

Metro Equity Inventory Report

In 2011, the Metro council recognized the limitations staff and regional partners face in the absence of a clear equity strategy and directed Metro staff to initiate the development of an organizing framework that consistently incorporates equity into all Metro decisions. Given the scale of effort needed to strategically move Metro's equity work forward, project staff has recommended a three-phase approach to developing a framework for Metro. The Equity Inventory Report is the first step in the process of developing an agency-wide equity framework.

In 2010 the Metro Council adopted Equity as a regionally desired outcome: "The benefits and burdens of growth and change should be distributed equitably across the region."

Over the past few years, Metro's involvement around equity issues has increased. Since 2008, equity has been identified as a regional outcome, leading to its adoption as one of the region's six desired outcomes. To further support these efforts, Metro Council recently identified the need to create an equity lens, or decision-support mechanism, to ensure that decisions are guided by a clear equity focus.

Parallel to these efforts, Metro staff and partners have worked to build capacity to better address the regional inequities that stand in the way of long-term prosperity. However, efforts to operationalize equity as a regional outcome lack the strategic direction needed to ensure their success.

The equity inventory report provides a snapshot of how Metro *intentionally* incorporates equity considerations into agency activities. The inventory is intended to provide Metro staff and community stakeholders with information on how Metro currently considers equity. In addition, the inventory can serve as a platform for developing an intentional strategy to advance equity issues in the future.

To develop an equity framework Metro needs a strategy for how to move forward. This strategy needs to explicitly define the scale and scope of how the agency will advance equity. To be successful in this effort, any strategy that Metro considers needs to have community support that evolves through sustained and equal partnership.

A Phased Approach

The objective of this work is to outline an approach for how Metro can operationalize equity as a regional outcome.

The intended outcome is to ensure the development of an organizing framework that provides the structure and support needed to embed equity into the institutional culture of Metro. By embedding equity into the organization's culture, Metro staff and leadership will have the knowledge and tools to consistently incorporate equity into Metro activities. This will not only prevent duplication of effort, but also equip staff and leadership with the capacity and knowledge to address the concerns community partners and organizations have with regard to Metro's current practices.

In recognition of the effort required to achieve this long-term outcome, staff propose the development of a three-phase approach. The following is an overview of each proposed phase of the project.

Phase 1 | Metro Equity Inventory Report

Before developing a framework Metro leadership and staff needed to have a better understanding of Metro’s current practices around equity. By engaging both Metro staff and external stakeholders, the Equity Inventory Report provides a snapshot of how Metro currently incorporates equity considerations into agency activities. In an effort to inform Phase 2, the report captures a number of findings and recommendations that emerged through the yearlong research phase.

Phase 2 | Define a strategy

The Phase 2 engagement process should result in two outcomes: first, the region—including community partners and stakeholders—needs to articulate and focus the region’s desired outcome around equity. Second, and again through an engagement process, Metro should articulate the agency’s strategy for achieving this desired outcome.

Phase 3 | Implement the strategy

Once an equity strategy is chosen, implementing this strategy will increasingly guarantee that Metro leadership and staff consistently consider equity at the beginning phase of program, policy and project development, ensuring equity considerations become actionable by staff and measurable during evaluation.

Phase 1 Overview

In an effort to inform the process of developing an agency-wide equity strategy, the Equity Inventory captures 22 specific activities that intentionally incorporate equity considerations. The project team interviewed Metro employees currently engaged in projects and programs that strategically advance equity issues. Staff was asked to provide detailed information on how their department, program or project considers equity. It is important to note that this inventory is not an exhaustive account of all Metro activities. For the purposes of this report, project staff chose to include programs and projects that strategically and intentionally advance equity, highlighting the work that is currently underway. Further, the process of completing this inventory highlighted that various projects and programs are in different stages of readiness and capacity when it comes to incorporating equity.

