees once they are planted. In communicating about this issue, interested people should be clear about the benefits of creating a tree canopy.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Communities play an important part in taking action on tree equity. Homeowner Associations (HOAs) are a significant force within communities. Getting HOA board members involved, and presenting HOAs with useful information, subject matter experts, and data, will be helpful to implementing a tree planting and tree equity program. People who have participated in the master gardener program, and representatives of the Desert Botanical Garden, are candidates for this type of speaking engagement.

In designing a tree-planting program, the community should look at private as well as public property. While schools and parks could benefit from additional tree plantings, there are other places, such as trailer parks and apartment complexes, that don't have many trees and could benefit from planting additional trees. People should have access to information about how to care for the trees, what species are best suited for a specific location, and the other environmental benefits that might be enhanced by planting trees in a particular area.

Public and community education will be an important component of any tree equity program. Having translators or bilingual presenters will be important to make sure that residents who are not primarily English speakers can receive the information. More youth voices should be incorporated in these efforts. Sponsors should be sought to support the effort financially. Partnerships of all kinds involving interests related to tree equity should be leveraged to create the greatest impact. Grant funding may be available to help support these efforts.

Students can be engaged in informational efforts and public outreach efforts, as well as planting trees. Students are very supportive of the idea of creating a county-wide student movement to plant trees as a rite of passage. Various incentives could be effective in promoting participation in such a program. For example, students might earn a cord and pin for graduation based on participation in this program. These efforts could be expanded to include college students and clubs. When talking about tree planting, we need to also discuss maintenance issues.

## 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 Arizona Sustainability Alliance Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Give trees as gifts.
- Donate to organizations that plant trees.
- Invest in educating my children, be an advocate for tree equity wherever I can, be on the look-out for opportunities to increase tree cover in the right areas.
- Continue to work with American Forests to improve tree equity in Maricopa County and all of the Southwest.
- Plant trees around my house and take an educational approach to understand and be part of tree equity.
- Bring "tree equity" to the conversation.
- Give trees to my kids for birthday gifts.
- Volunteer with my nieces to plant trees; ensure to vote in local, state, and federal elections, and bring awareness to others who are not in the room.
- Continue to start/share these conversations; plan plant a tree event at work with friends.
- Plant and take care of a tree.
- Follow up with new contacts and do more research on factors leading to tree death.

- Work to increase the number of trees at our schools and help our students not only understand the importance of trees, but also empower them to share trees with others in their neighborhood and community.
- Continue to engage in family activities that support plantings for tree equity and continue giving trees as gifts.
- Support political candidates who focus on the preservation of democracy and the critical work around environment, water, health, tree, and food equity.
- Continue to be a voice within my community.
- Give opportunities to others and use my position to make a lasting impact.
- Continue to get involved to make a change.
- Plant more trees and identify other locations to plant them, not just parks or schools.
- Help by planting at least one tree before I graduate high school.
- Help my community with making sure that the plant's health is maintained.
- Help with the Superstitions Springs mall tree planting project.
- Promote and help organize student tree growing projects, give trees as gifts, and teach students about tree equity.
- Focus on trees in and for marginalized and disadvantaged communities, both professionally and personally.
- Continue to help educate people in my personal and professional life about the importance of the right tree, right place, native/desert adapted trees and tree care and maintenance.
- Plant one tree and if I had the resources commit to planting 3 million trees.
- Share the information I learned today and inspire more people to start planting more trees.
- Keep teaching about it and involving students in learning about tree equity, green jobs, and tree plantings.
- Bridge conservation with enterprise, finance, economics, policy, and social justice.
- Make funding and volunteer partnerships to support our tree plantings at Arizona Sustainability Alliance (AZSA).
- Plant a tree in my yard.
- Volunteer my time and skills to help with the City of Mesa's tree planting initiative.
- Start planting a tree on my birthday that benefits my environment.
- Review Life Science standards in school and education that relates to local growing needs.
- Help educate the community, join plant a tree events, and give trees to plant.
- Collaborate with AZSA to give a talk to Prescott College students about tree equity and plant more canopy on my campus at Prescott College.
- Think more creatively about intersectional partners and the unhoused.
- Plant a tree at my house.
- Continue my work with my organization Valley Leadership to galvanize our leaders to support this effort, take part in trees plantings, and support AZSA.
- Promote and share the objectives and impact of this initiative as well as promote the protection of the native species around my community.
- Volunteer for a tree planting day, gift a tree for the holidays, and work in South Phoenix to increase shade cover through local business participation in Green Business Bootcamp.

- Continue my work with Valley Leaderships, who is partnered with the City of Phoenix and American Forests. We are currently focused on increasing tree canopy and private property (mostly commercial) and having private businesses contribute.
- Distribute funding equitably ensuring grant programs are accessible, easy, translated into Spanish, and evaluation of funding impacts.
- Put free trees out in front of the house, don't pull the sapling, dig it out and put it in a planter and make it available for anyone to take and plant.
- Educate and engage our workforce (and their families) around the importance and passion of tree equity.
- Be a leader in tree equity and work to make my community a healthy and tree filled place.
- Share what I have learned.

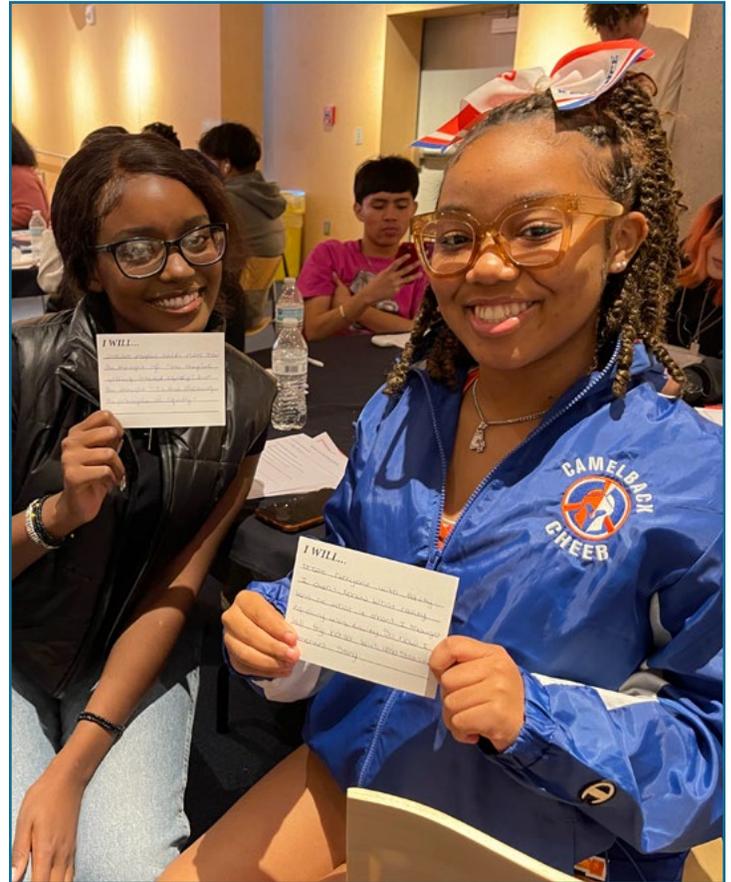
## IN COLLABORATION WITH



*"This program was an exceptional experience and opportunity to engage in critical conversation and meet new people."*

# City of Phoenix Future Leaders Town Hall

## November 3, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



*"It was an empowering experience for those who [are] typically withheld from power."*

# City of Phoenix Future Leaders Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is different from equality. Equality treats everyone the same. Equity understands and acknowledges everyone's different starting points and provides them with what they need. Equality gives everyone the same resources. Equity helps to level the playing field so that everyone has an opportunity to succeed.

Equity is demonstrated when parents and school counselors provide each child with the individual support and tools he or she needs. For immigrants or those who speak a different language, it means providing extra support so they can succeed. For those who struggle with math or other subjects, it may be providing a tutor. For those with disabilities it is providing the extra support needed to succeed or removing barriers to success. For those from families with limited funds, it means giving students the money to go to college and to reach their dreams. For those from rural or other areas with limited resources, it is providing those extra resources so that everyone has an opportunity to be their best. For those who come from groups that have been historically discriminated against (including women in traditional male dominated fields), it is taking the historical perspective into account and providing opportunities for them to succeed.

Equity takes into account that everyone deserves to be great. Equity is giving everyone the tools they need so we can all succeed together.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach gives everyone equal opportunities even when they come from different places. It allows people and communities to succeed that have not historically had many resources or that have not been treated equally.

To best serve those who have experienced discrimination or inequitable treatment, it is important to ask questions and to be open to the responses from those individuals and communities so we can best provide the equitable resources they need to prosper.

Equity is critical to our future. It is important to ensure we are providing the best resources and opportunities to our youth—especially those who need it most. If youth who need additional resources, whether funding for education, housing, or other resources, are not provided with these equitable opportunities to succeed, it will impact the future for everyone. We need to be the change. We need to come together to support and advocate for an equitable approach that bridges divides, brings people together, opens conversation and provides a space for people to feel comfortable in expressing themselves. We need to lead by example. It starts with us.

Many of the greatest opportunities for using equity as an approach for improving our communities involve our youth and our schools. Targeting younger kids is especially beneficial because they are our future generation and are more open minded. Our educational system in general, including for the current generation, involves several opportunities because it is more diverse with mixed cultures, races, and religions.

Clubs, events, and job fairs are just some of the methods that create opportunities for those who will benefit from equitable support. For example, events that highlight scholarships to college or workforce opportunities can create a ripple effect that extends benefits far beyond the individual student being helped. It is also important for schools to create opportunities for people to share their stories because it helps students to better prepare for adulthood.

Schools can be a place for students to learn how to research and explore opportunities on their own—a method for empowering students to be their own best resource in the future. Schools can provide opportunities that consider different learning styles and provide access to recruiters from colleges and other career pathways. Schools also can provide clubs such as HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and MEChA (the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan or Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) that allow students to learn about opportunities for scholarships, as well as additional support or resources. Clubs also allow students to learn about diverse cultures, to get out of their comfort zones and to become leaders in supporting their communities.

Giving students equitable and proper resources will increase their participation in school and in their community. In the end, an equitable approach makes the world a better and happier place.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

### Education and Opportunities Within Schools

- Provide education and information about Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to all students.
- Principals, district leaders, and others should promote and support more schoolwide events.

For example, Expos with diverse colleges, trade schools and job fairs. Support schoolwide events such as what the National Honor Society (NHS) does to raise awareness about opportunities for colleges and other opportunities that promote inclusivity.

- Teachers, students, and parents can help with educational needs, providing educational programs and tutors that allow kids to start learning workforce skills. We can use current successful programs as a model and expand them.

### Advocacy and Political Action

- Reach out to the masses directly. Give equity to those who need it and connect people to resources, including providing them with opportunities for political empowerment.
- Contact Arizona Boards and elected officials like the governor to advocate for people of low income.
- Elected and community leaders should promote diversity and provide opportunities to marginalized groups and those in need.

### Other Actions

- Utilize events that elevate different community voices. Hold more events like this to spread awareness and include those in power.
- Provide additional support and resources to organizations such as food banks.
- Create fiscal policies that distribute resources to lower economic groups who are in need.
- Arizona government, club sponsors and other leaders should take charge of these actions. They need to take the best interests of students to heart by giving them the resources they need to be successful. They need to create spaces for diverse students to use their voices and to have the opportunities they need to be successful because they are our future leaders.

*“I think more high school students should participate in this program, it actually is cool and very eye opening.”*

## 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 City of Phoenix Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Not let other people stop me from being successful and becoming everything I want to be.
- Keep all the information to motivate me and help me keep going because I know I might have a point in my life where I am low or told to stop.
- Remember today as a lesson for life and how I choose to live my life after having this conversation with everyone.
- Strive for what I want. For example, I will not be afraid to ask questions and to ask for help. This program really helped me understand to go for what you want and that there is much more out there.
- Lend a helping hand if I can.
- Share my resources and support if needed.
- Bring up this conversation with my student government (STUGO) group so that we can find more opportunities to provide equity.
- Go to more town hall events and share my ideas with the community on how we can improve our city.
- Take what I have learned today and use it to help other people so that everyone will always feel united.
- Learn how to connect and learn other people's stories.
- Use this opportunity to learn how to connect with our elected officials to promote equity.
- Start thinking about other people's struggles and lend my resources to help.
- Talk to my friends about coming together in our community for youth events and learning new things.
- Explore more into my civil virtue and engage more in town hall meetings.
- Take this opportunity to help inform others that your voice matters and people will help you achieve what you want to do.
- Advocate and lend a helping hand to provide resources for those who need it to show equity in this community.
- Treat everyone equitably. I did not know what equity was or what it meant. I thought equity was equality. Now that I know this, I will try harder to understand someone's story.
- Treat everyone equally and respect everyone.
- Support people who need my support and learn my native language more so I can help people who are from my country. For example, interpreting for elders or parents who do not speak English.
- Consider the fact there will be times where I will need to try harder than others to find what will help me succeed.
- Always be sure to take into consideration where everyone comes from and find common ground with those I do not have anything in common with.
- Share all the information I learned today with others on how to treat others regardless of where they come from or start from.
- Treat everybody the same no matter the differences they have from me. At the end of the day, we are all humans.
- Start being more open-minded and acknowledging that the differences in our lives are to make us better.
- Start to understand that equity and equality are two different things.

- Treat people better and speak up for our community.
- Personally use equity in my life by using resources from school to grow and find more opportunities.
- Use my knowledge on the difference between equity and equality and share it with my community.
- Speak up and raise awareness.
- Go to more town hall events to share the perspectives and thoughts of young people.
- Volunteer to help those in need.
- Attend more town hall programs and make my voice heard by contributing to the conversation.
- Try to be more involved.
- Understand different points of views.
- Come together with others to help each other.
- Make sure to always ask questions to make a difference.
- Go to college and further my education.
- Never let anyone “downplay” my efforts.
- Help those who need guidance.
- Make sure my process helps my community.
- Try my best to be the best version of myself.
- Be more engaged in my community.

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ACHIEVES

# Opportunities for Youth Future Leaders Town Hall

November 4, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



# Opportunities for Youth Future Leaders Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is making sure everyone has the resources they need. Equality is when everyone gets the same resources regardless of need. Equity is when everyone gets the resources they need to succeed, and those resources are tailored to their needs. Equity comes into play when considering access to voting, education, and health care. A child with special needs may receive different resources than other children because that is what they need to succeed. Equity brings a community together. Students facing challenges in school, such as those experiencing homelessness, may receive extra help or special considerations based on those challenges; that is an example of equity. Job Corps is a program that incorporates equity and equality because everyone gets the same opportunity but there are resources available to address special needs.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equity is an important factor in optimizing the potential of people, communities, and our state. Everybody brings something different to the table, and people need help and resources from one another. For example, for students who were not successful in their school experience programs such as student choice that provide opportunities for credit recovery, which can be very helpful to securing a high school diploma. Some people start out ahead in life because of generational wealth—assets they inherit from their family, or wealth that pays for resources they need, while other people do not have the benefit of family wealth and may need more help from public resources.

Equity can improve our community when considering homelessness, education, access to high-speed internet, and even therapy. In each of these areas there are people who lack access to what they need. Caring individuals can help create a moment in time or opportunity for people to thrive. A commitment to equity should be incorporated in every community and major institution. To promote equity in the community it is important to address the general mindset, to get people in a community on the same page.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

State and local governments should lead efforts to take advantage of opportunities to use equity as an approach to community improvement. However, while they have resources available to address the issues, they have not taken the initiative. People are experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, and the government is not addressing these issues to the extent needed. We need more programs like Community Bridges (CBI), which provide assistance to people experiencing homelessness, and a path to shelter, education, and jobs, and Bridging Success, which provides full scholarships to youth who were in foster care.

Consequently, much of the responsibility for dealing with these issues must be addressed by local communities and individuals. As Michael Jackson said, look in the mirror—it starts with you. The greatest opportunities are where there are caring adults. People can come together to address opportunities through group meetings such as the Arizona Town Hall, through “peace and love” protests, and by collaborating with one another. When elected officials do not take the actions that are needed, it’s up to the people to hold them accountable. School districts can be held accountable for creating greater diversity and equitable access to resources, through election of and discussion with school board members.

## 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 Opportunities for Youth Future Leaders Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Use social media to raise awareness and make a difference.
- Educate myself, talk about the issues, and encourage others to make change.
- Take what I learned today to the board of Foster Advocates to raise awareness of the issues.
- Talk to my principal about not only teaching students basic learning, but to also talk about how to prepare for college.
- Speak out more.
- Ask for what I need and accept help from others.
- Be more present.
- Get active in advocating for these issues.
- Support and love everyone as I want to be supported and loved.
- Educate my friends and young siblings on how to make changes in their communities and encourage them to speak their minds.
- Be more involved with the Arizona community and see the better light in things.
- Educate myself.
- Talk about equity and start the conversation.
- Get involved with DEI, volunteer, look for campus/work opportunities to get the changes out to the masses.
- Be more involved with my community.
- Learn more about the association between community, intersectionality, and policies that are within my power to change.
- Vote and support change in education, and more for equity rather than equality.
- Use my voice and speak up when I feel it is needed.
- Do anything in my power to help and continue being present.
- Try my best to keep a positive attitude and not let what others think disturb me so I can have a better mindset without negativity.
- Put into practice the information I took in and encourage others to do the same.
- Live my life the best way I possibly can.
- Influence the next person because I don't know who or what impact they might have, like to be the next president or a coach.
- Talk with my friend about equity and offer her resources.
- Call my representatives.

