THE EQUITABLE COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLKIT

supporting equitable economic growth and systemic change

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The Fourth Economy Equitable Community Planning Toolkit is a culmination of research conducted to assess how cities in regions in the United States are rising to meet the equity imperative. We are lending our thoughts and voices to a growing body of resources available to community leaders as they embark on a journey of equitable development.

The Equity Toolkit is designed for use by economic development, community development, philanthropic, private sector, and public policy leaders to be a foundation for self-awareness and conversation within your community. It is published with a recognition that it must continue to evolve and grow as the collective understanding of how to create and preserve equity is formed through countless efforts initiated throughout the country.

The opinions expressed and identification of promising practices are the responsibility of the team at Fourth Economy with leadership provided by Joshua Devine and Kristina Harrold. Design provided by Monica Hershberger.

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Equity **DEFINED**

For our work, we draw on the definition of equity from Merriam Webster and as understood in public discourse, as **"justice according natural law or right"**, as compared to 'equal', which is "of the same measure, quantity, amount, or number as another, or; regarding or affecting all objects in the same way". The elevation of justice in an equity definition brings passive 'equality' into action. It calls us to be champions of creativity and collaboration in the name of righting systemic wrongs.

ADRESSING EQUITY
through systemic change

By 2045, the United States population will be majority-minority. Children under five have already seen this milestone in their classrooms, and working adults will see this change in their workplace by 2039. At the same time, income and wealth gaps across the nation continue to widen by every statistical measure, impacting households of color by greater proportions. One's race and income-level have become the best predictors of quality of life, health, education, and employment.

Economic inequality in our nation today is further amplified by a global pandemic. Its far reaching health and economic implications is disproportionately impacting people and communities of color. Why? The disparity is systemic in nature. Impacts of historical policies and structures developed during America's long history of slavery—the Jim Crow era, redlining, etc.—are still seen today where Black and brown people do not achieve wealth and opportunity like their white counterparts. Decades of movements, marches, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations have paved a path forward, but it hasn't been enough.

Leaders in cities throughout the country are looking for solutions, bravely stepping up and committing to equity and meaningful change. They know that a community filled with inequities tips the scale on being a productive, growing, and vibrant place to live.

Equity is vital for true economic development. By 2050, our country stands to realize an $8 trillion gain in GDP by focusing efforts on eliminating disparities and increasing opportunity for people of color.

Champions emerge, innovative initiatives are birthed, opportunities for people of color are realized and the nation can finally begin to see meaningful change when equity is addressed through systemic change. Closing the wealth gap requires a closer look at the development, valuation, and protection of wealth assets. Serving the most vulnerable requires a different, more targeted and out-of-the-box approach to service and program delivery. Revitalizing communities requires a hard look at how public and private financial resources are being distributed with equity carve outs in mind. Advancing equity outcomes through systemic change is tough work, but can be done with proper planning, partnership and intention.

A Short List of Equitable Investments

There are many different approaches to organizing around equity. Each stage of this work has strategic support partners that cities can engage with; and, while many are assessing whether they are meeting this equity imperative, there is no shortage of ideas, unique programs, policies and partnerships that are moving the needle.

Here we highlight a few of these efforts:

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Detroit is leveraging the power of food entrepreneurs to drive neighborhood change. Initiatives like its Detroit Kitchen Connect program and Food Lab Detroit are helping food-based entrepreneurs find commercial kitchen space and a community of support and resources to thrive. St. Louis' Equity in Entrepreneurship Collective is piloting several programs that advance equity in tech-based entrepreneurship such as toolkit creation and data sharing partnerships to build greater access to investors.

HOUSING

Seattle's Housing Seattle Now plan prioritizes investments in housing for low- and middle-income families with the creation of a $15 million revolving loan fund, encouraging ownership and neighborhood reinvestment by supporting nonprofits with property acquisition. Indianapolis is marrying housing with transit, recently launching its $15 million Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Loan Fund to enable equitable access to jobs, education, healthcare and more.

