

Equity and Sustainability Scan

A 2014 USDN Project

Found [here](#), this scan first defined the term “Equity in sustainability” as incorporating procedures, the distribution of benefits and burdens, structural accountability, and generational impact, including: procedural, distributional, structural, and transgenerational equity. It also produced 10 “Good Practices” and 6 recommendations:

Good Practices

1. Define sustainability proactively beyond “green,” fully integrating equity and economy and a triple-bottom line approach
2. Connect the language and principles of environmental justice and public health to sustainability whenever possible
3. Put demographics and equity implications front and center to educate community members
4. Collect comprehensive sustainability data that fully integrate equity, then disaggregate that data to identify communities of concern
5. Use indicators to inform the community on progress towards sustainability, including the reduction of disparities among demographic groups
6. Build sustainability programs on a foundation of authentic community engagement
7. Provide learning opportunities on the basics of planning and sustainability, including developing capacity and leadership in neighborhoods prioritized for engagement
8. Build an infrastructure of people and entities tasked with achieving progress on equity in sustainability and foster collaboration across agencies and beyond
9. Provide professional development to cultivate the awareness, knowledge, and skills to effectively address equity within local government
10. Develop implementation tools and processes to institutionalize equity and increase accountability in decision-making, budgeting, and programs

Recommendations

1. Spread what works by expanding opportunities for information sharing and peer learning on equity in sustainability
2. Multiply and deepen professional development opportunities
3. Expand the use of equity measures and support their increasing sophistication
4. Diversify the sustainability field
5. Strengthen community partnerships, across sectors, to accelerate progress on equity
6. Push the envelope on equity in sustainability to innovate on high impact strategies

Project Reflection: *The benefits of sustainability must accrue to all, not just the privileged few.*

By fully integrating equity, local governments are uniquely situated to make a substantial contribution to the sustainability field. Equity has been left out of the framing and content of sustainability for too long, but a new generation of local leaders is bringing it to the fore. With this evolution, the sustainability field has the opportunity to communicate and brand its work far beyond environmental, scientific, and seemingly wonky policy approaches that don't touch people's daily lives.

Most importantly, many local sustainability leaders are rethinking and redesigning their work. They are using a structural equity lens to analyze access and opportunity to the determinants of a healthy, prosperous life. They are addressing distributional equity and uncovering the truths beneath community-wide data by identifying the groups who are the face of society's disparities and targeting their resources accordingly. They are building the capacity of the most disenfranchised groups in their communities to be true partners in democracy through their efforts to foster procedural equity. They are institutionalizing equity by making it an intentional, conscious part of their decision-making processes. In doing so, local government leaders are on the front lines of sustainability. Their lessons learned and cumulative efforts have much to teach those who are working on state, provincial, federal, and national sustainability policy and advocacy.

Equity is a key to maximizing the potential for sustainability to serve as a galvanizing, interconnected frame for creating a better world. Our collective future depends on making equity a priority. Sustainability has the power to weave the strands that create hope and prosperity, health and wellness, community cohesion and true opportunity for all. A focus on equity is an opportunity for sustainability leaders to address some of the thorniest, most deep-seated issues in society and to reinforce the inextricable ties that bind us in one shared destiny as people on the planet. Local governments have important roles to play, momentum on their side, and a window of opportunity with their grasp.