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# Phoenix Revitalization Corporation Community Town Hall

November 4, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ



# Phoenix Revitalization Corporation Community Town Hall

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity provides opportunities for education and economic opportunities. With respect to economics, it includes opportunities for entrepreneurs and the education needed to take advantage of economic opportunities. Equity provides opportunity no matter where you are from and takes historical discrimination and obstacles into account. For example, equitable access to education would include providing transportation or other opportunities that allow people to take advantage of educational resources that otherwise would not be available. It might also include programs like Upward Bound that provide experiences for students who would not otherwise be able to learn about opportunities for higher education.

Equity also means uplifting and showcasing local art and culture from areas that have been subject to historical discrimination. Equity includes additional investments in beautification, local business, and art and culture that are responsive and inclusive of these neighborhoods.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

An equitable approach is essential for optimizing the potential of our community. When additional investments are made, whether in programs, parks and recreational, education or economic opportunities, history has demonstrated that it makes a big difference. Likewise, when these investments have been taken away or if the programs exist, but our communities are not aware of them, we immediately see the negative impact on our families and neighborhoods.

Families in our communities do not currently get the robust and diverse experiences that make a difference in their lives—whether programs on hiking or swimming or exposure to different public service careers. We need to recommit to these programs and do it in a way that actively engages and educates our communities.

These types of programs provide an opportunity for children and families to learn skills and to learn about opportunities that even out inequities and that allow them to maximize their potential. Education begins in the home, and it is not only parent to child. It is also the education that children bring home from these types of programs and share with their family.

We need to make ourselves heard at the city, and state level. First, our community needs to be involved in city and state discussions that impact our neighborhood. We need to advocate for the need to include our perspective in decisions that impact us with public meetings that are intentionally held within our neighborhoods and done so in a way that invites participation in a meaningful way—one that includes and considers the voices and needs of our community. We also need to advocate for the need to distribute resources in a more equitable way so that the resources go to the communities where there is more need.

We also have a role. We need to lead by example. As individuals, we need to be civically engaged in our community and reach out to other community members to engage them and to make them feel included. We also need to vote, and we need to educate our fellow neighbors on how to make an informed decision about voting for those who will best represent our community.

## NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

We cannot ignore our role in the community. We need to start with ourselves, raising our voices as individuals and supporting and educating each other. We need to reach out to our neighbors and connect with them in ways that allow them to engage. For example, we can create events that occur at times and places that work for our community members and make special efforts with traditional and social media to reach out to those who are disengaged or not connected. We can then educate community members on how to participate in events that support our community, which includes how to take action in a positive way, how to stay connected, and how to advocate for and vote in a way that allows our community voices to be heard.

## 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 Phoenix Revitalization Corporation Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

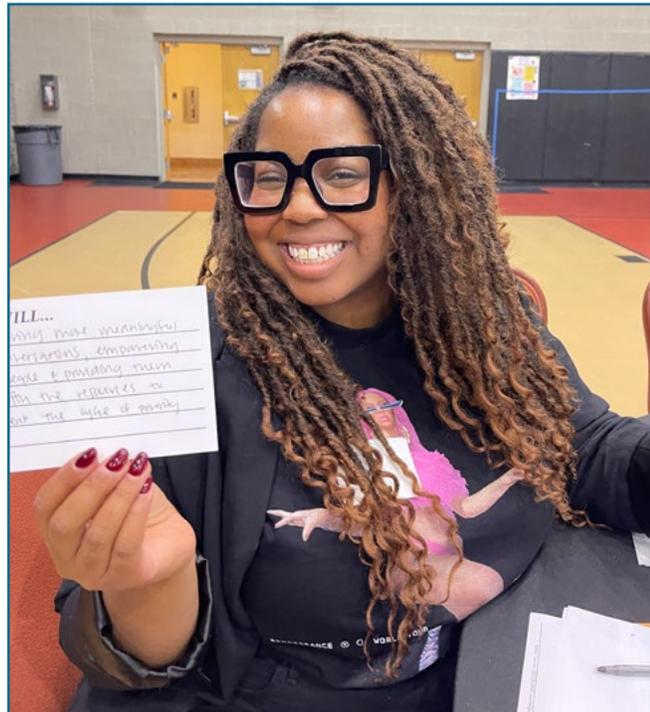
- Educate myself on how I vote.
- Be more involved in community activities.
- Help with community events.
- Help other youth learn to expand their thinking on helping the community and indulging in events that will help us communicate and bring ideas together.
- Educate my non-profit about our South-Central community, making connections, and growing together.
- Continue to advocate for South-Central.
- Create civic activity through my volunteer work that engages with youth.
- Continue to volunteer teaching U.S. Citizenship classes weekly.
- Bring Boy Scouts of America into our community.
- Continue to support and volunteer at the Grant Park Community Garden.
- Continue to be involved in my community and bring awareness to equity vs. equality.
- No tener miedo de hablar de lo que pasa al rededor de nuestra vecindad.
- Talk to my friends about coming together in community youth events and learning new things.
- Discuss with others what I have learned.
- Look for classes that teach people how to vote and how to reach their goals for their education.

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# Equity in the Soul of the City

November 30, 2023 – Phoenix, AZ; and Online via Zoom



*Each of us is part of a family, a neighborhood, and a community. We can spark change and inspire others through our individual actions and examples.*

# Equity in the Soul of the City

## DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

We struggle to distinguish between equity and equality. Ultimately equity involves giving individuals what they need. People are different, and affected by different circumstances, and individuals have different needs. The need for equity applies to ageism, sexism, racism, and ableism. We need to embrace equity in our communications demonstrating respect for each person's background and characteristics. Equity means speaking in the language of each listener. Equity is justice and fairness for everyone. It includes providing equal and comfortable access for the able and disabled without having to endure extended processes and time.

In seeking equity, we need to focus on the goal—what are we seeking to achieve? Basic fairness is the overarching goal, but we are all different, so fairness involves something other than equal treatment of everyone. One goal is to raise the base line for everyone. Another is to have a level playing field. All people need economic resources—jobs, housing, and education, and sufficient support for families, including childcare. In many European countries there are ample social services to provide for everyone, and the standard of wellbeing is higher overall. If the goal is to feed everyone, how do we do that effectively if we don't address individual differences and needs? Providing a peanut butter sandwich for every child will not accomplish that goal for children who are allergic to nuts. Providing sandwiches on regular bread does not nourish those who are gluten intolerant.

There is privilege granted to dominant groups, and our understanding of equity is based upon our experiences. We need to expand our world view so we can do the things necessary to create equity for all. Many still do not understand the difference between equality and equity. Equity requires that we actively address it, and not allow broad policies to be created by small, narrow groups.

To achieve equity, we should focus on removing barriers, and creating pathways of opportunity. Equity creates fairness by providing tools. Just providing equal resources to every community is not sufficient. We need to address historic inequities by providing what is needed to help people catch up after a history of inequity. Staying in community but not being a part of the community does not result in equity.

Equity means meeting people where they are and addressing their needs at the time. Different people and groups are affected differently and have different needs and resources. For example, public services such as public education, access to healthy food, cultural facilities, and law enforcement are not equitable across communities. One example of a community practicing equity is Tolleson—it has a good industrial tax base that could greatly enrich a single school, but Tolleson took the tax resources and spread them more widely.

Equity affects everyone. In seeking to achieve equity we can focus on specific systems that have the greatest impact, such as education, health care, and affording individual access to higher education,

We still have a long way to go in Arizona to achieve justice, which is to bring the walls down, even as we don't all agree that there is a wall. We have not yet achieved equality for marginalized groups. Systemic racism, for example, persists, and we must work hard to find and change rules, qualifications, and requirements from long ago that still exist.

## OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL AND IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

When equity is lacking it is not just the individual who suffers; the entire community misses out on the potential contributions from that individual. An equitable approach is important for optimizing the potential of people to the greatest extent possible. We all benefit when individuals are able to achieve their fullest potential.

In addressing the issue of equity, we should view the issue as one involving psychographics, i.e., classifying people according to their psychological differences, attitudes, and values, rather than their demographics.

An equitable approach involves meeting peoples' individual needs. When people have an immediate need, such as the need for shelter, that is an important focus that should take precedence over more general needs of the community as a whole.

Our systems are based on an inequitable model. Education, food, housing, health care, and paying bills all intersect. It is expensive to be poor. People living in poverty or disadvantaged circumstances are more vulnerable to a host of other problems, including criminal justice involvement. We should strive to change the situation where life expectancies in one zip code are 14 years more (or less) than in another zip code. Early intervention is important. Take the issue of housing, for example. When a family becomes homeless, it triggers a cascade of other needs and problems. Children who are struggling need extra help at the time they struggle, and providing that help may avoid a host of negative consequences, from the failure to achieve maximum potential to entering the school-to-prison pipeline and causing much larger economic and social consequences over time.

We need to clean house. We should look at what is working and what is not working, and that will help us identify what changes are needed. Although it is tempting to say that we should tear these systems down, that is not a practical approach. If we were to burn the house down, we'd still need a place to live. We need both a top down and bottom-up grassroots approach to identifying solutions that get to the root causes of problems.

The greatest opportunities to use equity are providing educational resources, access to health care, healthy food, public transportation, and other basic needs. In this mix housing is arguably the greatest opportunity for improvement nationwide because it is critical to meeting other basic needs. We also need to extend public transportation and services like light rail.

In approaching this issue, we should be aware of the differences affecting different populations. The problems of historical inequities are particularly challenging, and groups that have been affected by historic inequity may need special consideration and action. For example, because Black experiences tend to be different, addressing inequities that affect the Black community should adopt a Black-centric approach. In addressing the needs of historically disadvantaged groups we need to come up with approaches that are palatable to both the group and to society at large, and that address the specific needs of these populations, whether for education, health care, homeownership, or other needs.

Equity affects individuals and groups in many different ways and places, and we need to consider all of these issues. Equity in education includes even-handed administration of rules, discipline, and advancement. One of the greatest opportunities is education. Arizona has never seen fit to properly fund public education, and we must eliminate the voucher system. This also applies to colleges, universities, and trade schools. Higher education needs to be revisited in terms of availability and cost because many people do not have the funds to pay for college and are burdened with large loan debt afterwards.

Arizona would benefit if individuals reached their full potential.

People and groups need access to capital, to all of the social determinants of health, and they need the ability to make healthy choices for themselves.

Judicial and public officials can abuse their power to prevent equitable treatment. Their decisions and actions have impacts for generations to come. There is tremendous opportunity to increase equity and set precedents. We must strive for systemic change, rather than just act on a case-by-case basis. We must personally move on to the things that we can control or impact in our own sphere of influence. Equity initiatives need to be implemented to reach Indigenous peoples, veterans, and other groups we have consistently marginalized when it comes to resources.

As a community, government, and individuals we must act upon the declaration of human rights. Basic necessities like affordable housing, transportation, healthcare, family, and childcare aren't available to many. System change includes policy changes that result in greater safety and opportunity, especially in areas of poverty.

## **NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS**

There are seven pillars of influence, all of which should be involved in addressing these opportunities to increase equity. These pillars include religion, media, government, arts and entertainment, business, community, and family.

Things that we fought to get like voting rights, affirmative action, elimination of structural racism are being stripped away. The zip codes people live in determine their lifespan, and people of color and other marginalized populations are not equal under the law or in practice. We must harness our anger into diplomatic action, and action at the state and federal levels. We need to get out there, form coalitions, exercise our voices, and take collective action. Partisanship is not working and in fact has been detrimental. It is up to us to get involved by being informed and engaged and speaking up and avoiding toxicity.

It starts with us as individuals. Each of us is part of a family, a neighborhood, and a community. We can spark change and inspire others through our individual actions and examples. The power of one is illustrated by this story. A woman walked by an accident and saw a motorcycle driver unconscious and trapped under a burning car. She rallied people from the neighborhood and eventually twenty people were able to lift the car and save the injured driver.

We can start by going into communities and having many more conversations like this one about needs and opportunities. To meet people where they are we should understand where they are and what they need. In these conversations we should bring information about potential solutions.

For example, some programs such as emergency rental assistance have ended since the pandemic, and the need is still there. Many people do not have a supportive network to assist them be it family or friends. It is difficult to qualify for government aid if you don't fit in a category like having children, being an elder, etc. People have to fight to get the resources to move from survival to thriving. The federal and state governments should address housing inequity by making homeownership more affordable with equitable interest rates. We should increase individuals' exposure to different opportunities and resources so that they can envision themselves changing their own circumstances, doing something that otherwise might not occur to them. And we should address basic needs, including free daycare, more educational opportunities, and additional sources of funding for education. We need to strengthen the social safety net.

To improve equity, we should build communities where people feel connected. A school community, for example, might engage with banks, grocery stores, small businesses, and other stakeholders, both to forge connections and to think outside the box and make changes. We should make sure that those who need financial aid for post-high school education are made aware of the grant opportunities available. This information can be provided to and through school guidance counselors and other community gatherings.

## 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 Equity in the Soul of the City program. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### *I WILL...*

- Continue to learn about Arizona's needs and resources. I especially like Justine's comment: "Speak the language of the listener."
- Complete my Master's of Public Administration in December of 2024, and continue to work within the state to assist with changes in any way I can.
- Look for additional groups to participate in, like the Chandler Mayors Committee for People with Disabilities, so that my voice can continue to be heard.
- Attending these town halls and making a concerted effort to find and attend town halls, community cleanups, and continuing to attend workshops and personal education to better verbalize and share with/ listen to the needs of others around me- especially of those whom I don't share the same experiences.
- Commit to attending town halls next year and to finding local opportunities for listening to my community as well as contributing my own voice.
- Commit to writing down 2024 goals to move the needle on the issue areas of affordable housing, workforce development & mental health.
- Recruit others to participate in the 2024 democracy town halls.
- Teach my children about the importance of equity & the differences between equity & equality.
- Continue to fight for equity in all areas through coalition building, testimony, marching, voting, education, and picketing. It's how we get things done. Loud and proud every day!
- Personally research what the Department of Education can do about making information regarding access to financial aid more readily accessible to all students in Arizona.
- Vote in elections.
- Support proposals for more equity-based communities so that more people can be successful.
- Organize at least two community conversations with my family, friends, and affiliated organizations to have open dialogue about equity and challenge all participants to take one action to help move us forward.
- Become more engaged and educated on the issues.
- Have conversations with others.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy for extreme candidates who build more barrier than bridges.
- Have more candid conversations with those who can create impact and change.
- Have conversations with anyone who is willing to listen and listen to others without judgment.
- Have more conversations with people to break down stereotypes.
- Have more meaningful conversations, empowering people and providing them with the resources to break the cycle of poverty.
- Continue to develop health services and financial opportunities in my neighborhood.
- Stay connected with Arizona Town Hall, Pilgrim Rest Wellness Center, and Arizona Lawyers for Equal Justice and look for opportunities to support equity for all Arizonans.
- Give back to those who need it and pay it forward like others have for me.
- Identify opportunities to connect my organization with my local community—particularly in housing and access to housing.

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ARIZONA LAWYERS FOR EQUAL JUSTICE

# **EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS**

## **BACKGROUND REPORT**

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# EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS

## 115TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL TOPIC

### BACKGROUND REPORT - 2023

#### REPORT EDITORS

**Liza C. Kurtz**

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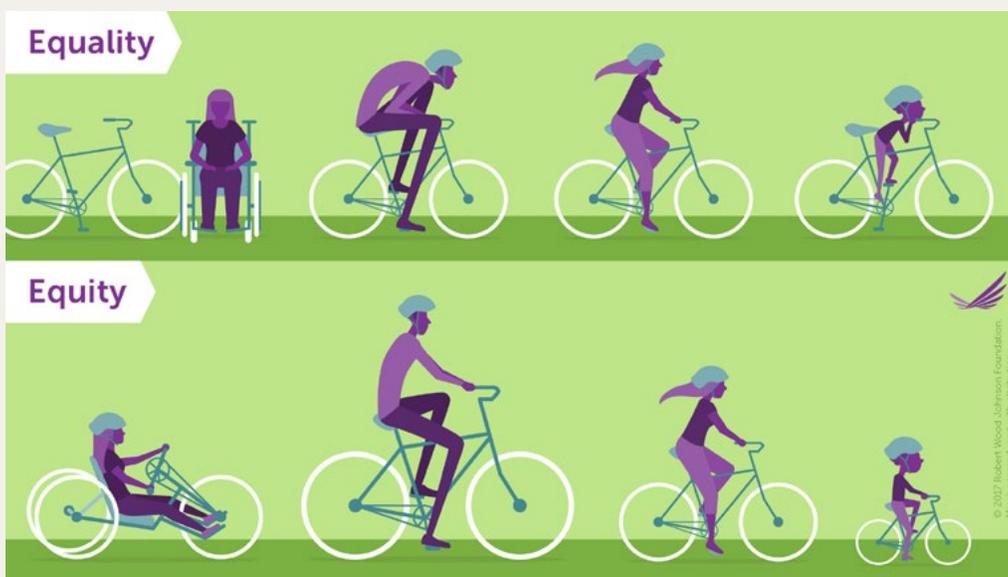


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# HOW TO USE THIS BACKGROUND REPORT

For 60 years, Arizona Town Hall has worked to educate, engage, connect, and empower Arizonans on a variety of critical policy issues. While those topics have ranged from criminal justice to water use and beyond, the discussions each year have centered one aspect of a larger question: How do we build a more prosperous Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential?