Photo Credit: Detroit Kitchen Connect

TALENT

Philadelphia has made great strides in preparing residents with the right skills, addressing barriers that prevent career opportunities and building a more coordinated workforce system. Their city-wide workforce development strategy—in response to its Growing with Equity: Philadelphia's Vision for Inclusive Growth plan—has generated early wins.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Philanthropic organizations - such as the Rockefeller Foundation which has committed $10 million across 10 cities - encourage equitable post-pandemic recovery. These large efforts are coupled by smaller, more geographically-specific efforts of cities and regions leveraging available federal funds, such as the CARES Act funding and the SBA Payroll Protection Program.

HEALTH

Chicago's health equity plan, Healthy Chicago 2.0, unifies many aligning goals between government agencies by identifying root causes of health as: the Built Environment, Economic Development, Housing, and Education. The Plan outlines over 200 strategies to reach 30 specific goals around investing in community health. As one output of this work, the Chicago Department of Human Health was awarded $150,000 in seed grants to organizations that will improve walkability and the built environment in communities that have historically suffered from disinvestment.

TRANSPORTATION

Leading equitable investments in Indianapolis are initiatives like their Inclusive Incentives program, or their new Red Line rapid bus transit system. Plan that expands public transportation access and makes it easier for previously disconnected community members to have access to central activity nodes. Additionally, Indianapolis has recently launched its $15 million Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Loan Fund, encouraging affordable housing development near transit lines to enable equitable access to jobs, education, healthcare and more.

Photo Credit: Indianapolis Inclusive Incentives

Photo Credit: A rendering of a Red Line station at the Indiana Statehouse by Benjamin O. Harber - indystar.com

EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
a framework

Equitable Economic Development **DEFINED**

Economic Development describes the process of growing an economy by using policies and programs to create and retain jobs, increase wealth, strengthen the tax base, and improve the economic well-being of a community. Traditionally, measures of economic well-being have focused on fiscal health. Equitable economic development is achieved when the policies and programs used to spur growth are specifically designed to ensure that traditionally underserved communities and individuals share in the benefits of growth. The end goal is for individuals to be both benefactors and beneficiaries of community and economic development initiatives.

Approaching Equitable Economic Development Work

In 2019, Fourth Economy sought to better understand how cities and regions were rising to meet the equity imperative and support the advancement of equitable economic outcomes. We began with an analysis of the United States Top 100 metros and explored (1) if these places had an office or designated entity for diversity and inclusion issues (2) if there was a strategic plan that either included equity or was specifically about equity (3) if these places established metrics/measures to evaluate equity progress (4) interesting initiatives and collaborations that can serve as models for growth.

Photo Credit: Fourth Economy Community Index. www.fourtheconomy.com/index

We found that less than a quarter of these metros have an explicit plan toward advancing equitable development. Even fewer determined a process—either a dashboard or common metrics—to evaluate their progress and impact.

WHY ARE EQUITY PLANS IMPORTANT?

Though we can't assume that communities without equitable development plans are disregarding equity, plans do provide an opportunity to align across shared goals and, hopefully, measurable results. For the communities that did have an explicit plan or office, we were able to uncover common themes across equity work that focused on both "access to" important economic systems (e.g. housing and/or job opportunities) and the "quality of" how these economic systems are experienced (e.g. housing conditions and/or low wage versus high wage jobs). This access
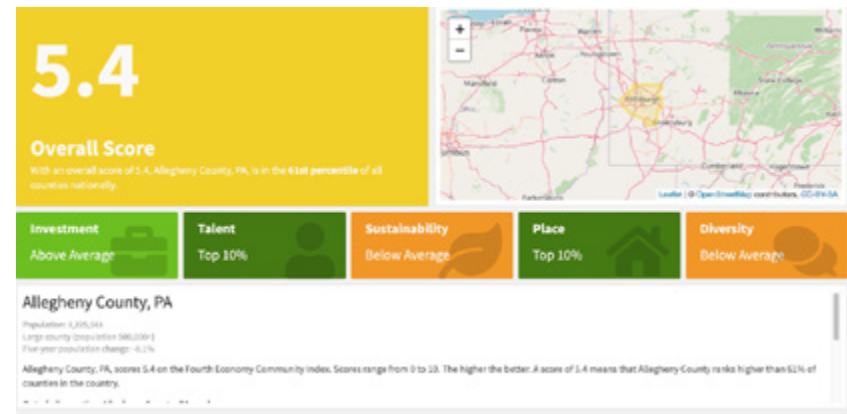
and quality distinction is crucial to understanding equitable development and a useful lens to creating the appropriate interventions in community planning.

