



EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS



**HIGHLIGHTS
REPORT OF 2023
ARIZONA TOWN
HALL DISCUSSIONS**



Top to bottom: Panelists Francisco Lucio, Holly Figueroa, and Sharry Veres at the UA College of Medicine-Phoenix community town hall, Phoenix.

Rey Rivera, Tara Jackson, Kathy Knecht, and Jonathan Robles at the West Valley community town hall, Avondale.

A participant group engaging in discussions at the Transportation Equity in Rural Arizona community town hall, Pinetop.

ARIZONA TOWN HALL

Since 1962, Arizona Town Hall has created solutions to complex problems by educating, engaging, connecting, and empowering Arizonans.

Community town halls and future leaders town halls (events held for high school and college students) allow a greater number of Arizonans to experience positive civic engagement. These programs also produce solutions for statewide issues and develop a grassroots network of informed citizens ready to work together to maximize Arizona's potential.

To ensure informed discussions, Town Hall participants reviewed background information developed by Arizona Town Hall. This publication is a summary of key points from the background report, additional background information provided to participants, and the 2023 town hall sessions.

Town Hall reports are published and made available to Arizona Town Hall members, elected officials (including the Arizona Legislature), public libraries, and the general public.

Download free digital copies online at www.aztownhall.org.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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.



Special thanks to the Morrison Institute for Public Policy, and Liza Kurtz in particular, for serving as Editor of the Background Report. 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.



For additional links and resources, visit: http://aztownhall.org/115_Town_Hall

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

Nearly 1,500 Arizonans participated in one or more of over 30 Community Town Halls across the state in 2023 to discuss the topic of “Equity for All Arizonans.” They approached equity from a variety of perspectives relevant to their communities, experiences, and needs. There were many areas of broad consensus, as well as discussions and recommendations targeted at the specific concerns of the area where the Town Hall was held. This report provides highlights from across the Community Town Halls. The full 128-page report with all the Community Town Hall Reports is available at www.aztownhall.org.

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.

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.

“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



Panelists give topic insights at the “Equity for All Arizonans” Background Report Launch, Phoenix.

BACKGROUND REPORT LAUNCH EVENT PHOENIX - APRIL 19, 2023

Moderated by: **Suzanne Pfister**, President & CEO, Vitalyst Health Foundation

PANEL PRESENTERS

- **Carol Scott Berry**, Judge (Ret.), Phoenix Municipal Court
- **Neil Giuliano**, President/CEO, Greater Phoenix Leadership (GPL)
- **Carmen Heredia**, Director, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS)



Top to bottom: Participants listen to presenters and engage in discussions at town halls in Tempe, Phoenix, and Nogales.

“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

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

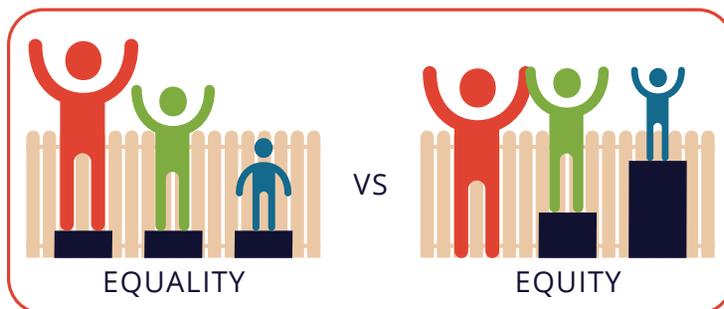
“The most creative ideas and successful solutions are generated through collaboration.”

Excerpt from the Flagstaff Community Town Hall Report

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.



Source: Image adapted from Annie E. Casey Foundation’s interpretation of Craig Froehle’s original illustration.

- **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.

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

Excerpt from the Kingman Community Town Hall Report

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.

“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

- **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.

“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

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.



Top to bottom: Participants at the Bullhead City, Flagstaff, and Lake Havasu City community town halls.



Top to bottom and right: Participants engage in discussions at town halls at Phoenix and Tucson.

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.
- 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.

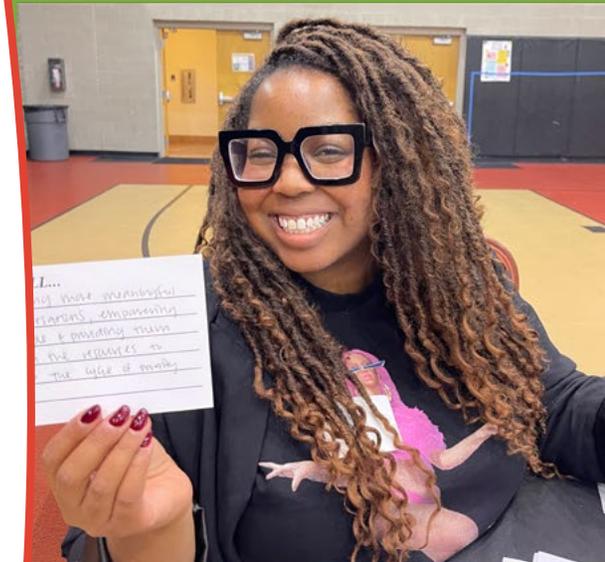


INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

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.
- As a marginalized youth, speak out for those like me in the community who cannot speak for themselves.
- Share my knowledge on CLAS (Culturally Linguistically Appropriate Services) standards to other agencies and friends to increase everyone's understanding.
- Help our elders whether assisting with grocery shopping, cleaning, or simply helping them find the services they need.
- Focus on trees in and for marginalized communities, both professionally and personally.
- Talk to my friends about coming together at community youth events and learning new things.
- Continue to fight for equity in all areas through coalition building, testimony, marching, voting, education, and picketing.



Top to bottom and left: Participants of the Phoenix Revitalization Corporation, Equity in the Soul of the City, City of Phoenix, and Gateway Community College town halls share their I WILL statements.



We welcome your involvement,
questions, and perspectives.

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Town Hall recommendations are a valuable resource for policymakers because they do not represent the agenda of a particular group or political perspective. Instead, Arizona Town Hall reports contain the informed consensus of Arizonans from different political parties, professions, socioeconomic status, and geographic areas of the state. A private, nonprofit civic organization, Arizona Town Hall serves as a catalyst for conversations and recommendations that create significant changes in Arizona's public policy. Countless local, state, and national leaders cite Arizona Town Hall as an important factor in educating people about complex issues and fostering the development of civic and community leaders.

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