This year's report examines equity as one mechanism for accomplishing the goal of a vibrant, thriving Arizona. Research shows that the benefits of equity extend beyond improvements for any one individual or category of people. Increasing equity has been shown to have the potential to increase productivity, gross domestic product, and tax revenues, as well as reducing social ills like poverty.<sup>1</sup> Equity is also related to, but distinct from, equality. Equality is the practice of giving everyone identical resources and opportunities, regardless of where they start. Equity, by contrast, acknowledges that everyone's starting position in life is different. Equity distributes resources and opportunities to provide everyone with a chance to succeed.<sup>2</sup>



Equity is a complex topic and has as many expressions and contexts as this report has readers. Each reader will bring their own life experience with them when they engage with this report. For some readers, the contents may be challenging or controversial, prompting them to reconsider equity in the state of Arizona and their role in it. For others, there may be nothing in this report they haven't already thought about. For most readers, it will be a combination of the two. A reader may see their own experiences reflected in some places while also being introduced to new ways of considering equity. Engaging with equity as a topic does not mean abandoning your values or leaving your own experience behind. Instead, it means reading with curiosity and recognizing that each of us has a unique perspective on what equity means, why it's important, and how to work together to create a more equitable Arizona.

1 Lynch, Robert. "The economic benefits of equal opportunity in the United States by ending racial, ethnic, and gender disparities." Washington Center for Equitable Growth. June 2021. <https://equitablegrowth.org/the-economic-benefits-of-equal-opportunity-in-the-united-states-by-ending-racial-ethnic-and-gender-disparities/>.

2 "Equity vs. equality: What's the difference?" Milken Institute of Public Health, The George Washington University. November 5, 2020. <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>.

If you have participated with Arizona Town Hall before, you might notice that this background report is shorter than some reports in previous years, and the content is quite different. This report does not attempt to be comprehensive in outlining every approach to equity or addressing every area where increasing equity is important. Instead, think of the contents like a gallery or buffet—a diverse sample of a broader body of work. Unlike previous background reports, this one has been designed to be read to completion rather than as a reference document. The report prompts readers to examine equity applications at multiple scales, from personal relationships to statewide policies.

The first section of this report is an equity exercise that pairs self-reflection questions for the reader with selected answers from anonymous respondents from every part of Arizona and all walks of life. This exercise challenges readers to slow down and take their time to explore this exercise—and to find points of connection and difference with the responses shown alongside.

After the self-reflection, readers will find a selection of equity case studies. These case studies highlight equity successes and stories of collaborating and working together to achieve greater equity in a specific field, such as higher education or small business entrepreneurship. You can think of these case studies as “road maps,” with each contributor offering different topics, strategies, and outcomes. These case studies are designed to inspire readers to consider what pathways to greater equity might look like in their own work.

The third section, “Equity in Action,” attempts to capture the breadth and scope of equity-based work. These short contributions from Arizona equity scholars and experts showcase the many different contexts in which equity applies. They also outline how they incorporate equity into their own work, striving to not only create external equitable outcomes but also internal processes that elevate equity within the organization as well.

Lastly, there’s one more equity self-reflection question in the conclusion—as well as a sneak preview of what Arizona Town Hall is planning for community forums and statewide convening.

Just as the contents of this year’s report are different, expect this report’s outcomes to be different from previous iterations. Whereas prior background reports have focused on outlining a community *issue* to prompt discussion of *solutions*, this year’s report is focused on engaging with an *idea* to create *change*. It’s a subtle but important difference. The groundwork for greater equity is laid when honest, respectful conversations happen in a space that protects, honors, and uplifts differences as much as similarities. Change happens when working together to understand the past, explore the present, and chart a shared future. What that change is, is up to you.

# REFLECTING ON EQUITY

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Before engaging with contributors' perspectives on equity, consider what equity means to *you*. Engaging fully with equity requires an open mind not only about other people, but about ourselves. Every person, including you, lives in a complex and interconnected web of social meaning. Some of those meanings are created *by* you, and some of them were created by other people and *assigned* to you. That web of meaning structures many things about our lives, including how we perceive ourselves, how other people perceive us, and how, where, and when we can make change happen.

The questions are not intended to make you feel positive or negative about yourself or your social experience. Anyone may find themselves in a situation where who they are benefits them, just as anyone may find themselves in a situation where who they are works to their detriment. Yet everyone must balance the knowledge that we are all individuals having unique experiences with the equally important understanding that we belong to social categories that have perpetrated and experienced long histories of injustice. Equity requires the reconciliation of these two opposing tensions and acknowledging past and current harm while also valuing individuals as more than the sum of their social categories.

In this section, you'll find seven open-ended questions designed to get you thinking about equity, identity, and your own distinct perspective on our shared society. These questions are not a test or exam, and you won't be asked to share your answers with others unless you chose to do so. You'll also notice that each question is paired with responses from fellow Arizonans from all walks of life. These contributions were selected from more than 150 survey responses gathered through partner organizations. They were chosen to include as many diverse life experiences and social identities as possible to highlight the range of perspectives on equity across the state. You may find our contributors' responses sound familiar, or they may be totally new and unexpected. You might be uncomfortable examining your own or others' experiences, or you might feel enlightened or proud or any other emotion you can name. The bottom line is: there are no right answers here, and the only way to fail is not to begin at all.

**QUESTION 1.** Everyone has social identities—traits that you share with other people. We use social identity to categorize ourselves in relation to others according to what we have in common. For example, part of a social identity might be based on where you live (“Arizonan”) or your career (“writer”). Other social identities might be based on your race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, the language you speak, where you grew up, and many other traits.

**What are your social identities?**

**Our featured contributors describe their social identities:**

“I’m a native Arizonan, Christian, African-American, college-educated public servant.”

“I’m a white female over 65 and disabled, [and a] retired entrepreneur.”

“I’m a senior, Caucasian, middle-class college graduate, an independent voter, spiritual but not connected to formal religion, a social activist, a mother, a grandmother and great-grandmother, a pilot, a blue-water sailor, a traveler and more.”

“I’m a mother, a melting-pot ‘white’ American, a world citizen, an educated critical thinker, past retirement age, and unreligious.”

“Middle-aged; Hispanic; bilingual; college educated; descendant of immigrants; self-supporting; parent; husband; leader; hard-working.”

“I’m a Black, heterosexual man from rural America with three degrees living in an urban environment.”

“I’m white, middle-class, disabled, queer, nonbinary, pagan, college-educated, an abolitionist, and a Leo.”

“Grandmother, nearing retirement, happily married, transplant to Arizona, college-educated, and spiritual.”

“Middle-aged, white, male, divorced single father of three daughters, college educated with Masters and PhD degrees, small-business owner, citizen of the United States (American), Arizona native, international traveler, lover of the outdoors from the desert southwest to high mountain pine forests.”

“White, male, middle-aged, husband, father of four children, heterosexual, agnostic, post-graduate degree, socially liberal, fiscally conservative, American (with a global view).”

“I’m a man of Mexican descent, a professional in middle-high income bracket, a Christian (actually Methodist), and retirement age.”

“Bi-racial but Black-presenting African American woman.”

**QUESTION 2.** Equity does not have a single, unified definition. Instead, what equity looks like varies based on the context in which it's placed. Equity can be about the fairness of a process, or the ability of people to access the resources they need to live a long and healthy life. It can be about making sure that the people affected by a decision get a chance to participate in decision-making, or it can be about making sure that historical injustices aren't carried through today. Equity has many facets, each with their own nuance.

**What does equity mean to you?**

**Here's what some of our contributors answered:**

"It means that all people have a fair chance to lead healthy lives free of fear, discrimination, and economic insecurity. People are able to participate in society to their full potential and how they wish to participate."

"Each person having an equal opportunity to grow, improve, learn, and succeed. Equity (personified) couldn't make me taller, but it would offer me a step stool or a ladder—or better yet, roller skates! It wouldn't try to force me to use these resources and it wouldn't make taller people kneel. It would give me choices and opportunities and help, but it wouldn't make us all artificially equal and 'fair' means we each get what we NEED (not just what we WANT or what everyone gets.)"

"The opportunity to sit at the table if I so choose. The opportunity to own the table. The ability to open the table for others to sit there."

"Equity to me means that every person is treated with respect. In an age of constant dehumanizing language and blaming/shaming, the loudest voices can drown out the softer, quieter voices. Equity means not only equal access but guarantees equal voice. We as a society do not do this well. Decisions are frequently in a 'top-down' way, and assumptions are made as to what equity means to the disenfranchised. Equity begins with the sincere use of inclusive language and requires active listening which may mean that persons in a place of power have to be silent for a moment and not move to immediate problem-solving mode."

"Equity is similar to unconditional love. Systems treat people fairly. Resources are available to all without bias of race, gender, physical, mental or emotional challenges, or income. Those who haven't had or been able to use opportunities are given a helping hand to take advantage of what is available."

**QUESTION 3.** Social identities are complex. Some of these traits might make other people perceive us positively, while other traits mean that we may be perceived negatively. These perceptions are shaped by explicit and implicit messages from all parts of society.

**What social identities do you have that benefit you? Give an example of how they have benefited you.**

**What social identities do you have that disadvantage you? Give an example of how they have disadvantaged you.**

**Our contributors reflect on their identities:**

“My entrepreneurial background and activity within the community help me to navigate advocacy for myself and others.”

“Black without generational wealth presents several societal challenges.”

“In our society, the fact that I am white, cisgender, and grew up middle class are all parts of my identity that privilege me.”

“As I age into my seventh decade, older adults are frequently stereotyped in negative descriptions.”

“As a highly educated white male, people often show me respect, and when out in my community or traveling most places in the United States, I don’t attract any special attention. I lived in South Phoenix for several years, and for that brief period, got a glimpse of what it feels like to be a minority. Same when traveling to Jamaica, Africa, and Asia.”

“Being a disabled female has impacted my ability to earn a living within ‘normal’ constraints. Earning less as a female to begin with and then having my income restricted in order to receive government benefits that enable me to remain independent and not be institutionalized are and will continue to disadvantage me.”

“No doubt I benefit from being white. Being well educated is also an advantage, not because I am smarter, but because people assume I am. I am also a military veteran which often garners respect, though many assumptions about [my] political leanings are made.”

“As the spouse of a formerly incarcerated person, I get reflected stigma.”

“Older white male, followed by many stereotypes held by people who are certain they have determined my social identity.”

“Being a fat woman, everyone makes assumptions about you, particularly that you’re slow, lazy, and gross.”

**QUESTION 4.** Psychology tells us that everyone is aware of their own and others' social identities, whether they realize it consciously or not. Social identities are how we determine who is "in" a group with us and who is "outside" our group. Often people outside the group are treated differently than in-group members.

**Give an example of one time you were treated differently because of your social identity. How did you know you were being treated differently?**

**Our contributors tell their stories:**

"Because I never married and had two children, it was assumed that I was not a professional but rather viewed as an unwed mom in need of support."

"Seeking employment opportunities. I was well-qualified and told I was in the top two or three candidates for a position and [was] then not offered the opportunity as an openly disabled person who uses a wheelchair. Prior to my disability, I had no issues with employment."

"Walking into a store and being followed; being outwardly called the 'N' word; being told by that the only reason I received a job was based upon my color."

"While walking through a Mesa park holding my girlfriend's hand, we were screamed at and cursed by a woman telling us we are going to hell. If I was in a heterosexual relationship and simply walking through a public park holding hands this would not have happened."

"I worked in a government/elected official's office, and the white residents used to call in complaints about their minority neighbors and would ask to speak to other office staff prior to relaying the complaints' details. It was obvious and outright during each call."

"While there are many, the most indelible moment where I recognized unequal treatment due to my skin color was at 12. Briefly, my white friends and I went to the local community pool one summer afternoon. After one of my friends' sisters dropped us off, I was told that I couldn't go swimming with my friends. I was forced to wait in the car while my friends enjoyed the pool without me."

"I was promoted at work and some people treated me differently because they assumed I got the position because of my nationality and not through my own merit."

**QUESTION 5.** Treating people differently and making assumptions based on social identities is easy to do because we are not taught to think critically about how social identities are formed. Instead, we absorb many subtle messages from society about what a particular social identity means. Just as other people may treat us differently because of our social identity, we often unthinkingly make assumptions about others because of their social identity.

**Describe a time you made someone uncomfortable because of an assumption about their social identity. How did you learn that assumption was incorrect?**

**Our contributors talk about unlearning their assumptions:**

“My sister married a person of color. I assumed a political identity he did not have and an early conversation was quite awkward. It doesn’t take long to discover political differences, especially these days, so I learned not to assume someone bases their political outlook on their ethnicity!”

“I was in a grocery store purchasing a package of pre-made tortillas called ‘Maria and Juan Fresh Organic Tortillas.’ I assumed that Maria and Juan were hardworking immigrants who had opened a business, possibly with help from Small Business Administration. Turns out Maria is a university professor and Juan is an MD! I slid easily into my incorrect assumption despite the fact that I work very hard not to make incorrect assumptions about others.”

“In college, when I first learned a friend of mine was bisexual, I immediately assumed she must have a crush on ALL girls... including me. I attended a religious university at the time, and was unknowingly homophobic. Spending more time with her and our other friends, it became very obvious she was NOT attracted to me, and I learned, unsurprisingly, that bi people are just like everyone else, with a wider range of attraction. It helped pave the way for me to realize I was bi myself.”

“I absolutely must check myself and the language I use when talking with families who are involved with child welfare. I recently was talking to a kinship adoptive parent about their child and I jumped into problem-solving mode when the person had not asked for my opinion or my ideas. She suddenly went silent, and I had to apologize and ask her to please continue.”

“One critical and incorrect assumption I made was the ‘belief’ that students who had come out were still nonetheless part of a family. My assumption was proven wrong when a number of students told us that they were no longer welcomed by family including parents!”

**QUESTION 6.** Everyone has ‘spheres of influence.’ Your spheres of influence are anywhere your values, ideas, and opinions are respected and you have the ability to suggest or motivate changes to business as usual. Your spheres might be your family, your workplace, your school, your circle of friends, or anywhere else you can connect with others to make change.

**What are your spheres of influence?**

**Our contributors reflect on their own spheres of influence:**

“The world of Arizona public education—meaning the education community (less so the legislative policy arena). I have influence among those who support public education and work in public schools.”

“Right now, just somewhat coming out of COVID seclusion, my sphere of influence is definitely my family and close friends. A VERY small community.”

“I am referred to as the ‘matriarch’ of my immediate family. This has tremendous responsibility, especially with grandchildren and their spouses. My professional work spans 40 years of volunteer work on behalf of a difficult and unpopular cause. It does provide assumed credibility with some groups in decision-making authority and/or in the media. This, too, carries responsibility with it. In my circle of neighbors and casual friends not associated at all with my work, I have a level of influence due to my professional work. For example, people will seek candidate and voting advice from me because they know I work directly with certain issues or officials.”

“My family, my newsroom, my slam poetry community.”

“My sphere of influence is most prominent in my friend group. I think that group takes my opinion seriously and my ideas have an effect on the way my friends think and act.”

“The town council I serve on and the town staff that I work with.”

“Within my family (when I am not the ‘bossy’ mother and spouse!). Also, in my workplace where I am a board chair.”

“Any time I have contact with a person with enough time to share some thoughts.”

**QUESTION 7.** Part of working toward equity is being able to imagine a future world where equity is normal and valued.

**What does an equitable society look like to you? How is it different than the society we live in now?**

**Our contributors share their own visions of a more equitable society:**

“Where we celebrate ‘differences’ as strengths not weaknesses.”

“It looks like a place where people value each other and assign worth to every person. It looks like a place where we are concerned for the good of others and not just our own circle of contacts... It also must include honoring each other and our lived experiences.”

“A ‘level playing field’ is hard to make consistent for everyone because there are so many different kinds of people with a huge variety of individual circumstances. For this reason, what creates fairness and equity to some, creates an overly positive inequity for others and an overly negative inequity for still others. I believe that the United States continues to evolve into a more understanding and accepting society with each new generation, which is the foundation of and essential ingredient to greater equity.”

“Systemic barriers are much reduced—schools, loans, opportunities are available regardless of race, religion, or sexual identity. There is a strong majority of citizens who defend ‘equal opportunity.’ We have figured out a way to create more opportunity rather than re-allocate scarce opportunities from one social group to another.”

“Everyone has what they want and need to feel like they belong and are valued and comfortable, safe, and successful (however they choose to define that).”

“Absence of poverty and related social ills, absence of violence toward the other. People are likely always to feel oppressed, even in an equitable society, because of different assessments of what’s fair. An equitable society presumably would eliminate the worst disparities and offer accessible pathways for people to improve their positions. This could reduce blaming and punishing the perceived sources of injustice.”

“Creating an inclusive environment where generational and structural impediments no longer exacerbate disparities. Zip codes should not determine one’s future prosperity nor life expectancy, so strategic investments in creating vibrant communities for the most vulnerable among us. Ultimately, the goal is getting people not to think of words such as ‘equity’ or ‘social justice’ as pejoratives but as assets.”

“There will never be equity where intellectual or physical abilities are concerned. Obviously, we’ve not all been blessed with athletic ability or musical talent, or various intellectual gifts. However, we’ve all been blessed with *some* talents or gifts, and what we can do is allow everyone the opportunity to realize their full potential.”

“One where all can achieve what they desire through their own hard work and effort.”

# EQUITY CASE STUDIES

If you completed the self-reflection exercise above, you now have your own working definition of equity, as well as a vision of what a more equitable world might look like. But how do you take a vision and make it reality? That question is at the heart of our equity case studies below. Although each contributing organization works in a different area and takes a different approach, each of these case studies showcases an equity “success”—an intentional and deliberate effort to increase equity by transforming business as usual.

As you read, consider takeaways for your own vision of equity. Try to more precisely define the context in which you would like to improve equity. Who will be your fellow champions of change? What first steps can you take? Who might have unexpected insight? What might surprise you along the way?

