Session IV - Equity

Leaders: John Killeen and Meg Merrick

Present: John Killeen, Liz Monk, Oscar Villareal, Jessie Partridge, Meg Merrick, Bernice Butler, Gary Painter, Nic Moe, Richard Parks, Megan Swindal, Katie Pritchard, Carla Mendez, Charlotte-Anne Lucas, Mary Buchanan, Lisa Pittman, Sean Capperis, Natalie Young

John - Defining equity, measuring equity and then how do you foster accountability in this area. So that's the session, maybe we can do quick intros?

Meg - Just a show of hands, anyone who's ever been involved in equity indicator work? I'm just going to say a few things about two different experiences. They bring up all of the issues that John’s talking about, definitions framing, measure the accountability. Our institute’s first encounter with whether or not equity is a desired outcome. We were creating Greater Portland Pulse. It was a huge community process and included government. Come up with goals and the indicators will follow. The issue of equity as mostly through the first Equity Atlas was becoming important. The biggest players were the government and we have a really diverse city. But we have at least one county with tea party politics, so there was pushback. Should equity be a goal or immersed in the other goals? The end was that it was immersed, because it just ended up being shown as disaggregating the data by race and ethnicity. Which doesn't work in small geographies. So when people were looking for equity, they couldn't find it. So now we added it as an outcome.

Second project? The counsellors decided to add an additional goal to their five regional goals, adding equity. When they did that they created and advisory committee of high powered people and then they paid nonprofits for communities of color to identify indicators. They handed them a spreadsheet of 450 indicators and said pick twenty, and that will show that we're moving the needle. That's a lot of power dynamics. They hired a facilitator to work them through the spreadsheets. And finally I got involved and we finally were able to. Some people were talking about suing the government, so they handed over the indicator process to this group and they struggled. They had to reframe their goals. It's equity as the lens. It's equity plus the other five. The politics of that hasn't been worked through yet but that was that recommendation. The next thing was that they don't have the data to measure this. That it's multifaceted and it’s structural. They said that if you want to show how you're moving the dial in our region, we need to have indicators that relate to your roles and responsibilities beyond it and we want to measure those things. And the push back was intense. “Well yes we have control over long range planning but that doesn't really affect equity.” “We have control over transportation but that doesn't affect equity.” “Land use, the zoo, the education, but nothing to do with equity.” There ended up being a huge education process. In the end the regional government walked away from that. They didn't want to coauthor. The report is online now, [Equity Baseline Report - Part 1: A Framework for Regional Equity](http://www.oregonmetro.gov/sites/default/files/Equity%20Framework%20Report_final%20012715small.pdf). It's not an academic report but it's their attempt to come to terms with this. Their indicators aren't data points, they're housing choices. There are some ideas, some recommendations for data that needs to be collected, and they're things that people have to do. For me, that is one of the most important processes I've ever seen because it moved the discussion to pick twenty data points to something that has real substance. But as for results, the politics is really intense. The advisory group is unhappy with the fact that this group took this approach. They created the definition of equity for the government and this group didn't accept it unless two conditions—We will use a racial and social justice lens and we'll use the social determinants of health. The challenge in this is that equity is complex. When you're dealing with goals, it's tough if that work doesn't get done.

Katie – And of the indicators? Is it the indicator or the way that you present the data that is called equity?

Meg - You actually need to read the report, it's rather complicated. Being with an equity map or a conceptual framework. They felt it wasimportant to describe the process they went through. In some ways, it's probably the most important part of the report.

Bernice – We’re different because we're an organization, but when dealing the education data, it must be through an equity lens. Until this year, they've done it with the best of interactions. But it wasn't until the staff pointed out that they weren't informing the work. LGTBQ students, disability, measuring standardized tests for autism, blindness, is all equity. We pulled representatives from all those national organizations with networks in those connections. They helped us share our work and our past. Our first rollback is that we need an operational version of equity so that it won't be a thing that's an afterthought but a thing that we start with. We hadn't framed it like that before but we also got information that we had never seen before. Southeast Asians are so different from other Asian students. Let's be intentional about strategically engaging so that people that view things for your lens. Now it's vetted with the equity advisory group. They pick it apart and hurt our feelings, but the same thing happens with our parent group and our teacher group. There was a report that shows the determinants of equity in King County. It pulls out equity so cleanly and intentional. It's very helpful.

Jessie – We’re similar in that work for the Regional Planning Agency. We have a different story in a lot of ways, and it's part of our mission to include equity in lots of ways. The work started long before I was there and I wasn't involved in the equity indicators, but we had a robust community engagement process. We have lofty goals throughout that in each of the topic area. When we did the indicator reports, we needed to dig into equity as a cross-cutting issue throughout each of the topic areas. So each of the topic areas had an equity lens to them and in the development process of that, we discovered some public health indicators that we hadn’t been including before. We released our Prosperity Indicator Reports and where we are now is that it's been about five years since the State of Equity. We're reflecting on the action phase. We also had an action agenda after the state of equity indicators report, to try to move those into policy or planning agendas. We're reflecting on how useful the way we measure indicators is because it's a lot of work. To do those in-depth indicators reports is had but it's also important. We need to figure out what is useful and what is necessary to go through again,

John- What's the interest in the work that you all are doing?