Communities that are seeing great success in their equity work understand how their economic systems are connected. And t respond to inequities comprehensively, they understand that they must address and work within the interactions of these systems. Providing necessary housing opportunities for residents how location and the role of transportation interacts with the proximity to jobs. This relates to public infrastructure, which interacts with needs for public safety and health. Interactions in community systems are complex and unwieldy. The graphic that follows serves as a menu of topic areass, demographics, and systems for communities to frame their conversations around equity and construct their equitable development planning.

Equitable Economic Development
FRAMEWORK

A COMMON DEFINITION

Equity is loosely defined across cities, with each city determining their own appropriate framing and language based on unique local context. These terms are most frequently used:

- Equity
- Inclusion
- Diversity
- Economic Opportunity
- Equitable Development

TARGET POPULATIONS

In many cases, efforts are highly localized and served the following commonly marginalized groups:

- Women
- LGBTQ
- Immigrants
- People with Disabilities
- Communities of Color, often African Americans and Latinx
- Low-Income

VARYING APPROACHES

To achieve these issues, communities are deploying a variety of initiatives - locally and regionally and across public and private sectors - in the form of:

- Targeted programs
- Mandates and incentives
- Process improvement
- Financial investments
- Physical infrastructure
- Partnerships

OUTCOMES

We identified 150 different metrics that cities are using to measure outcomes. Efforts focus primarily on addressing two pivotal concepts - barriers to access and disparities in quality - across 10 different systems:

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Public Services
- Health
- Public Safety
- Transportation
- Business & Entrepreneurship
- Education
- Finance

Building the **"Equity Ecosystem"** that Could

The early American fairytale of "The Little Engine That Could" has many versions, but the main plot points are the same: a small engine pulls a much larger, broken-down engine over a mountain, achieving its goal through slow and steady progress. It is a testament to optimism and hard work, and stands as a metaphorical depiction of the long uphill battle towards pulling our country and communities to the top of our mountainous goal of an equitable society. Each community, large or small, as its own hopeful and hardworking Little Engine That Could, is pulling the weight of old systems, practices and beliefs toward a future of shared prosperity for all its citizens. In order for a little community engine to reach its destination, it needs to be a well-oiled, finely-tuned machine with all its parts working in harmony.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put extra strain on our communities. While it feels like we're putting out fires everywhere, the pandemic offers a remarkable opportunity to more clearly see just where exactly our engine is out of sync. Coming out of the pandemic, we can better identify the gaps in our supportive systems, as we are called to provide assistance to those most vulnerable in our communities. When we are let out of quarantine and life returns to its usual pace, those gaps will still exist.

Photo Credit: Unsplash, Eliobed Suarez

But first, you need to define the partners in your equity ecosystem.

Are you prepared to face those missing pieces in your system and figure out why your "check engine" light is on? Where is your ecosystem lacking? What parts of your engine need a tune up?

The Equity Ecosystem

These are the players in the Equity Ecosystem. Roles are not mutually exclusive - some of your partners may be playing many roles.

ADVOCATES

Community leaders and organizations directly engaging with those who are in need. Residents and activists inform decision makers of the issues at hand and the resources needed, amplifying community concerns.

CONVENERS

Individuals and organizations specializing in partnership, bridging the gap between private and public actors, and ensuring residents are engaged and heard.

ALIGNERS

From small think tanks to universities, research partners ensure policies and strategies are well-aligned to the needs of the community. They uncover truths about the realities of a community's lived experience.