## Case Study: Arizona Equal Justice Alliance

*“Conversations are so valuable because they are the way that we learn—I can’t know what you’re going through unless you tell me. It’s an opportunity to see things from another perspective, person-to-person.”*

### Who are you?

The Arizona Equal Justice Alliance (AEJA) is a collaboration between members of the State Bar of Arizona and the ASU Center for the Study of Race and Democracy (CSRD). The AEJA collaborates with key stakeholders in the legal profession and community to advance our goals. Contributing to this report are the AEJA Steering Committee members, Honorable Carol Berry, Judge of the Phoenix Municipal Court (ret.), Honorable Roxanne Song Ong, Chief Presiding Judge for the Phoenix Municipal Court (ret.), Dr. Lois Brown, Director for ASU’s CSRD, and ASU Foundation Professor of English, Carole Coles Henry, Board Chair, CSRD, Equal Opportunity Director of Phoenix (ret.), and attorney Elena Nethers, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the State Bar of Arizona. We are leaders in our various communities and what we do impacts our communities.

*Creating a space for sharing experiences and fostering dialogue among people with different backgrounds is an essential part of building equity. It’s also much easier said than done. The Arizona Equal Justice Alliance is an organization that hosts community conversations around equity and inclusion in the legal profession. Their case study can help you kick-start similar conversations in your own life.*

### What is the goal of the AEJA?

The AEJA is committed to securing a fair, impartial, and just legal profession for all Arizonans. The AEJA initiates and promotes actions that advance legal, social, and economic justice through substantive dialogues and inquiry about equal justice. Our goal is to address institutional and implicit biases that impede equal justice and access to justice; focus on education for legal professionals, Arizona communities and community partners about the law, the justice system and the legal profession; and honor and preserve the diverse histories of legal professionals in Arizona.

## **How did the AEJA get started? What made you think now is the right time for this kind of work?**

In 2018, ASU CSRD Advisory Board Chair Carol Coles Henry approached Judge Carol Scott Berry to gather support from the legal community for the CSRD 2019 Delivering Democracy program. Judge Berry contacted her friends and members of the State Bar to discuss possibilities. The conversations and meetings were dormant until 2020. In 2020, we were all shocked and dismayed by the deaths of unarmed African Americans. An email from a law school classmate ignited Judge Berry to restart the conversations between ASU CSRD, members of the State Bar, and State Bar affinity groups. Representatives from all core organizations listed below joined the conversations. Our goal was to create safe spaces for focused dialogue to discover ways we could address institutional and systematic racism and discrimination in the legal profession.

## **Who are the core members of the AEJA?**

Our Steering Committee is the guiding entity for the group. The AEJA includes the Arizona Jewish Lawyers Association, Arizona Black Bar, Arizona Asian American Bar Association, Arizona Women Lawyers Association, Arizona LGBT Bar Association, Hispanic National Bar Association, Native American Bar Association, Iranian American Bar Association, the South Asian Bar Association, the Arizona Supreme Court Commission on Diversity, Equality and Justice in the Judiciary, lawyers, judges and members of the legal community, and organizations that address legal issues.

## **What was the first AEJA event like?**

Our first event was held in September of 2020, at a time when many people were isolated, overwhelmed and grieving. Most people including members of the legal profession wanted to discuss and process the murder of George Floyd but lacked a safe place in which to do so. Our colleagues wanted the opportunity to share their personal and professional experiences of institutional and systemic racism. Individuals who were not people of color were beginning to realize the states of injustice in the United States and within their own professions, communities, and families. The AEJA recognized that purposeful dialogues about justice and the legal profession were needed.

This program included small-group discussions co-hosted by moderators and scribes from our core member organizations. The response to this event exceeded all our expectations. We had to close registration at 200 attendees to ensure that our Zoom platform could host all participants!

Critical to our success was securing Dr. Lois Brown of CSRD as the moderator. She came into this role understanding the power of the collective, how human rights and civil rights are at the heart of these complicated conversations about race, power, and society, and how best to sustain an environment in which people are confident that they can think aloud as they work through their experiences and challenges. It was significant, too, that Dr. Brown was not a member of the legal profession because that then eliminated for participants the fear of saying something that might offend or alienate a co-worker in the legal profession, future opposing counsel, or a judge before whom they might one day appear.

Our engagement with participants enabled us to identify key areas for action. These areas then shaped our action planning and culminated in the creation of four primary areas of focus: Advocacy and Accountability in the workplace, Mission Statements for firms and legal professionals, Continuing Legal Education on Equal Justice, and a Collaborative Bars History.

Our first AEJA event confirmed that there was broad interest in open, non-judgmental dialogue and opportunities to contribute and support for initiatives focused on equal justice and access to justice.

## **It sounds like that first event was a success. How did you build on it?**

We have held events at State Bar of Arizona Convention for the past three years. We've refined our process, and now hold more structured discussions with prepared questions provided to smaller, facilitated breakout groups. We have moved from 75-minute zoom programs and virtual breakout room discussions with hundreds online to three-hour standing-room-only State Bar of Arizona convention programs featuring Arizona Supreme Court justices, judges from all levels of Arizona courts, legal advocates, and non-profits focused on equal justice, restorative justice, and access to justice. One retired Arizona judge who had attended State Bar of Arizona Conventions for more than three decades declared that this was the most impactful program she had ever attended.

Our sessions have always been interactive, and we continue to design forums that move from collective perspectives to individual reflection and back to collective assessments of what can be done. We invite and expect people to talk about racial equity, access to justice, systemic racism, unconscious and deliberate bias, leadership, and advocacy. We ask participants to take responsibility for how they bear witness to discrimination, inequality, and courageous acts of intervention. We have integrated evaluation mechanisms into our programming design, and we consistently use participant and facilitator feedback to inform our planning and program development.

We believe in the power of our personal stories. It is through open and ongoing dialogue that we are able to foster a greater understanding and respect for one another.

## **What happens after those conversations?**

As important as the dialogue is, we emphasize that participants are there to create their own personal and professional action plans for change. Our programs, at their core, are calls to action. We want participants to ask what they can do to contribute to a more equitable world. Our facilitated small and large group discussions enable attendees to clarify which values, professional goals, and experiences will enable them to become agents of change. We don't tell participants where to focus their effort or how to get to their goals, and that's intentional. This is what is distinctive about our work—we consistently address the power of personal convictions on professional and community transformation.

We find that when participants chart their own course toward their goals, it leads to a much more sustained, focused, and hopeful energy. Individuals avoid half-hearted and ineffective gestures and instead tell themselves "I can, and I will do this essential work." A call to action for some is a declaration that they will commit to incorporating concepts of equal justice in their work. Others may commit to seeking out pro bono opportunities at their firms and calls to action for others may result in their determination to teach their children about inclusion.

### **Has anything, positive or negative, surprised you along the way?**

Our biggest surprise has been the strong support and positive responses from our colleagues. Reputation and demonstrated impartiality are important in the legal profession and we weren't sure if our colleagues would engage on such difficult and sensitive topics. Their participation and enthusiastic support for future programming has been encouraging.

We did wonder whether our audiences would be made up of individuals who were already fully educated and onboard with the concepts of racial equity and justice. We have found that not to be the case. At every session, we've had participants who have never attended anything like this before. There will always be people who are unreachable, but we've been uplifted by how many more people are just waiting for the right time and place to have these conversations.

Another positive for us has been the high level of engagement from members of the judiciary, including Supreme Court Justices, County Attorneys, legal service organizations, and individual attorneys. The sustained efforts of our AEJA steering committee and members is also another beacon of light for us.

We have had to navigate the challenges of waning interest by some who aspired to do this work with us but then stepped away because of competing priorities. We also have had to reflect on how best to press on when we encounter hesitation or resistance to change within the legal profession.

### **What would long-term success look like for the AEJA?**

We are building a replicable model for other groups seeking access to justice, equity, and inclusion. We want to create a training program to help others have conversations about equity, using best practices we have learned along the way. Success will be the expansion of our continued legal education offerings, collaborations with organizations within the legal community, and partnerships with those who share our goals.

**Learn more at <https://www.azbar.org/>**

# Case Study: American Indian Policy Institute

*“A lot of the country really saw that broadband is essential and connectivity is essential. Now the general public has a better idea of why it’s important and how much we need digital equity for Indigenous communities.”*

*When you think of equity, you probably think of educational achievements, job opportunities, or access to healthcare—not infrastructure. The American Indian Policy Institute’s focus on digital equity highlights why equity is impactful even in unexpected areas, and shows how historical patterns of neglect can structure equity needs today. Their case study demonstrates that raising awareness can be the first step toward new opportunities.*

## Who are you?

We are Dr. Traci Morris, Executive Director of the American Indian Policy Institute (AIPI) at Arizona State University and member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, and E.J. John, J.D., Senior Policy and Research Analyst for AIPI and member of the Navajo Nation.

## What does AIPI focus on?

We are an applied policy research institute. Our expertise is in broadband technology, which is defined as high-speed internet access that does not rely on a phone line. For most broadband, your internet happens over dedicated wiring, like a coaxial or fiber optic cable. There’s a lot of policy that goes into guiding and shaping the technological systems we use every day, like broadband. We also have a particular focus on “digital equity.” Digital equity is a term that captures the need for everyone in society to have access to reliable, high-speed information technology—like the internet—in order to fully participate in that society. And we are specifically focused on broadband technology and policy and digital equity for Tribal sovereign nations, which often lack broadband infrastructure.

It is critical to highlight that we are an Indigenous-led, Indigenous-staffed research center. We aim to create and translate research and knowledge into on-the-ground solutions that meet community needs. We work to create change and build capacity by being deeply integrated with the communities we collaborate with, and it is important to us that we are not just coming in, telling them what to do, and leaving again. We work to intentionally build partnerships between academia and Tribal communities. We say intentionally because, historically, relationships between Indigenous peoples and higher education institutions have been very fraught. Universities have abused their power in all kinds of ways. We want to make sure we are not reproducing those dynamics, so our work is not *about* Tribal partners, it is *for* and *with* Tribal partners.

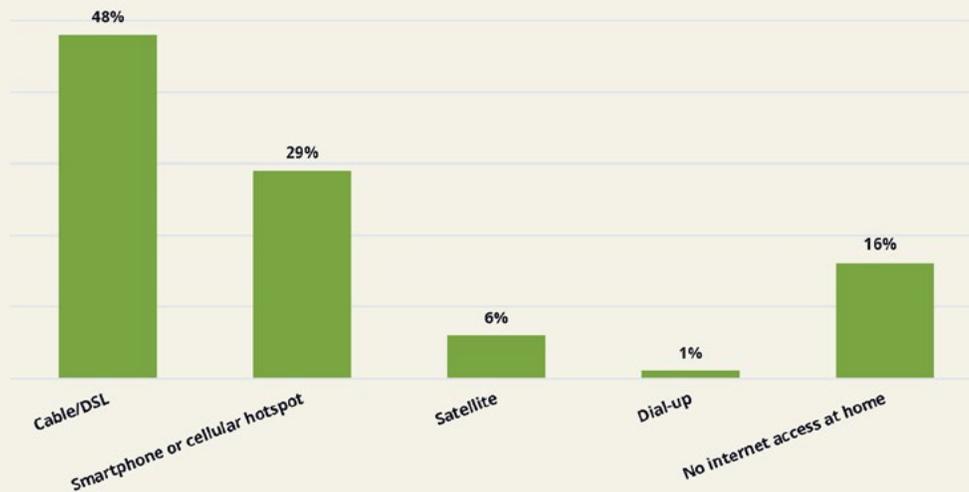
## What makes broadband access so important to equity?

Broadband internet has become integrated into every aspect of society. There is a good chance you are reading this on a computer screen using broadband right now. If you are at your job, you almost certainly applied for that job using an electronic job application. You can look at your paycheck through your online bank and pay your rent or mortgage through an online portal. If you have to take a sick day, you might book a telehealth appointment that requires a working webcam and microphone. If you get a parking ticket, you might need to pay online—and if you can’t, there can be serious consequences. At a broader level, not having broadband impacts a person’s ability to make an impact as a resident of their community. Local advocacy groups are organizing through social media. It is extremely hard to run a local business without internet access. Most news media have now pivoted to prioritize online content over traditional media like radio and television. Not having broadband puts you at a disadvantage at every level—educational, health, economic, social, political, and your ability to access information. And this disadvantage is not random: people of color and rural residents are the most likely to be without broadband access. This lack of digital equity perpetuates and reinforces disadvantage for already marginalized communities.

## What is the current state of digital equity for Tribal nations?

This is a hard question to answer with precision. The short answer is we know a lot of communities in Tribal nations lack the broadband infrastructure necessary to create digital equity. The longer answer is we know that there is a big infrastructure gap, but we don't know *how* big. There has long been a lack of consistent and reliable data about broadband infrastructure serving Tribal areas. This lack of data is part of a larger trend of lack of investment in Tribal nations more generally—not only is the infrastructure not there, but the information to understand what we even need is not there either.

### Internet Access at Home (%)



**Method for accessing the internet at home among respondents.** Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. [https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal\\_tech\\_assessment\\_compressed.pdf](https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf).

In 2019, we conducted our own assessment and received responses covering Tribal areas in 19 different states. We found overall that the majority of respondents did not have access to broadband internet at home and that a substantial portion were able to access the internet only on a mobile device.<sup>3</sup> It may be easy to think that mobile connectivity through smartphones is a sufficient alternative and be satisfied with that, but our research shows that smartphones are not really a viable alternative to broadband. Many critical digital resources like educational platforms and employment applications are not designed for smartphones. Even when mobile-optimized versions are available, many participants used limited data plans, and cell phone coverage on Tribal nations can be unreliable. Smartphones can be helpful and have important functions in people's lives—but they're not a replacement for full internet access.

All of this begs the question, why isn't broadband internet access already available for Tribal communities? If there is such a need, why isn't it being met by the same internet companies that have brought broadband to households across America? The fact is, the market forces that mean connectivity for urban areas often do not see less densely populated, more rural areas as a good financial investment. That perception is even stronger for Tribal areas, because they are often situated in the most remote, most rugged terrain—a legacy of Indigenous peoples being forced onto land that European colonizers had no use for. It is further complicated by complex legal requirements when it comes to installing infrastructure on Tribal lands. Even today, sovereign Tribal nations do not own the title to their own reservation land: it is held in trust by the federal government. So even something as relatively simple as digging a utility trench has to go through multiple layers of permit and approval: multiple

<sup>3</sup> Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. [https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal\\_tech\\_assessment\\_compressed.pdf](https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf).

federal agencies, private landowners, internal Tribal processes, and in some cases, the state as well. And all of the extra time and effort required adds up, whether it is the physical challenges of working in remote areas or the bureaucratic challenge of navigating land ownership.

### **The pandemic hit Tribal communities particularly hard. Can you tell us a little about the experience of the pandemic and how it highlighted the need for digital equity?**

It is easy to say that Tribal communities were hit particularly hard by COVID-19, but it is more accurate to say that because of ongoing disinvestment and infrastructure underdevelopment in Tribal areas, Tribal communities did not have the tools they needed when COVID-19 came roaring in. Lack of reliable, adequate internet access exacerbated these hardships. Suddenly residents were not able to leave their homes. Adults could not work remotely, children could not go to school remotely, and people who got sick could not reach their doctors for help. Most Tribal communities scrambled to put up Wi-Fi access points, but many residents had to drive a long way just to reach one. Someone might drive for hours to get to a hotspot, then spend several more hours in their car trying to catch up on work or homework, then have to drive home. Apart from the extra time, that is a significant expense in fuel for a family already that is struggling to get by because of pandemic-related job loss. You might need a telehealth appointment for a prescription and have to drive to where you can connect for your appointment and then drive some more to get to a pharmacy. Older community members often relied on neighbors for news, and with community spaces closed for everyone's safety, sometimes that meant standing outside someone's door and shouting from six feet away. If someone had a COVID-related health emergency, there might not be reliable 911 coverage. You might have to drive to connection point just to get help. All of these infrastructure gaps have been true for many years—but the pandemic brought national attention to these issues in a way that had not happened before.

### **What were some of the outcomes of that attention and where did AIPI fit in?**

Well, the ultimate outcome of the increased attention to infrastructure issues on Tribal lands was, happily, new funding streams for helping bridge the digital equity gap. The American Rescue Plan Act allocated \$100 million to support Tribal governments and Indigenous communities through the Indigenous Communities Program, and broadband infrastructure funding is available in that package along with many other opportunities. Later the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program was enacted through the Consolidated Appropriations Act in 2021 and expanded by an additional \$2 billion in 2022. That, in some ways, is a drop in the bucket—we estimate it would take between \$8-10 billion to fully close the digital equity gap for Tribal communities, but it's far more than has ever been previously allocated.

Describing it that way makes it sound like the funding happened on its own, but in reality, it was part of an enormous awareness and advocacy push from Tribal governments and many supporting organizations, including AIPI. Our longstanding partnerships and connections really shined as we worked with the National Congress of American Indians and the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, among others, to make legislators understand how critical this funding is. That is what we want to emphasize: it took years of groundwork to get everything in place, and then we saw our opportunity, jumped on it, and ended up securing funding at what seemed like a breakneck pace (but still not fast enough!). When legislators asked for justification for the funds, we were able to share AIPI's previous research on Tribal connectivity—which was especially important since, as we mentioned, few other data sources are available. We were also able to assist in the creation of three resolutions recommending changes to the funding programs and those resolutions passed committee. And we continue to support efforts to move quickly on funding Tribal broadband by helping Tribal nations navigate eligibility requirements and identify funding opportunities. This round of funding may not be enough to provide digital equity for all, but it does show that we have the expertise and connections to motivate action.