Katie - We have a Strive initiative and collective impact, and it's in third or fourth year. I recently agreed to chair the data council for it. A lot of new people got together but we need to learn some better ways to do that work.

Gary - At USC we are early as a center but they are efforts going on in equity. I was trying to think about how equity and the lens and equity in each, it's interesting to hear the political reaction to it. As a university, you want to be the Switzerland but if you use the equity frame on these, why do we map all of these things if not for equity? I was trying to think through how to integrate these ideas of equity and other indicators. Have you used indicators around income inequality in the region? Something like a field index? Or just poverty rates?

Sean - I'm interested in two things. Similar to what Gary was saying. Different ways of measuring equity and how to do it with a warrant but without advocating for any particular stance or policy. We're not advocates and now putting on my new hat in NYC government, our mayor and housing commissioner have been charged with making life in general more equitable for more New Yorkers. How housing policy shapes people's lives through the place that they are living in. How are people thinking about fair housing? Have a few ideas and thinking about income inequality and other things.

Nic - I'm interested in this topic generally but with the effort to put the equity lens on these processes is super interesting. I'm on a traffic safety task force in Austin, creating a full vision zero to think about how to end traffic fatalities and that's highly disproportionate. There needs to be an equity lens for that. Bringing in people who represent communities that are most effective. There's a lot of community involvement but after getting people to sign on, they’re in on paper. However, they don't come to the meetings. There's a huge effort from people who are ostensibly involved. We know them and we can't get them into the room. I can't speak for many of these communities and neither can't the people who show up. When you have a process like that, when you can't actually get them there? It was more top-down than it could have been but how do you have the conversation when people can't or won't show up.

Brian - In St. Louis, we are similar to what we saw in Dallas. The city is divided in half. We have the Delmarva divide. Divides the north and south. Below the line is more progressive incomes, better overall condition, north is African American. North of Delmar is mainly black. Food deserts over there. People know there are disparities; there are lots of fast foods but no grocery stores. How do you get people? There are cultural aspects; there is obesity, diabetes, heart disease. All zip codes that aren't blue are north of the Delmarva divide. Food justice is not a glamorous topic. They enjoy what they enjoy eating but a lot of time it's bad food or prepared in a bad way. There are people who are trying to create these foods. The mayor has a plan to reduce obesity by five percent by 2018 but we need to get our people to the table on a consistent basis.

Charlotte-Anne - As a media person who is covering issues in San Antonio, I was the only journalist when google fiber can to town to ask about those who cannot afford broadband now. Even choosing thirty dollars for broadband means the difference between food and broadband. No one else was asking those questions. I'm concerned with that kind of equity knowing full well that if we don't ask those questions in media, they're not able to ask those questions themselves. I'm interested in tech equity so that they're able to ask those questions.

Meg - This may be slightly off topic. A rural county has a large unincorporated population. They have community participation programs but they are gigantic geographic areas. They are dealing with white capture. It's been overwhelmingly white but has had a lot of diversity. The leadership of those organizations has been encouraged to reach out to community members but those people don't show up. So how you get people to show up to place based meetings is an issue. Even rural internet participation is way up from what it used to be. But then I know the conversations that I've had with folks, there are families that are barely surviving. People need to be paid to participate.

Charlotte - Anne - In San Antonio, we give them food. Because frankly, you have to feed your family. But if there's been food and childcare, that has done wonders. And some subsidy for transportation.

John – There’s been lot of genuine community participation in the one that you're talking about it. What was the strategy?

Meg - Portland is great with public participation although the reality is something different. The regional government recognized that to get the input, they would need to pay for it. They put out an RFP to represent a diverse community. They made mistakes—the Native American community was not represented. Their job was to do the outreach for this project. Because they spent months looking at a spreadsheet, they went through their money pretty quickly. But that community piece a really important and our regional government is kind of a bubble and they're kind of tone deaf to the world outside of their office building. They were going to have to be a little more serious. The big problem at this point is because of the discussions that happened, expectations are now fairly high and because the politics are complex internally, how this is all going to spin out is taking much too long. We'll see in the next few months. If they don't come out with something substantive, which is to say that they need to do something more than saying grad rates are going up or down, I don't know what’s going to happen. But the groups that were involved are strong groups and have great community ties. The participants were all smart and engaged and a great group of people who weren't afraid to speak truth to power.

Bernice - Have you just gone to where they already are instead of asking them to come to you? A mosque a synagogue, a barber shop, or wherever in that part of community? Because pulling in those people who they are trustful of could help. It may be a community development CDC where people already feel comfortable. Or if there's a neighborhood group or something? It takes more legwork and it takes more time and maybe the groups aren't individually as diverse, but those things are very helpful. They put all this money into this fitness park less than a mile away from the projects. But people from the projects aren't going because clearly they didn't build them for them. Asking other people to get feedback for you, for example.