SUPPORTERS

Private actors, such as businesses and corporations that hold immense political and economic clout can tip the scale on action around community issues with their support.
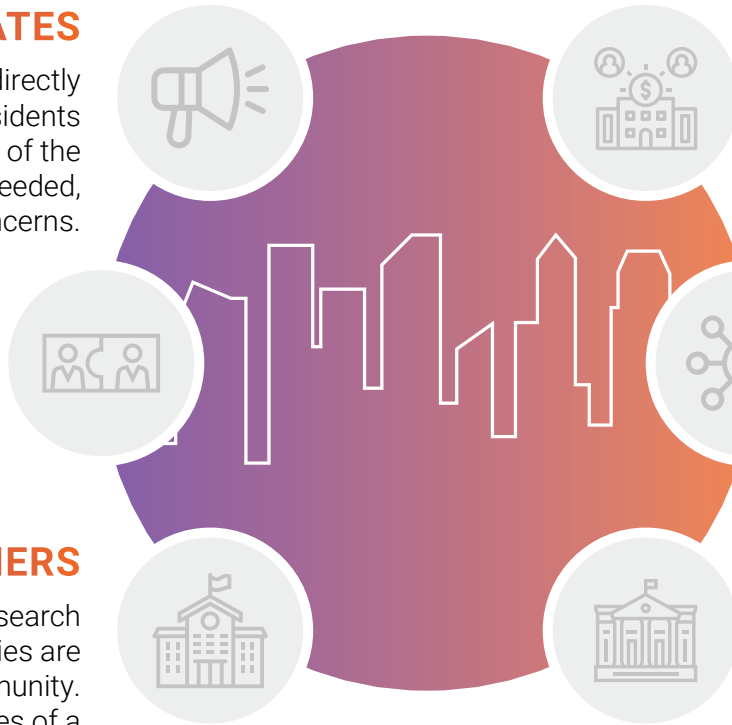
ACTIVATORS

Funders, such as philanthropic partners, support innovation and community progress.

ENABLERS

Policy makers and local government agencies often enable action and intervention, especially with systemic issues. Elected officials can either be catalysts or bottlenecks toward equity.

Systems Change **DEFINED**

If a system is a set of interacting components that function as a whole for a specific purpose, then systems change is about realigning how these components interact in order to address deficiencies; in this case, social and economic disparities. In a community, as its own unique system, the 'components' affecting the whole are the existing policies, processes, relationships, power structures, and infrastructure that disproportionately affect the end user. A systems change involves a deep look at each of these components in isolation, their effect on the system as a whole, and an intentional redirection in how they interact to achieve a more desired result.

Organizing Around Equitable Economic Development

Equitable development takes on many forms in communities across the country. Many are just starting out this work, building a framework that aligns with their area's values and priorities, while others are further along, tapping into national partners for data and implementation needs.

Across the spectrum, no one size fits all. The approach taken depends entirely on the community, its strengths, and goals. How broad and impactful your efforts will be depends on existing capacity, be it financial resources or strong partnerships, and the willingness to change. Additionally, a highly collaborative community might seek a cross-sector approach that includes a diverse perspective in decision-making. In other communities, pressing issues around transportation or small business warrant a more issue-specific approach that prioritizes seeing the issue through an equity lens.

Whether large or small, rural or urban, here are a few models found in our research to consider:

CITY GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

Equitable development at the city level is anchored most often by a government agency and led by progressive mayoral and city leadership. These "City Equity Offices" are creating strategic plans to help departments become more intentional about distributing government resources to support community organizations focused on addressing structural barriers. Austin, Texas' Equity Office is one example of an office emphasizing internal cultural

Photo Credit: Visit Raleigh

shifts to address implicit bias in local governance and build capacity for local equity collaborations.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Equitable development takes on an entirely different form when approached at a county, regional (and even state) level. At the core of this approach is cross-sector partnership. For example, regional and state entities can leverage relationships with the private sector to support local equity goals. County entities like Wake County Economic Development in Raleigh, North Carolina are engaging with business leaders to better understand how to support and promote economic mobility for targeted growth areas and vulnerable communities. Regional organizations like Partnership for Southern Equity based out of Atlanta, Georgia and Center for Economic Inclusion in the Twin Cities region are amplifying a collaborative model that convenes stakeholders around key equity focus areas and metrics.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

Community Foundations are shifting focus, moving beyond being just fiscal agents. More and more often, they are also serving as communicators, conveners and catalysts for equity work. The Seattle Foundation is aligning with Seattle's Equity Plan and creating programs like the Civic Leadership Fund, Center for Community Partnerships, and the Healthy Communities Fund. These programs make investments in collective-impact and neighborhood initiative incubation models that drive action and lead to systems change.