## What are some of the unique opportunities presented by working with Tribal communities on greater digital equity?

Tribes successfully rolling out broadband infrastructure are being very creative in their approach. We are seeing increasing use of the community broadband model, meaning that instead of a private company, the Tribe itself or the local municipality owns the infrastructure. Without the same demand to make a profit, connectivity becomes much more affordable for households. And the infrastructure many Tribal communities build is truly equitable—there is a firm commitment to building out to *every* home and no one is left behind. It may not always be the fastest internet, but it's for everyone. We are also seeing some innovative experiments with wireless connectivity, like community Wi-Fi, which can dodge some of the concerns around land ownership that can plague hardline internet infrastructure.

## What's next for AIFI?

Our first task moving forward is to make sure that Tribal needs are not forgotten as pandemic-related attention and funding begin to fade. We are looking at new partnerships with organizations like the National Digital Inclusion Alliance to ensure we are not left behind. There has often been one-time investment in Indian Country that is not sustained—for instance, E.J. tells the story of growing up with landline phone service but one day, someone accidentally cut the phone line while doing farm work. They called the phone company, but the company headquarters had moved 200 miles away, and no one ever came out to fix the lines. That community still does not have phone service. That is exactly what we want to avoid now—a one-time fix. So, we will keep bringing the pressure to bear on federal agencies to live up to their promises.

We are excited to do more research into how the funds are used moving forward and support Tribal efforts by educating partners on the unique needs of Tribal communities. We are also partnering with a group of educators called “digital navigators” who work in parallel with infrastructure-building efforts to assist Tribal communities in understanding the ins and outs of broadband technology. That means how to use the internet but also the system as whole: how broadband works, what the process of constructing it looks like, and the regulatory agencies in charge of it. The digital navigator program is a recent addition, but in 2022 when all this funding became available, Tribal nations were encouraged to apply—but there are so many complexities to planning out broadband infrastructure that they did not always have the knowledge needed to apply. By pairing policy, infrastructure, and social expertise, we can secure greater investments in broadband infrastructure and hopefully begin to close the digital equity gap for Tribal communities.

**Learn more at <https://aipi.asu.edu/>**

# Case Study: Arizona Health Improvement Plan

*“Our success is a plan that isn’t just a document. It’s a tool for convening, sharing, and building a future.”*

## Who are you?

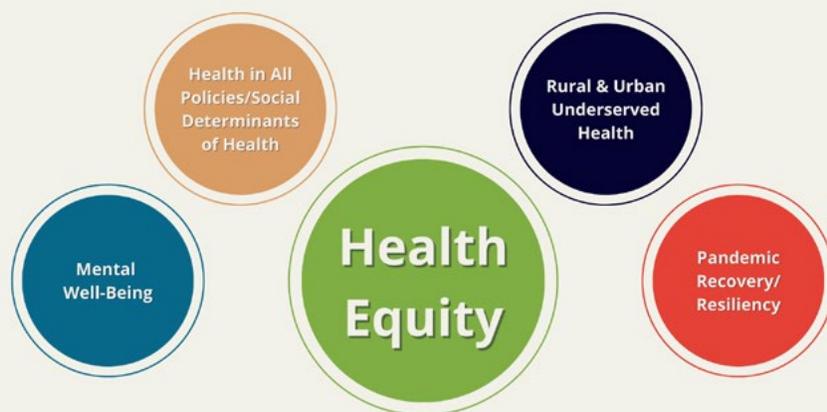
I am Sheila Sjolander, the Assistant Director of the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). I serve as one of the primary staff for the Arizona Health Improvement Plan (AzHIP). My colleague Carla Berg, former Deputy Director for Public Health Services at ADHS, also staffed the AzHIP initiative.

*Re-imagining a statewide planning document with dozens of stakeholders is no mean feat! Sheila and Carla kindly shared their experience moving from an approach that addressed only health outcomes to one that reaches the root causes driving those outcomes. The Arizona Health Improvement Plan case study is for anyone wanting to transform their perspective on a problem to examine deeper issues of equity.*

## Can you give us a little background? What’s the context for your work?

The AzHIP is a comprehensive, statewide planning document produced every five years that sets priorities for improving health across Arizona. As the guiding document for health priorities, it has an enormous impact on the health equity of Arizona residents. Creating the AzHIP is a process that involves effort not just from ADHS but also from our partners, including county health departments, professional and community-based groups, tribal organizations, and subject matter experts. Our steering committee alone has representation from 23 different agencies and organizations. In 2021, we transformed the way our document’s priorities were created to highlight five key areas (see below).

### 2021-2025 AzHIP Priorities



“Arizona Health Improvement Plan Summary Document, 2021 – 2025.” Arizona Department of Health Services. June 2021. <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/operations/strategic-initiatives/azhip-2021-2025.pdf>.

## What was the catalyst for change?

The previous iteration of the AzHIP (2016-2020) used a list of statewide leading health issues to set priorities. Each priority had a plan and a workgroup was created around each issue. For example, substance use and suicide were both listed as priorities in the 2016 AzHIP—meaning both suicide and substance use had a separate workgroup that identified strategies and action items. Over time, however, we realized this was not the most useful way to

organize ourselves. Having so many priorities was challenging to manage and at times, inefficient. While suicide and substance use are not the same, they share many of the same causes, like trauma and social isolation. We also discovered that having strongly siloed working groups was counterproductive as many stakeholders were in multiple working groups, and participating became a significant time commitment. Workgroups were often having similar conversations about root causes, such as how our neighborhoods are built. And we ran into roadblocks because some of the right players were not at the table to help solve complex problems. While we had movement forward in many of the priorities, it became clear that the planning process needed improvement to maximize impact.

### **How did you get from Point A (old plan) to Point B (new plan)?**

We began the process of planning for the 2021-2025 HIP in 2020. And we were lucky to have such great relationships with our partners because they were coming to meetings and saying, “Look, our local health assessments are all showing the same thing. We’re tracking different diseases but we’re seeing the same disparities in outcomes across all of them. Whether it’s cancer or heart disease, there are differences by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by rural areas compared to urban areas. We need to think about how to organize differently.” They showed us that the unifying factor in all of these outcomes was a lack of health equity, and that lack of equity was driving who got sick from what and whether they could get care, and whether they died from their disease or recovered. And from the ADHS perspective, we knew there were too many priorities and working groups. It ended up being the perfect time to come together and examine how we structure our plan and imagine something that was more cross-cutting, more multi-dimensional, and spoke to the common underlying contributors of health.

We were also careful with the scope and timeline of implementation in the new plan. We chose to focus on specific, tangible actions that we thought we could be accomplished in the next two years. Since the plan took effect in 2021, that means we will be revisiting and updating this year in 2023. That was intentional on our part since we found in previous iterations of the AzHIP that trying to project what will be impactful or necessary too far in the future is not realistic. For instance, none of us could have foreseen a global pandemic when we were meeting in 2015 to plan for 2020! So, we learned if we build out detailed actions for five years from now, they will not be relevant by the time we get there. Instead, we are keeping our large-scale goals around health equity and addressing root causes in focus, while also making sure we stay flexible and can pivot quickly in pursuit of those goals as things change.

### **How does equity fit in?**

The new planning process we implemented in 2020 centered around prioritizing the root *causes* of health outcomes, not just the outcomes themselves. And thanks to the data in our health assessment and the input of our partners, we knew that health inequities and injustices were at the heart of these root causes, driving everything from differences in life spans to rates of disease to access to treatment. Centering health equity as a priority means paying particular attention to communities and populations where the impacts of health injustice and inequity are being felt every day and co-creating solutions and systems with those communities. The health equity priority is also a guiding light for how we achieve our other AzHIP priorities. Health equity should be in everything we do, whether engaging with non-traditional stakeholders that have previously been excluded to build relationships or embracing cultural humility by asking a community to help us understand their needs. We have put our focus on health equity into action by prioritizing funding for program implementation based on its ability to advance equity.

### **What’s one big challenge you faced along the way?**

We’ve faced two significant barriers while re-envisioning the AzHIP. The first is funding to make sure that we are financially supporting the work. In the past few years, public health funding has seen a big uptick in investment from both governments and private foundations. The downside is that a lot of that funding is very targeted and relies heavily on a grant or funding application being able to fit into a specific category. Much like the priorities

in our previous iterations of the AzHIP, those categories and targets do not always allow for a broad perspective on solutions. It can be hard to succeed when applying for funding opportunities if your work is more holistically focused on root causes than a single intervention program. Fortunately, we were able to leverage some funding from Proposition 207, which specifically identified the Arizona Health Improvement Plan as a program that could be funded from a one-time allocation. In addition, a certain percentage of tax revenue from marijuana sales is distributed to a Justice Reinvestment fund on an ongoing basis. That fund is designed to support communities disproportionately impacted by high rates of arrest and incarceration during marijuana prohibition. The AzHIP also focuses on positive impacts in underserved communities, so it was a natural fit to receive some of those funds.

The second, related challenge is evaluation. Most public health evaluation is set up to track program outcomes through quantitative data indicators. In previous iterations of the AzHIP that focused on specific diseases, this was sometimes as simple as seeing the number of people with that disease go up or down. It is not quite so simple when you are talking about these cross-cutting thematic priorities like mental well-being or health equity. Those bigger priorities intersect with concepts that can be very hard to measure, like quality of life, and sometimes the best indicator is not even something related to health. So, we had to be creative in what we use: for instance, one of our measures for how we are doing on improving the social determinants of health is the percentage of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing. That may not seem health-related at first glance, but we know from research that safe, affordable housing is one of the biggest factors in mental and physical health. It is also something we can track and measure over time.

### **Tell us about your success, and what's next for the AzHIP?**

We've been surprised and delighted at the support from stakeholders and partners in the current version of the plan, and we have seen a big increase in stakeholder buy-in for plan implementation. Working groups are now much more connected to one another because they are no longer siloed by topic, and complex issues can be examined from multiple angles. We are also seeing new organizations and agencies feel able to participate even if they are not explicitly health-related. For instance, the Arizona Department of Housing has become a valued partner since housing and health are so closely tied. We have also been able to establish an Office of Health Equity within ADHS to support the AzHIP priorities, which is a huge win.

As previously mentioned, it is hard to measure the success of something like the new AzHIP purely in numerical terms. We will be thrilled if in two years we are updating the plan to show full implementation, even if we do not know what the final outcomes of our programs will be yet. We are also seeing success in the way that stakeholder groups are pulling together to achieve common goals. Part of success for the AzHIP is showing partners how much their local efforts strengthen and contribute to our overall priorities for health improvement. The AzHIP is a requirement for ADHS to meet standards for national public health accreditation. It would be easy to produce a document that is designed only to check that accreditation box, but that has no real impact on health. However, we have never wanted to do that, and we have always thought of it instead as an enormous opportunity to coalesce partners around common goals. The AzHIP is a way to tell the story of health in Arizona and highlight our strengths as well as opportunities to improve. Reinvigorating the plan through incorporating health equity as the thread that runs through all our priorities and programs was a great way to build momentum and connect with each other in order to better health outcomes for all Arizona residents.

**Learn more at**  
**<https://www.azdhs.gov/operations/strategic-initiatives/index.php#azhip-home>**

# Case Study: Arizona State University Bridging Success Program

*“They don’t have to talk about their history, although they can if they need to. It’s a place to share or not share, but they always belong. They don’t have to explain themselves. They know we get it”*

## Who are you?

We are Justine Cheung, MSW, Program Director of Bridging Success, and Kalah Villagrana, MSW, MPA Social Worker for Bridging Success within the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University.

## What is Bridging Success?

Bridging Success is an ongoing higher education support program for students at Arizona State University (ASU) who are entering college who have been or are currently in the foster care system. Our work starts even before admission, as we provide one-on-one guidance for students the moment they decide they are interested in coming to ASU. We can help with things like applying for college, navigating financial aid, and enrolling in classes. We have an Early Start program that brings students who have a background in foster care to campus early to get familiar with their space, learn more about what campus offers, and connect with other students with similar backgrounds. We work with these students throughout their time at ASU, including personal coaching for academic and personal success, workshops that teach psychosocial skills, and social events. If a student gives us permission, we can also interact with their “supportive adults” to coordinate resources. These adults may be foster parents, group home staff, biological family members, high school counselors, teachers, or other adults who are involved in a young person’s life.

Most importantly of all, Bridging Success staff and fellow students help by being a support network and providing a place for students with unique life experiences to connect with staff and fellow students. We are a community that can listen to their needs, share their successes and challenges, guide them through the complexities of a large university, and recognize them as people with full, complex lives beyond the box they might tick on a demographics form.

## How did Bridging Success get started?

Bridging Success was born from a senate bill (1208) passed in the state legislature in 2013. The bill mandated that the Arizona Board of Regents create a five-year pilot program that provided tuition waivers for any student who was in foster care at the age of 16. The impetus for the senate bill was the gap between educational aspiration and achievement for youth in foster care. When asked, more than 80% wanted a bachelor’s degree, yet graduation rates for two- or four-year degrees were 11% for women previously in foster care and 5% for men by the age of 26.<sup>4</sup> The tuition waiver program is a way to help close that gap.

*Building a program that serves individuals with unique life circumstances is hard to begin with. Building a program that creates genuine bonds of shared support is even harder. Bridging Success at ASU shared their best practices for collaborating with their students to create a space that honors, respects, and supports their experiences. Their case study is a blueprint for anyone who wants to advance equity by building a community for self-advocacy.*

4 Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. “Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni.” Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. [https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging\\_success\\_may\\_5\\_2022.pdf](https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf).

Higher education institutions around the state realized the new tuition waiver program was going to create an influx of students who were or had previously been in the foster care system. We also realized that this student population would benefit from additional support in order to succeed academically. In that sense, Bridging Success was created to be an equity program. We knew that there was also an achievement gap in K-12 education between students who were in the foster care system and those that were not, with lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates for students that were in foster care.<sup>5</sup> They also tended to move from school to school due to unstable living situations and placement changes, which disrupts learning and makes it hard to form lasting connections with peers and educators.<sup>6</sup> We thought, “Wow, these students are getting admitted to ASU despite all these challenges, and now the tuition waiver program means they are financially able to attend.” So, they are in, and they are here; now, how do we make sure that ASU is giving them the things they need to succeed? They are doing their part; now, let’s do ours.

In 2018, the bill was updated, and the tuition waiver program was made permanent. They also widened the criteria so that all students who were in foster care at the age of 14 are now eligible for a tuition waiver.

### **What makes Bridging Success different from other academic support programs?**

We try to be very holistic in defining “support.” We’re an academic program, but academics are just the tip of the iceberg. It does not work to only worry about someone’s classes and focus on what will improve their grades if they are having challenges in their personal life. More importantly, it is not fair or equitable to treat people like their personhood is the same as their GPA. We see our students as whole people with more going on than just college. The kinds of things they might ask for support go far beyond academic coaching. We might be asked to help them find safe, stable housing, connect them with legal experts for a court case, or get copies of their vital records like their birth certificate to apply for a new Social Security Card. Having someone in their corner when dealing with complex life issues can be just as—or even more—helpful than having another academic writing seminar. Of course, we do those too!

Our focus on the student rather than only on the academic outcome carries over to other types of work we do. We advocate for change within the ASU system to better accommodate students from foster care backgrounds. Sometimes the way the university operates unintentionally excludes our students or makes it more difficult for them to access resources because the system is not designed with their experiences in mind. For instance, the option to select that you are currently in foster care when you apply for ASU is a recent addition that we worked to implement. An ongoing example of this is housing. Many of our students need to stay in on-campus housing for their entire college career, but there is very little housing for upper-division students like juniors and seniors available. So, we are working with ASU Housing to ensure our students receive priority for the upper-division housing that does exist. It is about bringing awareness of our students’ needs to the people who can create change.

It is important to mention that we are fortunate to have our own supportive community, just like our students. Bridging Success and programs like it are larger than just ASU: all Arizona Board of Regents universities and the Maricopa and Pima County Community College systems have similar programs to support foster youth. We take a collaborative approach between institutions and share a lot of lessons learned. It is an unusual arrangement because if you think about it, all these colleges and universities are technically in competition for these students. However, everyone’s perspective has always been to put our students first and make sure these programs are as successful as we can make them, and that overrides any sense of competition.

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5 Barratt, Vanessa X, BethAnne Berliner and Natalie J. Felida. “Arizona’s invisible achievement gap: Education outcomes of students in foster care in the state’s public schools.” WestEd. 2015. <https://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Arizonas-Invisible-Achievement-Gap-2015.pdf>.

6 Barratt, Berliner, and Felida. 2015.

## What are some of the challenges of running a program focusing on students who are foster care alumni?

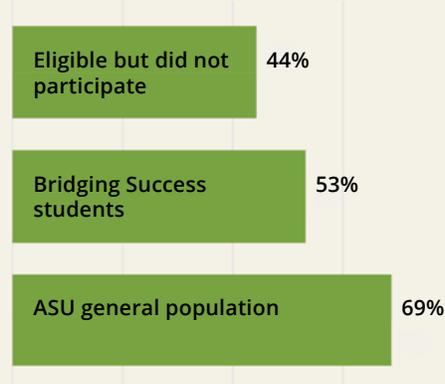
We have two major challenges: integrating students from foster care backgrounds into an educational system not set up with them in mind and securing funding. We have already talked about the first challenge, but it bears repeating that these students are coming into an environment that doesn't intentionally have barriers but is not built to meet their needs. We get unique situations all the time, like one student who came to us after being in foster care with the Navajo Nation rather than the Arizona Department of Child Safety. Does that student still qualify for the tuition waiver program? New challenges come up so frequently that we have a running joke about it. It feels like it's always, "Hmm, this is a barrier we've never seen before." Thankfully, we are usually able to resolve it by connecting students with experts in admissions, housing, or financial aid. When it is not a problem the university can tackle, we reach out to our amazing external advisory council, which includes community-based organizations that are often able to provide other forms of support.

