



Metro | Memo

Date: Friday, March 20, 2015
To: Martha Bennett, Chief Operating Officer, Metro
From: The Equity Strategy Advisory Committee
Subject: Comments and recommendations on the “Equity Baseline Report: A Framework for Regional Equity”
Cc: Metro Equity Strategy staff

The Equity Strategy Advisory Committee (ESAC) has completed a thorough review of the “Equity Baseline Report: A Framework for Regional Equity” (report) produced by the six community-based organizations (CBOs) under contract with Metro. The report identified the most critical inequities and disparities experienced by people within Metro’s desired outcomes for the region. The report is intended to be an analytical framework for Metro to prioritize its Equity Strategy and Action Plan. Collectively, we would like to offer you our own reflections on the report and our recommendations moving forward.

Overall, we are pleased with the quality and substance of the report which makes a significant contribution to Metro’s understanding of regional equity and towards the development of an equity strategy itself. The workgroup of CBO representatives who authored this report should be commended for their contributions to identifying and framing the most significant areas of concern for regional equity, the historical context to understand them, and their potential applicability for action.

Here are ESAC’s recommendations on the report and our ideas for moving forward with the development of the Equity Strategy and Action Plan:

1. **Equity+5 framework:** ESAC agrees that the reframing of Metro’s six desired outcomes into the “Equity+5” paradigm is a necessary first step in building a meaningful equity strategy. The integration of equity within the other five desired outcomes would sharpen Metro’s understanding of the intersectionality and complexity of equity. It would also help Metro figure out how to measure its progress toward achieving equity within vibrant communities, economic prosperity, safe and reliable transportation, leadership on climate change, and clean air and water over time.

Recommended action: *Metro should adopt the “Equity+5” paradigm to institutionalize equity across the agency’s policies, programs and services.*

2. **Racial equity and economic justice lens:** ESAC agrees that Metro should develop a racial and economic justice lens as part of its equity analysis and strategy. The lens would acknowledge that the most significant inequities and disparities that exist in the region disproportionately impact people of color and low income people. This approach would take into account the historical significance of these inequities, the changing demographics of today and the urgency for prompt action to prevent the worsening of disparities. Utilizing such a lens would not necessarily imply an exclusive focus on certain community groups at the expense of others.

Ultimately, an intentional focus on the most impacted communities would benefit the entire population and increase the competitiveness of the region as a whole.

Recommended action: *Metro should adopt a racial and economic justice lens and should consistently apply it to benefits and burdens analyses for policies, programs and services.*

- 3. 10-Indicator framework:** ESAC agrees that the workgroup identified cogent indicator categories and definitions which, except for the need for further refinement in some of them, provide a useful context to measure equity in the region. We concur with the workgroup's assertion that these 10 equity indicator areas highlight the interrelated nature of equity. While the report does not contain formal equity baseline data, it suggests how measurements for regional equity should be organized. This is perhaps the most enduring outcome of the workgroup's contribution.

Recommended action: *Metro should adopt and proactively use the 10-Indicator framework in its approach to advancing, promoting and measuring regional equity over time.*

- 4. Additional data collection needs:** ESAC agrees that existing data about regional equity is both abundant and incomplete and that Metro should create a systematic approach to developing equity measures and supporting data collection efforts when appropriate. ESAC acknowledges the workgroup's conclusions that given the sheer volume of regional data it was impractical to select datapoints as a means to define measures of regional equity. For this reason an equity baseline report was not produced as originally envisioned at this stage of the process, but might be necessary to do so as part of its equity strategy development and assessment.

Recommended action: *Metro should invest in efforts to improve data collection in areas over which it has authority, and collaborate with other efforts that support this goal.*

- 5. Community-led equity "audit" of Metro's departments:** ESAC values the need for accountability and community involvement in the creation of the Equity Strategy and Action Plan for Metro. For this we believe that an "assessment" of Metro's programs and policies in areas where Metro can have an impact in regional inequities and disparities should be conducted in tandem between community stakeholders and Metro staff, coordinated through the Equity Strategy program. ESAC also urges Metro Council and staff leadership to reaffirm and restate their commitment to advancing equity and improving equity outcomes through the development and adoption of the Equity Strategy and Action Plan.

Recommended action: *Metro should work with community-based organizations and strategic stakeholders to conduct an in-depth "assessment" of Metro's policies, programs, services and authority in areas where Metro can have an impact in addressing regional inequities and disparities. Doing so will build trust, accountability and transparency in the process of creating the Equity Strategy and Action Plan with wide community support.*

- 6. Suggested approach for strategy development:** ESAC agrees with the CBOs' suggestions to identify short, mid and long-term activities and tangible strategies that provide a roadmap for action. In order to demonstrate its commitment to advancing equity in the region, Metro should

act on the areas over which it has immediate control, establishing a track record of "early wins" that increases its credibility and visibility to advance other more profound initiatives for the medium- and long-term.

Recommended action: *Metro should identify clear actions for immediate application of equity in the short term as it develops high-impact, enduring strategies for the medium and long term to be included in the Equity Strategy and Action Plan.*

7. Other observations:

- The Equity Strategy and Action Plan should take into consideration a broader definition of "community" that represents the entire region. The expanded definition, in addition to communities of color and low income people, should also include stakeholders from the disability, aging, youth, business and philanthropy communities as well as local government jurisdictions.
- Metro should consider the prompt development and application of a disparate impact analysis to all its decision-making mechanisms, in order to complement and support the Equity Strategy and Action Plan development.
- While the framework report was generally very well written, ESAC was concerned about some of the language in the report and requested some changes from the CBO work group; due to logistical issues, they declined to alter the report. ESAC would like to register the following areas of concern:
 - The title of the report should be "Equity Framework Report" and not include reference to "Part 1".
 - The term "audit" (p.75) connotes a formal process that is not appropriate in this instance. ESAC recommends the term "community-led assessment".
 - The headline "Oregon: A White Homeland" (p. 21) intends to convey that the white settlers who founded the state of Oregon consciously sought to excluded other racial and ethnic groups from living in it. However, that headline is offensive to other racial and ethnic groups, especially to Native Americans, and it should be changed.
 - The framework report did a good job of documenting the historic discrimination that has resulted in disparities and suffering among communities of color; however, it failed to capture and celebrate the strength and resilience of these same communities. ESAC recommends using more balanced, strength-based language to refer to these communities in subsequent communication.

We commend Metro for involving the community, represented in the voices of the community-based organizations that produced the report, early in the process of developing its Equity Strategy and Action Plan which adds significant value to the understanding and advancement of equity in the region.

Sincerely,

Carl Talton
ESAC Chair