ISSUE-SPECIFIC APPROACH

Nonprofit and mission-driven organizations are always important allies in advancing equity work, as they work on the ground in the community, and can be pivotal allies to local governments. CO+HOOTS, a coworking community in Phoenix, Arizona, is an example of an organization responding to the disparities that exist as the City increases its innovation and tech capacity. The inclusion initiative seeks to increase ethnically diverse companies by partnering with local nonprofits serving disadvantaged populations and providing scholarships to entrepreneurs in these communities as well as discounted membership and free coworking spaces.

Photo Credit: CO+HOOTS

GRASSROOTS AND RESIDENT-LED

Central to equity work are local residents and communities, particularly those most impacted by unfair policies, programs and practices. OneDC (Organizing Neighborhood Equity), a grassroots organization serving Shaw and the District in Washington, DC, provides a unique model for equity work, putting power in the hands of local residents. OneDC's resident-led efforts are centered around a shared leadership and non-hierarchical governance system that encourages consensus building, transparency and participatory democracy. This approach has led to successful advocacy and community organizing campaigns, a resident-led workforce and job center in an underserved community and many negotiated community benefit agreements.

Resources in Support of Advancing Equity

When a community is ready to incorporate an equity lens in their economic planning, it takes a multitude of actors contributing their expertise to see success.

Hundreds of foundations, think tanks, organizations, and educational institutions are adding to our evolving understanding of equitable development. They each have a unique role to play, and now, with COVID-19 challenging each of us, many actors are taking on new responsibilities and advancing the work in innovative, groundbreaking ways.

Here we outline some of the roles that equitable development champions take on, and some of the ways their contributions have grown or changed in light of COVID-19.

Providing a Baseline

To know where you are going, you need to start by understanding where you are. A number of national think tanks operate tracking and mapping tools to help communities understand where they fall on a series of metrics around racial and economic inclusion. PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute publish the National Equity Atlas which provides a broad array of data for the largest 100 cities, the largest 150 regions, and all 50 states. Harvard and Brown's Opportunity Atlas, and the Equality Indicators from the Institute of State and Local Governance both provide data that can help inform policy. The Urban Institute also ranked the largest metros in the U.S on inclusion policies and programs.
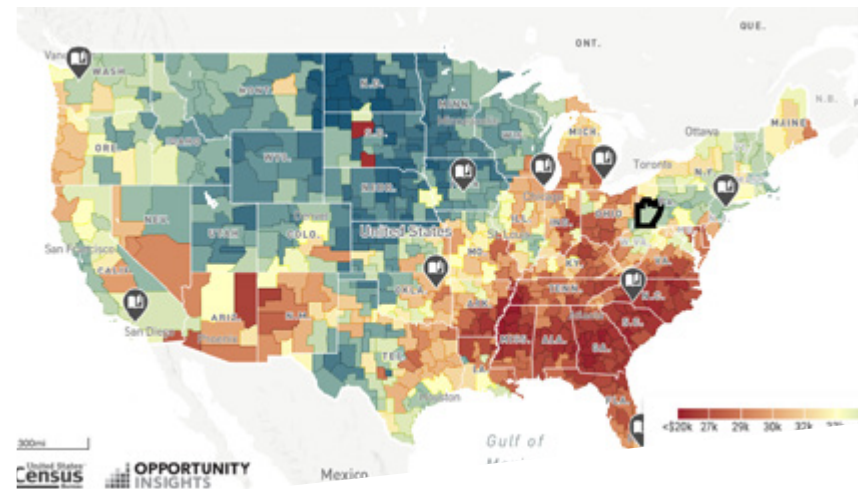

Photo Credit: Opportunityatlas.org

With COVID disproportionately affecting communities of color, more institutions have stepped up to bring disparity to the forefront: COVID Tracking Project from the Atlantic and the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research teamed up to create the COVID Racial Data Tracker. The Other and Belonging Institute is maintaining a heat map of COVID racial disparities by state.