At the program level, funding is an ongoing issue. The tuition waiver mandate from the state legislature is an unfunded mandate, meaning that colleges and universities are expected to use their own financial resources to fund tuition for students from foster care backgrounds. The legislature did not dedicate any money for tuition or to additional support programs like Bridging Success. We were lucky enough to be grant-funded by the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust in the past, and it was fantastic to have that launching point, but grant funding is not viable long-term. Moving towards more sustainable funding means we need to demonstrate program impacts—and that takes a while. In the meantime, students have needs right now that we are trying to meet. It is a balancing act.

## How do you measure success?

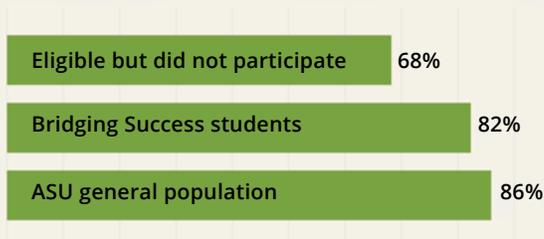
That is an interesting question because we think of success in several different ways. In terms of program outcomes, we recently partnered with the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at ASU to evaluate indicators like enrollment and retention. We are happy to report that we have increased enrollment among students from a foster care background by 31% and that our student retention after one year is 82%. Our graduation rate is 53%, which is below the general student population but higher than the national average (31%) for students from foster care backgrounds. We are very pleased with the results of the evaluation, but they also show we have room to be even more ambitious in the next few years. We also just received with ASU's President's Medal for Social Embeddedness, which recognizes work at the university that contributes to the success of the community as a whole. That is an enormous honor.

## Graduated Within Six Years



Comparison of Bridging Success graduation rates. Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. "Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni." Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. [https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging\\_success\\_may\\_5\\_2022.pdf](https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf).

## Student Retention After One Year



Comparison of Bridging Success student retention after one year. Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. "Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni." Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. [https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging\\_success\\_may\\_5\\_2022.pdf](https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf).

At the same time, the most important measure of success will always be our students and how we are impacting their lives. Retention, graduation, and having our students go on to master's degrees is wonderful, but what matters most is that our students are doing what is right for them. We will support that any way we can. So sometimes success looks like helping someone who has not found their footing at college make an exit plan, so they have what they need to transition successfully. Sometimes it is helping a student transfer to a different university or enroll in a community college instead. We have gotten heat from colleagues at times: "Why didn't you do more to keep them?" Because it was not in their best interest to stay, and that is our guiding principle. Are we enabling students to pursue their own best interests? Then we are doing our job.

## What do the next five years hold for Bridging Success?

In the short term, we want to build out our program to offer more opportunities for upper-division students. We have created a program that focuses on transitioning into college and the ASU community, and now we need to think about something similar but opposite: how can we help prepare our students to leave ASU? How can we empower them to find careers or decide if graduate school is a good fit, and how do we help them build their next safe, supportive community along the way? So that is our target for the next few years. We would love to find a funder that would be willing to invest in our students directly—for instance, through a small grant that would allow us to reward them financially for every successful semester. These rewards would culminate in our students graduating with a small savings account, a nest egg that could help set them up for success after obtaining their degree.

In the longer term, we are looking at ways to capture our best practices and share the knowledge we have learned across not just Arizona but to all of higher education. We are working on a program manual that hopefully will help other institutions set up programs like ours. A program like Bridging Success takes a lot of effort and a lot of willingness to listen to your students and learn from your mistakes, but it is worth it. Building community is how we make change.

**Learn more at**  
**[https://fosteryouth.asu.edu/  
services-support/bridging-success](https://fosteryouth.asu.edu/services-support/bridging-success)**

# Case Study: Fuerza Local (Local First) Arizona

*“We’re building community, not just revenue streams.”*

## Who are you?

We were lucky enough to closely collaborate with city partners on Fuerza Local’s first business accelerator program outside of Maricopa County, so we have both city and Fuerza Local staff telling our story. We are: Jenna Rowell, Director of Rural Community Development for Local First Arizona; Elaman Rodriguez, Senior Manager of Spanish Rural Programs; Tricia Lewis, Tourism and Economic Development Director for the City of Cottonwood; and Molly Spangler, Economic Development Director for the City of Sedona.<sup>7</sup>

*Small business entrepreneurship can be a critical part of building equity in underserved communities. Building up small businesses, however, requires strong relationships between local governments, organizations, and communities that have previously experienced discrimination. Fuerza Local’s case study is a guide to engaging residents and building trust through cultural humility and a willingness to try new things.*

## Can you give us a little background on Fuerza Local?

Fuerza Local means “Local Strength” and is a program of Local First Arizona, a non-profit organization working to strengthen communities and economies by supporting local businesses throughout Arizona. Fuerza Local is a Spanish-language business accelerator designed to help Latino/a micro entrepreneurs gain the skills needed for success. Our participants meet weekly to learn about financial literacy, cash flow management, business planning, and more. They set a goal to save \$1,000 throughout the program, and if they meet that goal, their contribution is matched by a \$1,000 scholarship to support their business. They also build a strong support network through relationships with other entrepreneurs in their cohort and past alumni. In 2022, we piloted our first cohort outside of Maricopa County through partnerships with the cities of Cottonwood and Sedona.

## What does small business entrepreneur training have to do with equity?

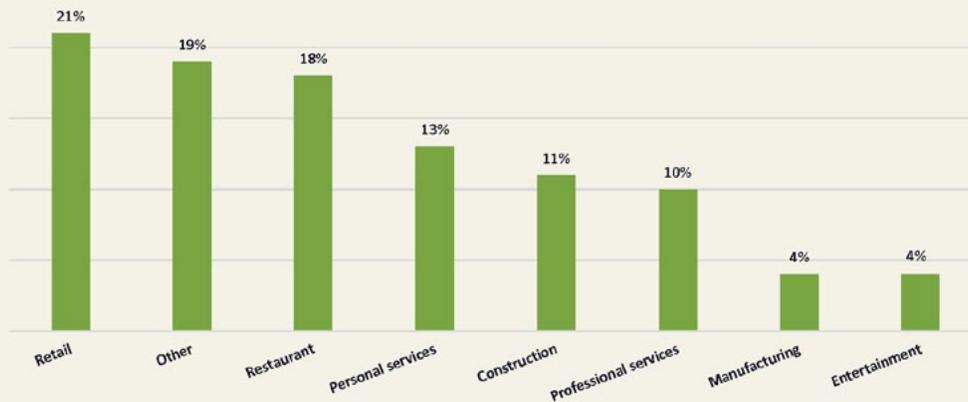
We believe that offering inclusive programs that support local businesses across Arizona helps create a more equitable economy for everyone. We find entrepreneurship to be the most effective way to battle racial wealth gaps by building self-sufficient, sustainable local businesses that can support their communities and diversify economic development. We also believe that local businesses, which foster community relationships and connections, can be powerful agents for systems-level change.

There are so many aspects of small business ownership, especially for rural and Spanish-preferred entrepreneurs, that are impacted by a long history of discrimination and disadvantage. Fuerza Local’s creation was in direct response to an increase in the number of predatory lenders that were targeting low-income, Spanish-preferred business owners. Many of these owners either did not know about or did not have access to more reliable capital. Prior to our work, the average lending interest rate offered to our entrepreneurs was 48%—an exorbitant rate compared to those offered to white business owners.<sup>8</sup> During our 2021 business accelerator programs, 67% of our Fuerza Local graduates opened a checking account for the first time, and all of them participated in a micro-lending program to build a positive credit history. We also help them connect with local credit unions, accountants, city staff, and other institutions that support the infrastructure of running a small business. By doing so, we increase equity not just for local businesses but in the community at large by encouraging investments, wages, and profits to stay local.

<sup>7</sup> Note: Molly Spangler has since the time of this interview taken a position with the Town of Camp Verde.

<sup>8</sup> “Fuerza Local Business Accelerator 2021 impact report.” Local First Arizona/Fuerza Local. 2021. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eda8042168e9a1a9ba78e80/t/6266d670e2ecc72d7f518878/1650906746586/Fuerza+Local+-+Impact+Report+2021+-+Final.pdf>.

## Business By Industry (%)



**Method for accessing the internet at home among respondents.** Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. [https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal\\_tech\\_assessment\\_compressed.pdf](https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf).

### Why now? What made this the right time to start the program outside of Maricopa County?

The idea to expand beyond Maricopa County really started several years ago. Several Fuerza Local organizers are from rural areas, and they came to us saying, "We can see the need is there. How can we take what's been done in Phoenix and do it in places like my hometown?" We know that young people are moving out of rural areas because there aren't career opportunities available, and they do not feel engaged and supported. A thriving small business community can be the difference between needing to move and retaining that sense of place and community. And we knew a significant population of rural, Spanish-preferred entrepreneurs throughout Arizona that could not access services. Many of them are first-generation Americans or the first entrepreneurs in their families, and we felt it was very important to support their success.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Rural areas and smaller cities in Arizona took an especially big hit in employment as many industries laid off workers. That was the catalyst for a lot of folks to start or expand their small businesses, and suddenly we had a whole new crop of entrepreneurs. So, when the cities of Sedona and Cottonwood approached us about starting a business accelerator program, we jumped at the chance. The cities wanted to build stronger relationships with their Spanish-speaking business owners, and we wanted to move beyond Maricopa County, so it was a perfect partnership opportunity.

### What was launching the first *Acelerador de Negocios* in these new locations like?

Well, first of all, it was very different than how we have launched business accelerator programs in the past. We had to reorient ourselves and take an experimental, "let's see what works and be ready to change course" approach. We tried to embrace cultural humility and understand that the program was as much a learning process for us about how we could help these entrepreneurs as it was for our participants to learn about running a small business.

We discovered that working in more rural areas brings its own set of logistical challenges that we needed to overcome before we could even start soliciting participants. Sometimes there are simple but tricky problems, like making sure the internet access where you are holding the classes can handle the type of material and number of people that are going to be using it. We had to think through what participants might need to be able to attend – could we provide childcare? What about a meal so that participants are not choosing between feeding their families dinner and coming to class? Transportation can be an issue too. Geographically speaking, can all the participants meet in a central location or do you need to go to them because they do not have the time and resources to devote to a long commute? Instructors and mentors need the right kind of expertise, because doing business in a

rural area or smaller city has a different set of challenges and opportunities than in a metropolis. What works in downtown Phoenix does not always apply elsewhere.

Once we had the logistics figured out, we could think about recruiting. We knew that our normal methods like announcing the application on social media and sharing with our professional networks would not work in this scenario. So, we built the program from a very grassroots model because that is what helps you meet people you don't already know. We asked every member of the city staff to tap into their personal networks and reach out if they knew someone who might be interested. Our organizer, Elaman, literally went door-to-door to small, Spanish-speaking businesses in Cottonwood and Sedona and just talked to the owners about the opportunity to join the program over and over again. He spent hours doing outreach in person and driving through our communities looking for candidates. Sometimes it took more than one visit for business owners to understand exactly what the program was and coming back multiple times to keep discussing it helped hammer the point home that this was not a scam and that our team was reliable and legitimate. Sometimes a successful relationship was built even if the business owner decided not to participate! In one case, we went to a business, walked in, pitched the program, and were told very emphatically to "get out" by the owner, who wanted nothing to do with local government. Elaman, however, kept coming back, and by the time we completed recruitment, although he still did not want to join, we were on much better terms. In the end, all the hard work paid off, and we had an amazing first cohort of business owners. Now word-of-mouth is fueling interest, and we even have neighboring communities asking for a program of their own.

### **Were there any surprises along the way or in the results?**

Some of the surprises we talked about already but one of the biggest was how much the trust we built between the community and Fuerza Local paved the way for better relationships with city government. It is hard for our Spanish-preferred participants to believe they will see an extra \$1,000 incentive at graduation because so many promises have been made and broken to them in the past. When we write those checks at the end of the program, we have really earned their trust. That is huge, especially in rural communities, where there is not a lot of trust for government generally. Our entrepreneurs are taking a big risk with their time and business by coming into the program. And when we do keep our word about the benefits, it opens the door to accessing other resources, because that trust is there. Suddenly participants feel able to walk into a city office and apply for seed funding or ask for help with a problem because of their positive experience with us.

Another surprise was exactly how much support our entrepreneurs received from their families and communities. There were over 100 people at our graduation ceremonies and it was truly a community-wide celebration. We were not anticipating that it would be so emotionally impactful, not just for the families but for city partners as well. Many kids got to see their parents graduate for the first time and there was such a sense of family pride. Staff were excited to attend too, even if they did not speak Spanish. Even the city mayor and other elected officials were there! It was amazing to see people who had worked so hard, with so little, for so long, be uplifted by their community and finally get the recognition they deserve.

### **What does success mean for Fuerza Local, and what's next for the program?**

The traditional models for measuring success of an entrepreneurship program are all about economic impact. That means tracking things like sales revenue, private investment, and number of jobs created by businesses participating in the program. Fuerza Local does track some of that internally, but our city partners have chosen not to because we do not want to create barriers to participation. So many Spanish-speaking small business owners are already fighting an uphill battle to stay afloat, and we do not want them to feel that they are being graded on their return on investment.

We are more interested in looking at our own success in terms of making sure we are maximizing impacts. What are our completion rates? Are we giving people what they need to stay in the program? Fuerza Local is really a wealth-creation program meant to help populations that have faced a long history of discrimination find self-sufficiency and build generational wealth. So, our metrics are designed around the idea of sustainability. Do the businesses we support open bank accounts and can they access capital and loans if needed? Do they still have a bank account and an active business a year later? How about five years later? That helps us understand if our program is really contributing to their long-term success. We are working on new programs with city partners that will build on our past work; for instance, Sedona has expressed interest in creating a small business accelerator of their own to continue to support entrepreneurs.

Ultimately, the success we are all most invested in is increasing inclusivity. Success also is a greater voice for marginalized groups in institutions where there has not previously been trust. Success is more local businesses at our community events, applying for funding opportunities, taking advantage of the resources that we and our city partners offer. It is the fact we were able to reach out and invest in Spanish-language entrepreneurs in the first place, and that those relationships are now leading to greater input on city development, climate action planning, and strategic goal-setting for municipalities. Success is a future that builds a diverse, participatory, and equitable community for all.



Cottonwood and Sedona's first Fuerza Local cohort at program graduation in 2022.

**Learn more at <https://localfirstaz.com/fuerza-local>**

# UNPACKING EQUITY

*As you read this report, you might be wondering how to identify areas that need additional equity efforts in your own spheres of influence. While the purpose of this report is not to document or measure inequities in Arizona, thinking about the concept of equity often leads to asking questions about where equity could be improved. The questions below are one way to start thinking through how to increase equity using some of the “big picture” context about influences, outcomes, and key players.*

*The questions are paired with examples of the kind of data that might be useful when you’re considering how to approach an equity issue. This list isn’t meant to represent every area where equity could be improved or comprehensively demonstrate which groups of people have less access to equity. Instead, it’s designed to be a jumping-off point for your own thought process as you consider how using an equity perspective might improve your own life, community, and the state of Arizona.*

**Define the scale:** Are you trying to increase equity in your own life, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, in your community, in your state?

**Define the issue:** Can you explain the inequity you are correcting in one or two sentences to someone not already familiar with the issue?

**Define the solutions:** What would an equitable process look like in this context? What would an equitable outcome look like in this context?

**Find the decision-makers:** Which people, organizations, or agencies are making decisions about these processes and their outcomes?

**Identify the rules:** What policies, common practices, or norms are impacting these processes and outcomes? Who enforces them? Who has the authority to change them?

**Find your allies:** What people or organizations are already tackling this issue elsewhere? Are there lessons you can learn from their experience or other examples that might provide a useful roadmap toward change?

# EXAMINING EQUITY THROUGH DATA

*Interested in equitable access to healthcare for a rural community?*

*Consider the ratio of providers to residents:* In 2019, there were 80.1 providers per 100,000 residents in **urban areas**. In **rural towns**, the ratio was only 10.1 providers per 100,000 residents.

*Or the cost and time involved in accessing healthcare:* In some rural areas, the **nearest medical care** can be nearly 80 minutes of drive time away.

*Source:* Kochb, B., Coates, S., Campos-Outcalt, D., Carter, H., and Derksen, D. "Arizona primary care physician report." October 2019. University of Arizona Center for Rural Health. [https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-04/20191010\\_AZ\\_PCP\\_Workforce\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-04/20191010_AZ_PCP_Workforce_Report_Final.pdf).

*Want to know if funding for business entrepreneurs is equitable?*

*Examine who is most likely to receive funding:* 215 Arizona **startups** received external **funding** between January 2020 – February 2022. Only 31 of these companies were founded or led by **women or people of color**.

*Source:* Blye, Andy. "Arizona's startup founders of color, women get far less funding from investors, data shows." March 15, 2022. Phoenix Business Journal. <https://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2022/03/15/arizonas-founders-of-color-snubbed-by-investors.html>.

*Curious about equitable homeownership for all Arizonans?*

*Look at differences in homeownership by race:* In 2021, 72.6% of **white** residents in Arizona owned their homes in Arizona. Only 59.4% of **Latino**, 56.5% of **American Indian**, and 40.8% of **Black** residents owned their homes.

*Source:* "Arizona Prosperity Now scorecard outcomes – homeownership by race." Prosperity Now. 2021. <https://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/data-by-location#state/az>.

*Investigating equity in education for students with disabilities?*

*See if educational outcomes are different between groups:* In Arizona during the 2020 – 2021 school year, only 17.2% of high school graduates with a **disability** enrolled in **postsecondary education** – a 7% **drop** in enrollment from one year previous.