Brian - Churches are tough. I live in the county of St. Louis but I don't live in the neighborhood where somebody might go to church. But if people live in the distressed neighborhoods the data might be skewed one way or another.

Bernice - But if you have a large employer for example. Everybody in that community has a stake somewhere in that community. Those people have a buy-in into the community.

Katie - We spent a few years doing an intensive project on racial disparities in infant mortality. Learned a lot of hard community lessons. The hardest lesson that we haven't gotten over - what is the difference between framing it in an equity sense and just using equity as a disparity, showing disaggregation. The organizations and the staff people who run things in neighborhoods are not speaking for the people in the neighborhoods. Haven't quite gotten over that one. We had to set up structures where people's ability to vet the information and own the data was really important. We did the planning for the implementation of this piece. But the shocker was that people think of infant mortality as a maternity issue, but it's all about fatherhood. And health literacy. So now all of the money is invested in engaging fathers and households. Really different things than what health professionals would have come up with.

Susan Millea - At a qualitative level what we're hearing are issues about engagement of the fathers. Having the fathers engage and their own personal challenges. Even if the father is a part of the family cluster, they're not acknowledged when they have a media appointment.

Megan - Interested in the way the data points to issues in the community versus a regional issue where everyone is complicit in. Interesting to think of the use. Does it scale up to ownership by the community to fix that?

John - You can think about it operationally. You can think about a specific area or community. You're talking about government or transportation where you can see that there is more of that happening here and less of that happening here and it does direct back to a program that actually exists. Is there a lack of equity in some ways here? You're looking at a program and how equitably it distributes here. One of the things that's suggested for a moderator, is there a goal? The goal for me is to absorb all the things for the website. Think about what I could do for places that are disaggregated in many ways. There's a point in there that I could do something with that readily. Are there things that you're doing here that are measuring equity?

Meg - One of the things is a call to follow the money. Looking at community involvement. This group would say that this is a priority, put lots of money there. Dealing with the suburbanization of poverty to the way our transportation agency reports frequency service bus lines, they report the frequent service for the entire line, even if the frequent service isn't for the entire line. But once you have an equity lens, you have to have them pulled apart. People are being pushed out to the farthest end of the lines. It's not true for those people who live out there. You can't know what the situition is unless you report it all that way. When you push hard enough, there's a lot of resistance.

Nic - Another question, how do people deal with data when they look at equity based on the data that exists? We can only break it down so much. But the groups that are really affected by something aren't showing up in that data. How do you identify when that's happening? Or which questions to ask that are able to segment those groups? Segmenting into appropriate groups to identify where those groups are?

Jessie - Really interesting work with the Boston Fed—wealth data broken down by very distinct ethnic groups. They looked at Black, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Colombian black, Caribbean for example, and the different groups might have different backgrounds. Now it's looking at different assets and groups and it's all through a survey. And throughout indicators work, we look at data through community type. We have 101 cities and towns, and we have suburban and other cities and towns. That allows us other census groups where there are other disparities for other Asian groups for suburban and urban. By community type helps us see where we can't tease out, for example.

Bernice - I think too, we realized that there was a disparity in Memphis in face value but we didn't know why. Nobody had the data but they don't even consider it as data because they don't keep the database. We can't tell what the income level of people who take into school, but we can see that in FAFSA.

John- it gets into the thing of how much does that measurement gauge what you really do. That does reflect my community in some way but very Kodak data is entirely relevant there but maybe it's tough to change an organization's performance measurements. There are 460

Sean - this may sound blasphemous so don't count me out. We were engaged with one of our community partners but we have a parallel system of housing called 3/4 house. Folks that are leaving the criminal justice system but need some treatment as a result of their release. So their privately owned homes house them but connect to them treatment and have unsafe living conditions, we wanted to connect to data and prevalence of the issue. We learned pretty quickly that there is no organization that can connect a comprehensive snapshot because the data is over a very long time period and those houses are only open for a short period of time. But what we could do to raise awareness is actually procedural and financial. To show that Teresa a financial issue because there's public assistance being funneled into this system. The alternative here for these folks because they become homeless, they don't comply with the rules of their release, and then they end up back in the system. Now the city has started to change the procedures here, so maybe qualitative work might be an answer for some situations.

Bernice - I think you shave to use both. You have so many pieces but it's a storytelling piece. Politicians are politicians t they're also people. Those human stories tap into what makes them human but not always. We need the real stories with the real consequences. Those stories get you things that money can't get you sometimes.

Jessie - one tension we have there is whether the TA informs the stories or the stories inform the data. If the data that we hold doesn't back up the journalist’s story, they just don't publish the data. If the data isn't there to back it up, it doesn't invalidate the story but it might widen the story,