Using data to inform conversation is critical, especially if it can concretely identify realities about your community that may not be apparent at face value. Fourth Economy's Community Index helps communities understand themselves based on a series of metrics that indicate vibrancy and areas for growth. This, and other locally-focused tools will help set the stage for meaningful dialogue.

Elevating Promising Practices

National sources can also be a hub for promising practices across the country. The Aspen Institute captures new and innovative approaches being employed, and you can also browse the Brookings Institution or the Washington Center for Equitable Growth's articles about national trends.

After coronavirus hit the United States, organizations went into high gear searching for tactics that could help address the new challenges in front of them. The Urban Institute compiled a list of policies to help protect people and communities in the midst of the pandemic, and there is a section specifically for Equity and Inclusion.

Building Consensus and Developing Strategies

Organizations are developing toolkits (like this one!) that offer community leaders and advocates guidance on how best to define, organize and plan around equitable development. Check out Forward Cities' Inclusive Innovation Toolkit; All-In Cities' toolkits exploring six different policy areas such as economic security, healthy neighborhoods, and anti-displacement; and NALCAB's equitable development neighborhood guide with tools for engaging community partners.

Moving Toward Action

Where there lacks capacity (leadership and/or financial resources) to implement strategies, national partners can come alongside communities and move them toward action. Communities benefit from technical assistance providers in that they can leverage a broad network of educational resources. For example, The Strong,

Photo Credit: SPARCC

Prosperous, And Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) provides technical assistance, grant funding, and network opportunities for six cities across the U.S. The National League of Cities, Policy Link, and the Urban Land Institute's Equitable Economic Development Fellowship provides one year of technical assistance and peer learning to cities.

Institutions are also organizing around specific strategies such as Accelerator for America assisting communities in delivering equitable investments in Opportunity Zones; and the Government Alliance on Racial Equity emphasizing structural racism in governance.
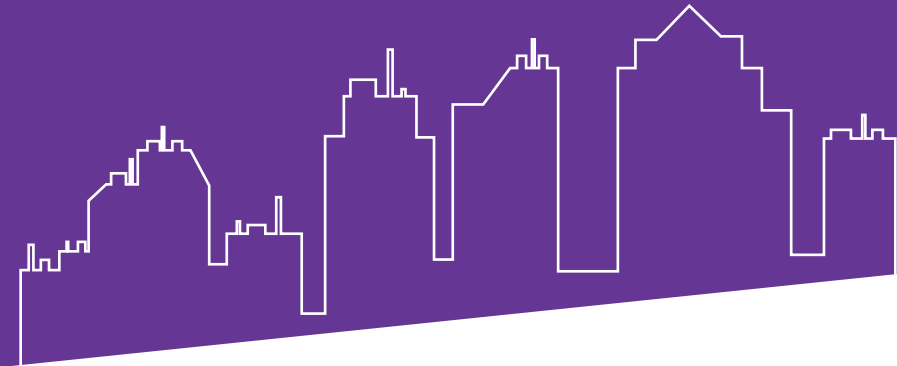
Measuring and Evaluating Success

The National Equity Atlas from Policy Link tracks and measures cities' inclusive growth using a set of common metrics; there are small scale efforts utilizing displacement measures to evaluate neighborhood investments; and we know of many places—such as New York City and Greater Minneapolis region—who are developing their own dashboards to evaluate in real time their equity progress.

This is only a small sampling of the partners and supporters of equitable development work in the country, and every day more voices join the conversation.

Photo Credit: National Equity Atlas

PLANNING & DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE

For an equitable economic development system to work, communities need to be able to pull the right levers and navigate the complexity and diversity of players, processes, and resources that exist. Additionally, understanding how that system operates at a local level vs. a regional level—and in what ways the two interact—is equally important.