*Source:* "Postsecondary attainment report." Arizona Board of Regents. November 18, 2021. [https://www.azregents.edu/sites/default/files/reports/2021-postsecondary-attainment-report\\_0.pdf](https://www.azregents.edu/sites/default/files/reports/2021-postsecondary-attainment-report_0.pdf).

# EQUITY IN ACTION

If the case studies were roadmaps towards greater equity, you can think of the contributions in this section as portraits in a gallery. Each contribution is distinct in terms of context and content, but each shows why equity is a necessary component of the work they do and how they strive to enact it in their sphere of influence. These pieces are designed to give you a feel for equity beyond the contexts that probably come to mind, such as a workplace training. This section will broaden your horizons about what equity means and who benefits from incorporating equity not just as a goal but as a way of thinking, working, and living.

## Equity in Action: Goodmans Interior Structures

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, I found the performative virtue signaling of businesses—mine included!—was insufficient. Our Black Lives Matter post on Facebook just wasn't going to reverse the impact of structural racism. What could we do as a company that might actually have an impact?

My business, Goodmans Interiors, is a 69-year-old, third generation office furniture distributor in Arizona and New Mexico. We have 200 employees and \$100M in annual revenue. More importantly, we are a benefit corporation which has declared our stakeholders to be our employees, the community, and the environment. Goodmans is the first certified B Corp in Arizona. In 2012, we won the overall Impact Company of the Year Award from the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce and a year later were honored with the Better Business Bureau's International Torch Award for Ethics. Goodmans was recognized as the Top Social Responsibility Company by the Arizona Republic in 2018 and is a 12-time winner of the Best Places to Work award.

Yet, I theorized that if structural racism is everywhere in the structure of society, then it must also be present in my own, ostensibly "woke" business. One easy way to investigate discrimination is in hiring practices, so I looked at the demographics of our company employees. While I found that the overall census of Goodmans' workforce matches the demographics of Arizona more broadly, I also learned that hiring discrimination is only one form of racial bias. Another, called 'occupational sorting,' was baked into my company through an unconscious bias that steers people of color to lower-paying blue-collar jobs in the warehouse or field. Conversely, 93% of our salespeople—the highest paying job—were white.

Occupational sorting exists in societies (e.g., boys are doctors and girls are nurses), in industries (e.g., women in Silicon Valley), and even in companies. At Goodmans, the occupational sorting was at its most insidious when we promoted employees we saw as high performers with high potential. Historically, if you were successful as an installer in the field, then your career path steered you toward managing others in the field, where your career growth and earnings would plateau. A more equitable alternative would have been also considering installers for more lucrative positions with higher earnings potential, like sales or design.

I thought fixing this unconscious bias would be as simple as announcing at a meeting that we were no longer steering people in one direction or another. I stood in front of our entire field operations team, which includes many of the individuals who may have previously been steered away from higher-paying positions, and asked for volunteers who were interested in making more money and providing for their families better with a career in sales or design. Nobody raised their hand.

It turns out that systemic racism is, indeed, systemic. The occupational sorting bias was just as pervasive in our field team as it was in the management team. Our field personnel later told me they had never seen anyone follow that career path, so it was impossible to even imagine themselves in higher-wage, office-based jobs like sales or design.

Unconscious bias can't be trained away in an instructional video or seminar. It might be temporarily elevated in your consciousness, but that isn't a sustainable course of action. The only way to remove the bias from our promotional decisions is to remove subjectivity from the process. We needed a better process for retention and promotion that didn't rely so much on our own unconscious biases.

We engaged a consultant to assess our entire company for their skills, motivators, working styles, and personalities. The company benchmarked our highest performers in each job classification. Now, when we are career counseling a high performer with high potential, we can take an objective look at their assessment and compare it to the highest performers in each job. If a candidate expresses interest in a particular job, we can create a development plan to help the candidate acquire the proficiencies necessary for success, regardless of their race or ethnicity. For example, a high-performing installer with high potential expressed an interest in growing his career. We compared his assessment to our benchmarks and concluded his logical next step was in customer service. To do this, he would need fundamental computer skills training, plus some writing development. We established an 18-month timeline for building those skills, at which time he will transition into a customer service role.

There are only a few examples of stories like this, and the slow pace was frustrating for us. We finally accepted the fact that systemic racism took 400 years to get where it is; we're not going to undo its effects in one or two years. We believe it will take ten years or more to make a meaningful change. As a 69-year-old third-generation family business, we're not deterred by long timelines because we have the luxury of thinking about change in terms of decades, not months, quarters, or years. This project is born out of a sense of responsibility to our stakeholders. Goodmans is a benefit corporation, and that requires us to think deeply about our impact on employees, suppliers, customers, our industry, and the community at large.

Beyond the moral obligations, we believe there is a business case to for equity and inclusion. Goodmans is battling a talent war on a daily basis and today's employees are demanding this kind of transparency and proactive engagement from their employers. This gives us a massive employment advantage against our "less woke" competitors who are stuck in their own unacknowledged unconscious bias. Our customers, for the most part, seem uninterested in what we are doing about the challenge of systemic racism. I like to joke that customers only care about this if we are the low bidder.

There are some exceptions, of course. There is a well-known owner's representative in Phoenix who controls a massive amount of business. He publicly stated that he will never do business with Goodmans because of our "ridiculous" position on systemic racism. We're not sorry to see him go, and we won't miss his business.

Other CEOs have celebrated our approach, and many have accepted my challenge to do this kind of analysis in their own businesses. This has been immensely gratifying to me because it moves business leaders away from sitting in judgment of bad societal actors and engages them to make an impact in the place where they have the most influence.

When I describe occupational sorting to employees, they instantly get it because they can see it. Our entire company has rallied behind our call to eliminate unconscious bias and supports our assessments and frank discussion about skill gaps and development opportunities. I look forward to the day when our average compensation by race is equal. That will mean we have given equal opportunities to all of our high performers with high potential, and we are no longer unconsciously steering certain people to certain jobs.

*Author: Adam Goodman, CEO of Goodmans, is the third generation to lead the 69-year-old family business. Adam currently serves on the boards of Greater Phoenix Leadership, Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting, Banner Health Foundation, The Phoenix Symphony, Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC), and the Jewish Community Relations Council. He lives in Paradise Valley with his wife, Stephanie, and has three children ages 22, 20, and 17. He hopes you will try a racial compensation study for your organization. Ignoring seniority, experience, and competency, look at the average wage for people of each race. What is driving the discrepancy?*

**Learn more at <https://www.goodmans.com/>**

# Equity in Action: Dr. Aaron Guest

We are all aging. Whether we like it or not (I am a fan)—we are. Beyond our individual aging experiences, communities, populations, and nations are also aging. We are an aging nation in the United States—we have more people over age 65 than under age five.<sup>9</sup> In Arizona, 18.5%, or about 1.374 million individuals, are over age 65, and as such, Arizona ranks 12th amongst states with aging populations.<sup>10</sup> Yet even though aging is something we all experience and is a natural part of our biological processes, it is something many people fear. Promises of “anti-aging” products surround us. People regularly look for the next pill that can “reverse” aging. We use words like “fight” and “battle” to describe our efforts against aging. We cheer when people say they have “embraced” or “accepted” their aging. But what is there to accept but a typical experience of being human? Why should we fear older age, which constitutes nearly a third of our life?

## The Troubling Triumvirate

In part, I believe many people’s relationship with aging is biased due to a lack of gerontological literacy, our beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of aging. Many people are gerontologically illiterate—they have no basis for understanding aging. Our work has argued that this occurs through three-interrelated processes.<sup>11</sup> The first is gerontophobia, a morbid fear or dislike of older persons that remains pervasive. We fear our future selves. Gerontophobia is reinforced and a product of ageism, or the prejudice and discrimination against a particular group due to their age. This then informs what cultural critic Margaret Gullette termed a decline ideology.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, ageism and gerontophobia are so ingrained in our culture that aging is associated with decline, regardless of data that continues to indicate productivity, knowledge, and experience increases throughout life.

The result is a society where age equity, or the equitable treatment of individuals regardless of age, is not achieved. Instead, we find ourselves in a gerontologically illiterate society where ageism is prevalent and has direct health and economic effects. Levy and colleagues have pegged part of this effect at nearly \$63 billion in additional healthcare costs due to ageism alone.<sup>13</sup> But the effects of an inequitable age society extend beyond increases in health costs and the prevalence of chronic health conditions. It results in a community in which there is a lack of intergenerational connectedness and learning in which knowledge is not fully passed down. It creates false dichotomies that we must fund either preschool or long-term care. It creates distrust among generations and us versus them mentality. Above all, it distracts from the reality that living in an inequitable society prevents individuals of all ages from achieving their most significant potential.

**\$63  
BILLION**  
*The estimated cost of additional  
healthcare due to ageism.<sup>13</sup>*

Yet, this only shows half of the story. We also know that there is a lack of equity within the aging experiences and older adult populations. For example, lesbian and gay older adults are more likely to experience loneliness, increased rates of chronic conditions, and more lifetime discrimination than their heterosexual peers.<sup>14</sup> African American and Hispanic populations experience a higher prevalence of Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementia.<sup>15</sup>

9 “2020 profile of older Americans.” Administration for Community Living. May 2021. [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/aging%20and%20Disability%20In%20America/2020Profileolderamericans.final\\_.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/aging%20and%20Disability%20In%20America/2020Profileolderamericans.final_.pdf).

10 “Arizona – U.S. Census Bureau quick facts.” U.S. Census Bureau. July 1, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/AZ>.

11 Guest, M. Aaron, Katherina Nikzad-Terhune, Tina M. Kruger, and Graham D. Rowles. “Exploring college students’ attitudes toward older adults: A description of methods used by the gerontological literacy network.” *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education* 42, no. 4 (2021): 578-588; Newsham, Tina MK, Amy M. Schuster, M. Aaron Guest, Katherina Nikzad-Terhune, and Graham D. Rowles. “College students’ perceptions of ‘old people’ compared to ‘grandparents.’” *Educational Gerontology* 47, no. 2 (2021): 63-71.

12 Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by culture*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

13 Levy, B. R., M. D. Slade, and E. Chang. “S., Kanno S. & Wang S.-Y.(2020) Ageism amplifies cost and prevalence of health conditions.” *The Gerontologist* 60, no. 1: 174-181.

14 Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen I. “Dismantling the silence: LGBTQ aging emerging from the margins.” *The Gerontologist* 57, no. 1 (2017): 121-128.

15 “Alzheimer’s disease facts and figures: Special report.” Alzheimer’s Association. 2022. <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>.

Older immigrants are more likely to be below the poverty line.<sup>16</sup> Compounding these challenges is the fact an estimated 40% of Arizonians live in a healthcare professional shortage area—resulting in increased challenges in accessing care.<sup>17</sup>

These are only a few examples of the internal age-equity challenges facing the older population in the United States. They highlight the critical nature of living in an inequitable aging society. We must consider not only the broader community and culture but also the inequities within the aging population and our state. Alarming, disparities between racial and ethnic groups in Arizona seem to widen.

## Opportunities to A More Age-Equitable World

Examining and naming inequities is one thing, but we also must work to address and reduce these inequities actively. Historically, this has come from laws and policies in the United States. Social Security was enacted, in part, to provide an economic safety net for low-income older adults. Thirty years later, Medicare sought to provide a health safety net for older individuals. The Older Americans Act of 1965, and its subsequent amendments, buttressed these safety nets and developed an infrastructure capable of addressing the needs of the social and well-being of older persons. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) aimed to protect older adults in the workforce.

Over the last 20 years, these policy-level efforts have been supported and enhanced by the growth of the Age-Inclusive Ecosystem. Based on the principles of Universal Design and known more commonly by the most significant component, Age-Friendly Cities, the age-friendly Ecosystem aims to create environments inclusive of individuals of all ages.<sup>18</sup> For example, in Arizona, several cities noticed that older adults were missing appointments for medical care. Through Age-Friendly Arizona, they worked to develop and centralize rideshare information through AzRide. In the city of Tempe, community members worked together to gain the AARP Age-Friendly Livable Communities designation and, in doing so, designed a city-wide plan on how to make Tempe more accessible for all.

By critically examining the communities, health systems, public health systems, and educational systems we function in, this ecosystem model aims to generate community-led interventions to influence individual outcomes and macro-level policies. Notably, these efforts aim not to make an older, adult-friendly environment but rather an age-inclusive one that provides equitable access and opportunities to all. Throughout Arizona, residents can work together to identify community barriers to the full participation of all ages.

## Conclusions

While we may live in a gerontologically illiterate society, we do not have to remain illiterate. The emphasis here has been on the aging process leading to older adulthood, but we know that challenges of age-equity exist throughout the life course. We can and must work to address these challenges. In doing so, we can create a more age-equitable society as well as a society in which there is equity in aging.

*Author: M. Aaron Guest, Ph.D., MPH, MSW, is an Assistant Professor of Aging at the Center for Innovation in Healthy and Resilient Aging and Senior Global Futures Scientist at Arizona State University. A socio-environmental gerontologist, his primary research addresses the health inequities among older adults in rural communities. His wish for the reader is to consider what type of world you want to age in and make it happen.*

**Learn more at <https://aging.asu.edu/>**

16 Margolis, Rachel, and Ashton M. Verdery. "Older adults without close kin in the United States." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 72, no. 4 (2017): 688-693.

17 "Designated health professional shortage areas statistics: Designated HPSA quarterly summary, as of September 30, 2022." Bureau of Health Workforce, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 30, 2022. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>.

18 Fulmer, Terry, Pinkey Patel, Nicole Levy, Kedar Mate, Amy Berman, Leslie Pelton, John Beard, Alexandre Kalache, and John Auerbach. "Moving toward a global age-friendly ecosystem." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 68, no. 9 (2020): 1936-1940.

## Equity in Action: Rising Youth Theatre

Rising Youth Theatre (RYT) is a youth leadership organization in Phoenix that uses theatre to position young people in advocacy spaces. Founded in 2011, RYT works locally in Arizona and in national and international partnership with young people, adult artists, and communities. RYT produces original plays around topics that matter to our community, including, race, mental health, student push-out, and more and works with more than 500 young people each year through school residencies, community partnerships, training and consultations, and learning exchanges, in addition to our ensemble production work. Thousands more people of all ages attend and engage with free performances. RYT is the recipient of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Outstanding New Children's Theatre Award, the inaugural recipient of the Phoenix Mayor's Arts Award in Theatre, a finalist for the Governor's Arts Award, and is the 2023 recipient of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America Medallion Award.

The company works with youth and professional adult artists to create multigenerational, socially relevant, original plays and processes, operating on a power-sharing, horizontal leadership model. In practice, that means youth and adults lead our organization together, in our artistic ensembles, as teaching artists, as organizational staff, and on our board of directors. When we speak publicly or publish as the organization, we do so as youth and adult teams. The diverse young people in our ensemble are central to our decision-making process and organizational structure.

Rising Youth Theatre believes that change happens when we listen to young people. There are very few spaces in our state where young people are positioned as leaders, working alongside adults to make a difference.

Through artmaking, storytelling, and embodied research around issues that matter in our community, we are able to create opportunities for young people to advocate for themselves and their peers. This includes creating original productions and engaging in collaborations with partner organizations to co-create and sustain spaces that center the lived experiences of young people in our communities and their expertise. One example is our touring production and workshop residency Keysmash, where youth and adults come together to be in dialogue about the mental health needs and considerations of young people.

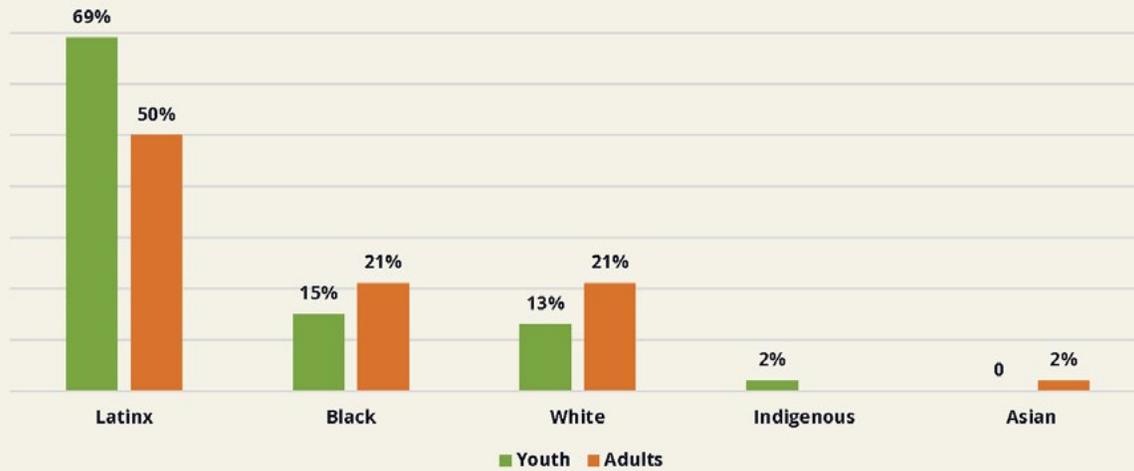
As a multi-generation organization based in Phoenix, Rising Youth Theatre is committed to the constant dismantling of traditional power structures by uplifting and amplifying the voices of young people in the community. The decision-making is shared by both youth and adults in the space. As artists, facilitators, and community members, we use our artistic practices to learn and unlearn harmful practices to effectively work with our young people in a collaborative model. We work from the understanding that the people closest to the problem are closest to the solutions and are experts in their own bodies and lived experience.