Activities documented in the Equity Inventory Report

Planning and Development

- *Regional Travel Options (RTO) Strategic Plan*
- *Active Transportation Demonstration Projects*
- *Regional Flexible Funding Allocation*
- *Vámanos!*
- *East Metro Connections Plan*
- *Southwest Corridor Plan*
- *Federally Funded Projects*
- *Opportunity Mapping*

Sustainability Center

- *Resource Conservation and Recycling Division Strategic Action Plan*
- *Recycle at Work*
- *Toxics Reduction program*

Parks and Environmental Services

- *Solid Waste Operations: Hazardous Waste Roundups*
- *Solid Waste Operations: Metro Paint staffing*
- *Community Enhancement grant program*

Visitor Venues

- *First Opportunity Target Area*
- *Minority, women and emerging small business (MWESB) program*
- *Oregon Zoo*

Research Center

- *Greater Portland Pulse*

Agency-wide practices

- *Opt In*
- *Minority, women and emerging small business (MWESB) program*
- *Diversity Action Plan*

Community Investment Initiative

Findings

The findings are based on the themes and commonalities of efforts to advance equity at Metro as well as input gathered during interviews with outside stakeholders.

Phase 1 confirmed that there is duplication of effort and a lack of strategic guidance to support intentional efforts to advance equity throughout Metro's activities. The inventory process also highlighted the inconsistency of approach as well as the lack of capacity to advance this issue throughout the agency. While some departments and divisions are farther along the spectrum of capacity and knowledge to incorporate equity, others struggle to understand the equity implications of their work.

Barriers

Efforts to **build and maintain relationships** with underserved communities are inconsistent in part due to the following:

- Staff has **limited time** to seek out and build relationships with other professionals working on equity issues and time to accommodate these partnerships is not typically considered during project scoping.
- There is a **lack of flexibility** to create unique communication mechanisms with standard policies and/or procedures.
- Staff and leadership have not considered or adopted performance measures designed to hold them **accountable for implementation** of policies that advance equity.

Limitations

Metro has **limited experience** around the issue of equity and has not invested in capacity and knowledge building for staff, leadership or partners to advance equity as part of Metro's activities.

- Metro **does not have a definition for equity** that provides strategic direction to guide the agency's work
- **A lack of inter-agency coordination** leads to inefficiencies, uncoordinated outreach and engagement, and duplicative research and engagement efforts.

Implementation considerations

Staff identified the need to have **guiding documents or policies** to consistently implement efforts to advance equity.

- Even when mandated, there is often **limited or no guidance on best practices** available for reference.
- To date, Metro has primarily focused on geographic and health equity, which do not ensure **transferability** to other equity issues.

Role of leadership

The Metro Council and the Senior Leadership Team have supported the goal of overcoming regional inequity, however there is **no specific direction or allocated resources** to advance this work. In absence of Metro's leadership, community organizations and regional partners are leading the work around equity.

Recommendations

Overall, there is critical need for Metro to develop a strategy if the agency intends to advance regional equity as identified in the desired outcome. Taking this first step will require funding and staff capacity to move this work forward.

Define the focus of a strategy to move forward. Developing a strategy will increasingly guarantee that Metro leadership and staff consider equity at the beginning phase of program, policy and project development, ensuring equity considerations become actionable by staff and measurable during evaluation. While defining a strategy should NOT take place without meaningful external stakeholder partnerships and dialogue, the focus of the strategy needs to deliberately build capacity within the agency to advance other dimensions of equity.

Identify institutional and structural challenges. Time needs to be spent on identifying the existing institutional and structural barriers to advancing equity. This process should identify how these barriers might be addressed and needs to be completed through a formal and transparent process that is grounded by community partnerships.

Recognize the need for internal and external strategies to do this work. Metro's new Diversity Program Manager can serve a role in this work, however not all diversity and equity issues can be addressed with one staff position. While there is overlap between the internal and external efforts to advance equity and diversity, they require different types of actions and skills and should not be considered to be interchangeable. Similarly, more education on the difference between diversity and equity is needed throughout the agency.

Given fiscal realities and constraints, identify how current resources can be allocated differently to address equity. A central theme to Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative is the idea that "*we cannot pay our way to equity*". While additional resources, time and energy are needed to advance equity, applying more resources to existing processes will not achieve equitable outcomes—it may in fact exacerbate existing inequities.