Planning Systems Change

MAP THE SYSTEM: Identify the roles and makeup of the system	EVALUATE THE SYSTEM: Identify the principles, policies, and programs that enable the system to thrive.
Identify the Work: What problem are you seeking to address? How do the goals, programs, policies, etc. of existing system partners reflect this core issue?	**Engage the Partners:** Do the partners reflect the community? Are they working from a shared, common vision?
Identify The Partners: Who are the partners? How are these partners organized?	**Understand the Work:** Is this work of the system partners reaching a targeted community? Who is benefiting? Why and/or why not?
Identify the Methods: What is the function of the leadership? Who are the collaborators? What are the resources being used for support?	**Evaluate the Methods:** Are these processes creating new pathways for intended end-users to participate? How are they being shaped by end-users?
Identify the Outcomes: To what end are these actors working and how are they measuring success?	**Challenge Outcomes:** Do these outcomes incorporate equity?

Doing Systems Change

A focus on wealth creation

Wealth is defined as the value of assets owned by a person, company and/or country and there are four key elements that contribute to a family's ability to build wealth: community context, family wealth, income, and savings. True systems change requires wealth-generation and preservation approaches for underserved populations.

Action steeped in a sense of urgency

Equity has been talked about, analyzed, and confronted for years, but few actors have truly moved the needle for sustained progress and change. A sense of urgency moves partners beyond the discussion phase and toward meaningful progress.

Openness to changing the status quo

Archaic ways of thinking and functioning allow inequity to persist. A community must be willing to reevaluate how it has historically delivered services, granted funding, and developed policies, and then be willing to dramatically change its course—especially when it recognizes that what has been established isn't working for the people and or places that it should work for.

Bold leadership with a commitment to resource reallocation

Capital is what drives growth and progress. Investment in new programs and reinvestment in historically underserved communities are examples of how cities and regions can recalibrate their resources for intentional investment.

Avenues to regularly learn and evaluate

Equity work takes time and meaningful change is hard. Communities, through data and conversation, should regularly evaluate where they are, how they are doing, if they are being successful and what might be missing.

Evaluating the Equity System
a toolkit

In this section, you will find activities and guiding questions that are designed to help you and your partners brainstorm about equity within your economic systems. Use these worksheets during an internal or community planning session. Send these questions in to a colleague or partners in your community meeting to aid their thinking on the creation and implementation of a program or partnership idea.

The questions across the worksheets aren't meant to be an exhaustive list of things to consider as you are planning. Instead, they are a helpful guide to centering equity and the end-user in your strategy work.

IDENTIFY THE WORK

What problems are you seeking to address, and what are your goals in addressing them?

DIAGNOSE THE PROBLEM
Take a moment to write out a few thoughts around the problems your community is facing.

IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS
Take a moment to write out a few thoughts around what your community has been able to leverage to find success in addressing the problem. What's working?

ESTABLISH YOUR GOAL
Building off your strengths to address your problems, what goals have you identified?

IDENTIFY THE PARTNERS

Who are the key partners within the system
and how are they organizing?

UNDERSTAND PARTNER ROLES		
Take a moment to list the partners in your equity ecosystem, based on the below roles:		
Advocates	**Conveners**	**Aligners**
Supporters	**Activators**	**Enablers**

How are these actors working together to accomplish goals of the shared vision?		
Goal	Method	Actors Involved

Who are the end-users this system is seeking to strengthen?

How effective are the above partners in reaching the community?

What is the partnership model to ensure these partners are engaging around the issue?

IDENTIFY THE METHODS

How are system partners functioning, collaborating, and engaging?

PARTNER ALIGNMENT
Take a moment to write out the actors noted in the previous worksheet and some key policies, programs, resources and/or initiatives they are doing to address the aforementioned problem.

Partner	Program, Policies, Resources, etc.

GAP IDENTIFICATION
Where you are finding gaps within your system?

Are the above programs, policies, resources meeting the most vulnerable community members where they are?

In what ways are you utilizing the end-user experience to shape what these partners offer?

What are the policy, programmatic, financial barriers to achieving success in this area?

IDENTIFY THE OUTCOME

To what end are partners doing the work and how are they measuring success?

MEASURING SUCCESS

Take a moment to write out your goals in a previous worksheet and identify the metrics needed to measure your progress toward this goal over time.

Goal	Metrics

What capacity do partners in the system have to evaluate data?

What role would a shared dashboard play in organizing partners around success metrics?

How can you ensure qualitative input? And will the methods for this kind of input reach the end-user?