An equity perspective, for Rising Youth Theatre, is not one single initiative, committee, or training, and it is not something that can truly be separated from any other part of our work. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are built into every layer of who we are as an organization. Our work cannot and should not exist without a practice of equity *and* justice at the center. When equity is seen as a lens which can be put on or taken off or as a subset of the work instead of woven across the fabric of the entire organization, that means typically that harm will happen. All of our organizational practices move from our mission and values, which are our guiding principles. Also important is our practice of power sharing, which guides our premises for collaboration and guides a more equitable way of being with each other, offering a roadmap for what power sharing looks like and feels like in our rehearsal rooms, planning processes, leadership spaces, and more.



Youth leadership at Rising Youth Theatre.

## Participating Artists - Racial and Ethnic Diversity



**Participating artist demographics by race and ethnicity.** Xanthia Walker, personal communication to editor, February 2023.

We have a diverse ensemble of youth and adult artmakers and a team of core staff leaders who drive our work forward. Our staff, board, and artistic ensemble are all more than 75% people of color. The demographics of our participants at every level reflects the perspectives of our community. We know that the young people participating in our programs are racially diverse. It is then imperative that the adults work with also reflect our community. Our paid staff (13 people) is 77% Black or Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and our board (seven people) is currently 100% BIPOC. We are constantly in process un-learning the toxic practices of traditional non-profit structures in our field of practice. Part of our responsibility in our work is also to invite our field at large to move to practices that truly center the whole humanity of people, especially young people. We regularly offer workshops, trainings, and present at conferences in our Theatre field, and we participate in coalitions and learning exchanges with other organizations to ensure we have consistent spaces to be in a learning/un-learning community.

We operate on a horizontal leadership model, practicing shared power and transparency at every level. Shared power is critical to youth leadership. Shifting material power and leadership to be shared with young people in our space must be an action, not just talk. Ideas and words are not enough unless they come with specific, ongoing, change-oriented steps. These steps look different for each project we work on, but are focused on how our creative practices move from idea to action in the workshop/rehearsal room/performance and beyond. And so, for us at Rising Youth Theatre, power sharing, anti-racism, and equity are ongoing, everyday learning and growing processes. We developed an accountability checklist that we use in our rehearsal rooms, staff meetings, board rooms, and community spaces. We share this checklist with our partners and artists of all ages who work with us. And when we're not meeting these standards, we stop and talk about why, repair harm that was caused, and work to shift accordingly. This has made our overall organizational practices stronger, our artistic work more engaging and meaningful, and has allowed us to be more resilient and effective as we have weathered some very challenging years.

*Author: Raeana Casillas, Sofia Fencken, Trinity Lugo, Thameenah Muhammad, Julio-César Saucedo, Sarah Sullivan, and Xanthia Angel Walker are the Rising Youth staff leadership team. They hope you will open yourself to the possibilities of multi-generational collaboration that centers people's full humanity across all their identities.*

**Learn more at <https://risingyouththeatre.org/>**



## Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation

**Rung 8** – *Youth-initiated shared decisions with adults*: Youth-led activities in which decision-making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners.

**Rung 7** – *Youth-initiated and directed*: Youth-led activities with little input from adults.

**Rung 6** – *Adult-initiated shared decisions with youth*: Adult-led activities, in which decision-making is shared with youth.

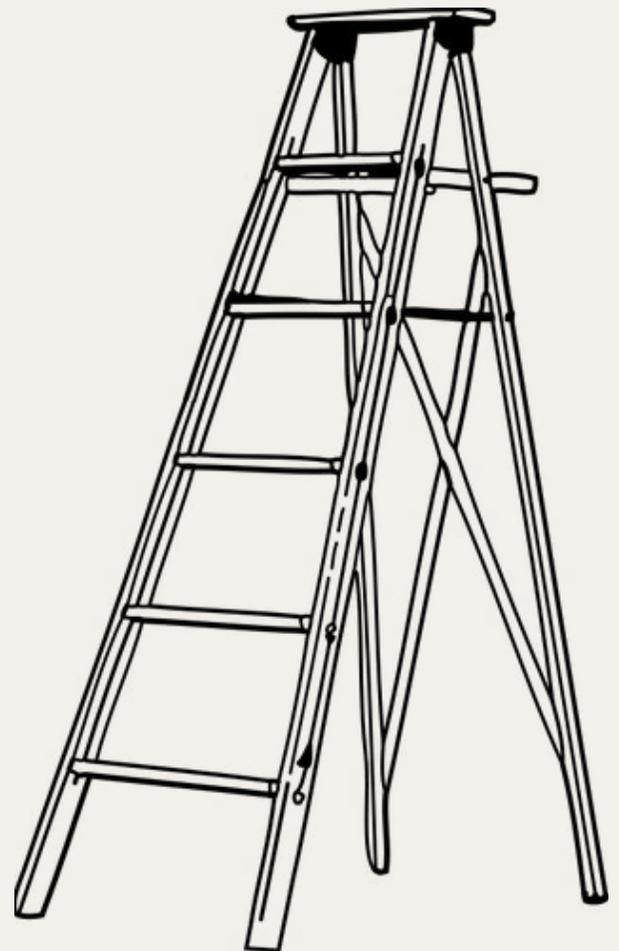
**Rung 5** – *Consulted and informed*: Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

**Rung 4** – *Assigned but informed*: Adult-led activities in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role.

**Rung 3** – *Tokenism*: Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

**Rung 2** – *Decoration*: Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

**Rung 1** – *Manipulation*: Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding the purpose of the activities.



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). "Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship." Office of Research-Innocenti, UNICEF. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/100-childrens-participation-from-tokenism-to-citizenship.html>.

## Equity in Action: Equality Arizona

For Equality Arizona, equity is more than a value add: it's the fundamental goal of our work. We are committed to the values of equity and inclusion—that everyone should have a say in the decisions that will shape their lives and communities. Our organization exists to ensure LGBTQ+ people in Arizona have the opportunity, capacity, and confidence to make change as advocates, voters, and civic leaders. Wherever decisions are being made in Arizona, it's our job to make sure LGBTQ+ people are involved in that process. What that looks like for us is three categories of activity: civic advocacy, political organizing, and “context creation” through education and community-building activities. One of our more recent accomplishments includes partnering with the City of Mesa to enact an ordinance protecting LGBTQ+ and other minority groups from discrimination that would affect their ability to be housed, employed, shop at local businesses, and participate in their communities.



Equality Arizona social hour at Brick Road Coffee in Tempe, Arizona.

We've always been committed to equity in terms of our outward-facing work, striving for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people at every level of the decision-making process. To achieve that goal, however, we've had to examine how we think about equity *within* our work as well. It can be easy for organizations like ours to prioritize getting things done by doing them the same way others have before us. This can lead to a 'business as usual' attitude that means valuing potential contributors only if they have experience and expertise in lobbying or political work, and then investing a lot of money in their approach. But we find it's not sufficient to simply gather together a lot of credentialed people or throw a lot of capital at a project. Doing so creates a cycle where only a select few voices are heard over and over.

Instead, we try to create a different cycle: a feedback loop that recognizes the expertise of lived experience, not just professional credentials. For us, this means recruiting individuals who are able to transfer their own expertise to our work from a potentially unrelated field, bringing new perspectives. It also means that we don't silo our team by field or by program. Organizers at Equality Arizona work across all three of our areas of activity, so when the time comes to pivot from legislative advocacy to elections work, the expertise is already shared across the entire team. We can quickly scale up one project while scaling down another. Many of our contributors are volunteers, and we've learned to assume their expertise as well—instead of deprioritizing the knowledge of volunteers compared to paid staff, we now rely on it. This has opened up a wealth of opportunities, and in some cases, we find our best volunteers when someone calls us out on a shortcoming and offers to use their own expertise to help us correct it. We don't need people who have all the answers, but we do need people with fresh approaches to problem-solving. It's rare to capture that lightning-in-a-bottle set of conditions under which creativity can thrive in an organization or team, but we can help set the stage by valuing expertise beyond professional experience.

Our organization was founded in 1992 during the height of another pandemic, the AIDS crisis. At that time, we focused on fighting for the rights of people living with AIDS and promoting the legalization of LGBTQ+ lives and identities at a time when many forms of sex and gender expression were against the law. Since then we have campaigned for the repeal of policies that prohibited openly LGBTQ+ people from serving in the military (“Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”), supported marriage equality, and much more. But despite advances for legal rights for LGBTQ+ people at local, state, and federal levels, we still face organized opposition from individuals and groups who believe that LGBTQ+ people have no place in public discourse. We are at a precarious moment where progress towards greater equity through increased legal rights and cultural acceptance of LGBTQ+ people could stall or, heartbreakingly, even regress. Pushing forward requires a commitment to trusting and depending on each other and to pursuing equity within our organization as well as outside in the public sphere.

*Author: Jeanne Woodbury is the interim executive director for Equality Arizona and is a living example of how expertise comes in many forms. She has worked in advocacy and organizing for many years but has a background in mathematics, English literature, and anthropology. She hopes the reader will find opportunities to challenge and be challenged by others, and to both offer and accept tough but teamwork-oriented criticism.*

**Learn more at <https://equalityarizona.org/>**

## Equity in Action: First Place AZ

First Place AZ's vision is to ensure that housing, healthcare, and community options are as bountiful for adults with autism and other neurodiversities as they are for everyone else. Our innovative approach recognizes that current policies and systems are not yielding optimal results and provides an alternative model focused on meeting needs articulated by autistic adults and their families.

Autism research and diagnosis have historically focused on children rather than adults.<sup>19</sup> Forty years ago, the DSM-III (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) first included the diagnosis of infantile autism, considered primarily a childhood condition. The DSM-V, published in 2013, modified the term to autism spectrum disorder, including four previously separate diagnoses: Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, autism disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.<sup>20</sup> Autistic individuals assert that the spectrum is not linear but better viewed as a circle with skills, symptoms, and challenges increasing and decreasing depending on environment, available supports, and overall development of the individual.<sup>21</sup>

A 2017 review revealed that only 3.5% of published research on autism focused on adults; specific research on supports and services is estimated to be even lower. This is of great concern as the rate of autism diagnoses continues to increase. In the 1970s, autism in the U.S. was reported to affect one in 10,000 individuals. By 1999, it had increased to one in 500; by 2004 it was one in 150. Today, one in 44 children has autism spectrum disorder. Data is based on children aged eight years across cities in 11 states, including Arizona. That means that the eight-year-olds from the 1970s are now middle-aged, while the individuals from the 1999 and 2004 cohorts are in early adulthood. While many studies demonstrate positive changes in individual functioning with age, it is evident that many individuals, regardless of IQ and ability, remain highly disadvantaged as adults.<sup>22</sup>

To reduce these disadvantages, First Place has established a housing and community development responsive to resident needs. With over 100 Transition Academy graduates and 75 current and former residents, we have utilized our community-led approach to advocate for more robust research, policy changes, and investment on behalf of this population. Our residential prototype aspires to be an international model. The apartments and residential Transition Academy life skills program are home to individuals who live there, provide peace of mind for family and friends who come and go, and create an inspiring and enriching environment for those who work and learn there.

We also champion a broader array of solutions. The First Place Global Leadership Institute is focused on pressing issues of accessibility, advocating for more affordable housing and community and independent living options for this population. We collaborate with autism and disability advocacy and research groups, housing and human services organizations, healthcare institutions, philanthropic organizations, universities, state agencies, and local businesses to advocate for the resources and opportunities needed to create those options.

As part of our work advocating for housing and living options, The Global Leadership Institute and partners completed the Greater Phoenix Housing Market Analysis in August 2022. We contacted over 80 organizations to recruit autistic adults and their families and/or supporters to self-advocate and participate in educational sessions on housing, long-term care support services, and supportive amenities. Sessions were held virtually and in person in English, plain-language English and Spanish. Responses were received from 165 individuals. Through the analysis of those responses and current prevalence data, our efforts are focused on making the needs of the estimated 63,000 adults with autism and/or intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (A/I/DD) living with a caregiver over age 65 heard and visible to housing developers, legislators, and policymakers.

19 The term autism and/or intellectual and/or development disabilities (A/I/DD) encompasses a larger population than those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), research and data may refer to ASD only, or ASD as part of the larger A/I/DD population.

20 Faroy, Michal, Gal Meiri, and Shoshana Arbel. "DSM-5 and autism: Diagnostic changes and clinical implications in early childhood." *Harefuah* 155, no. 5 (2016): 291-5.

21 Burgess, Rebecca. "Understanding the spectrum: A comic strip explanation." March 30, 2022. <https://the-art-of-autism.com/understanding-the-spectrum-a-comic-strip-explanation/>.

22 Howlin, Patricia. "Adults with autism: Changes in understanding since DSM-111." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 12 (2021): 4291-4308.

Part of making these needs visible is understanding how many adults are affected by A/I/DD. To address the ongoing challenge of a lack of data, First Place utilizes prevalence data to create estimates. Additionally, approximately one-third of individuals with A/I/DD are eligible for and served by the Arizona Long-Term Care System, and many of them reside with their families—whether they want to or not. It is necessary to segment the data and explore the specific challenges encountered by this population to attract the attention of policymakers as they address overall employment, housing, and healthcare policy improvements. It is also essential to acknowledge the intersectionality of the challenges—disability, race, socioeconomic disparity, gender and orientation. Many individuals with A/I/DD rely on public benefits in whole or part and as a result, have low or very low income. This income disparity is exacerbated by the Supplemental Security Income marriage penalties.

Healthcare systems also present challenges for autistic adults and their families. To equitably and inclusively address those challenges, First Place AZ developed the 360 Health & Wellness® curriculum and supporting collateral and tools easing communication barriers for health care professionals and patients while improving system navigation and outcomes. The curriculum is designed for three separate audiences: Staying Healthy for adults with A/I/DD; Supporting Independence for family members, supporters of and caregivers for autistic adults and others with A/I/DD; and Implementing Care for healthcare professionals who provide care to autistic adults and others with A/I/DD. First Place AZ also serves as a site for educational efforts by Creighton University, which offers courses for medical, pharmacy, occupational therapy and physical therapy students to improve their ability to serve autistic adults on a holistic level.

Law enforcement agencies similarly require training and support to improve interactions with autistic adults. Collaborations with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and local police agencies include training opportunities enabling both law enforcement officers and neurodiverse adults to learn more about expectations and roles and responsibilities, as well as to reduce the possibility of negative outcomes. Law enforcement officers can expect commands like “pull over” and “license and registration” to be followed without resistance; however, autistic adults may need more time to process the requests and learn that they need to ask for clarification before putting their hands in their pockets.

Employment can also be challenging for neurodiverse adults. Individuals with A/I/DD are often unemployed or under-employed. Myriad root causes add to this challenge, including limited educational attainment, myths about the challenges of employing individuals with disabilities, concerns regarding maintaining access to public benefits and low expectations. Through a variety of supports, First Place works with First Place–Phoenix residents and Transition Academy students to help them gain skills through volunteerism and employment to chart a vocational path. We aim to create 1,000 new jobs for autistic adults in the Greater Phoenix area by educating and encouraging employers to hire adults with A/I/DD.

Lastly, First Place is raising awareness of the diversity of the autism spectrum and the challenges encountered by autistic adults on a daily basis. The documentary “[In A Different Key](#)” recently premiered nationally on PBS and features First Place–Phoenix and the Transition Academy. While we are proud to be included, awareness is just a starting point not the endpoint. Equity requires acceptance, planning and accommodations that ensure this population can not only access needed supports and services but can thrive alongside neurotypical peers.

Adults with A/I/DD have a different way of thinking and finding order in their world, they also have much to contribute to society. Creating a neuro-inclusive community that supports and celebrates these differences can and will lead to a better world for all. Belonging is a human right, and we believe that just as the Americans with Disabilities Act created physical curb cuts decades ago benefiting most of us today, neurological curb cuts can do the same as they advance community accessibility for this population and more.

**Learn more at**  
**<https://www.firstplaceaz.org/>**

***Authors:** Denise Resnik is the founder and president/CEO of First Place AZ, and co-founder of the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC). Her adult son Matt, who has autism, and others with different abilities inspire her work. Maureen Casey has worked in the disability community as both a family advocate and professional for almost three decades. She leads efforts to demonstrate innovative practices and collect data on efficacy to ultimately expand the opportunities to create neuro-inclusive communities. They hope you will learn and respond with all your senses – and sensibilities!*

# CONCLUSION

How do we build a more prosperous, vibrant Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential?

Arizona Town Hall hopes this report has prompted you to consider equity as one answer to that question. While equity is far too broad to capture every aspect in one document, this report's contents were designed to introduce new perspectives, ignite readers' curiosity about the social world around them, and broaden individual definitions of equity to show its applicability to many contexts and situations.

Arizona Town Hall also hopes you see yourself reflected in these pages, if only for a moment. It can be easy to assume that equity is a niche concern and make a hasty judgment about whether greater equity is something that could impact you. But equity goes beyond any one definition, any single social category, any distinct identity, any unique issue or profession or field. Instead, equity is a basket, holding inside it many related concepts of fairness, justice, recognition, and understanding. It involves acknowledging where people are presently while intentionally building the road toward a shared future. Equity is about providing all Arizonans, including you, what they need to reach their full potential.

This might be the end of the report, but it doesn't have to be goodbye. Arizona Town Hall hopes this sparks a desire to discuss and pursue equity within your own spheres of influence, and would love to continue this conversation with you as part of a community town hall discussion. Please consider this an invitation to discuss, share, question, and collaborate. Visit [aztownhall.org](http://aztownhall.org) to learn more.

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Arizona Town Hall extend heartfelt thanks to our contributors, both named and anonymous, who trusted us with their stories and without whom this report would not have been possible. A heartfelt thanks to you, the reader, as well, for taking a risk and engaging on a complex, challenging, and rewarding topic.

This report leaves you with one last question...

## ...what will you do next?

***... In your neighborhood?***

***... In your community?***

***... In your organization?***

***... In your state?***



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