EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS

ARIZONA TOWN HALL
Creating Solutions

BACKGROUND REPORT - 115TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL TOPIC
2023

In 2023, Arizonans across the state will participate in Arizona Town Hall programs on the topic of "Equity for All Arizonans."

An essential element to the success of these consensus-driven discussions is this background report that is provided to all participants before each program. The Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University coordinated this informative background material in partnership with other industry professionals who have lent their time and talent to this effort. Together they have created a unique resource for a full understanding of the topic.

For sharing their wealth of knowledge and professional talents, our thanks go to the report's authors. Our deepest gratitude also goes to Liza C. Kurtz, Research Analyst, Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, who marshaled authors, created content, and served as editor of the report.

After the culmination of various programs, including community town halls, future leaders town halls, and the statewide town hall, the background report will be combined with consensus recommendations of participants into a final report. This final report will be available to the public on the Arizona Town Hall website and will be widely distributed and promoted throughout Arizona. The background report and recommendations will be used as a resource, a discussion guide, and an action plan on how best to address a more equitable Arizona for all.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Casuga
Board Chair, Arizona Town Hall
www.aztownhall.org

EQUITY FOR ALL ARIZONANS
115TH ARIZONA TOWN HALL TOPIC

BACKGROUND REPORT - 2023

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HOW TO USE THIS BACKGROUND REPORT

For 60 years, Arizona Town Hall has worked to educate, engage, connect, and empower Arizonans on a variety of critical policy issues. While those topics have ranged from criminal justice to water use and beyond, the discussions each year have centered one aspect of a larger question: How do we build a more prosperous Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential?

This year's report examines equity as one mechanism for accomplishing the goal of a vibrant, thriving Arizona. Research shows that the benefits of equity extend beyond improvements for any one individual or category of people. Increasing equity has been shown to have the potential to increase productivity, gross domestic product, and tax revenues, as well as reducing social ills like poverty.[1] Equity is also related to, but distinct from, equality. Equality is the practice of giving everyone identical resources and opportunities, regardless of where they start. Equity, by contrast, acknowledges that everyone's starting position in life is different. Equity distributes resources and opportunities to provide everyone with a chance to succeed.[2]
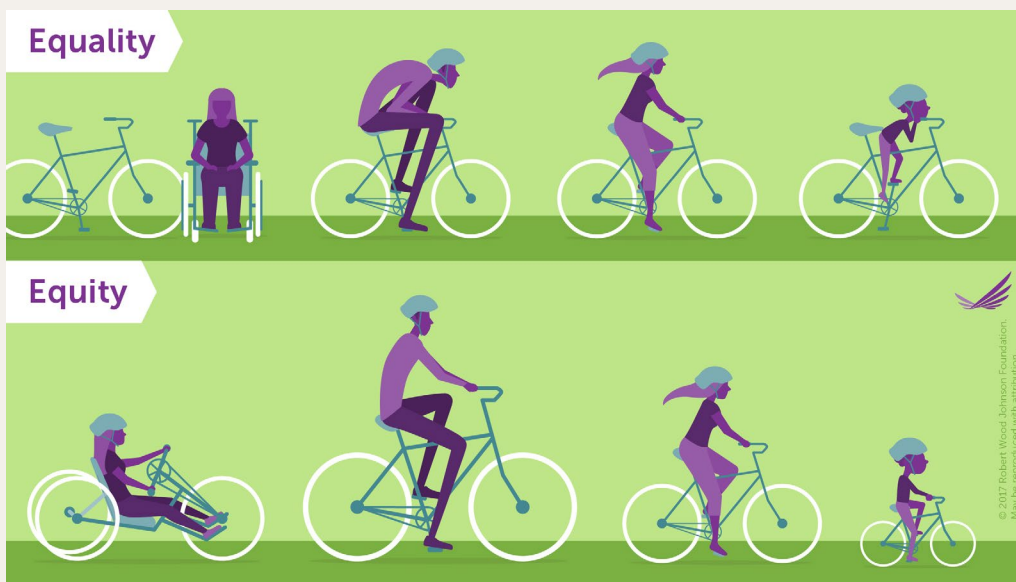
Equity is a complex topic and has as many expressions and contexts as this report has readers. Each reader will bring their own life experience with them when they engage with this report. For some readers, the contents may be challenging or controversial, prompting them to reconsider equity in the state of Arizona and their role in it. For others, there may be nothing in this report they haven't already thought about. For most readers, it will be a combination of the two. A reader may see their own experiences reflected in some places while also being introduced to new ways of considering equity. Engaging with equity as a topic does not mean abandoning your values or leaving your own experience behind. Instead, it means reading with curiosity and recognizing that each of us has a unique perspective on what equity means, why it's important, and how to work together to create a more equitable Arizona.

1   Lynch, Robert. "The economic benefits of equal opportunity in the United States by ending racial, ethnic, and gender disparities." Washington Center for Equitable Growth. June 2021. https://equitablegrowth.org/the-economic-benefits-of-equal-opportunity-in-the-united-states-by-ending-racial-ethnic-and-gender-disparities/.

2   "Equity vs. equality: What's the difference?" Milken Institute of Public Health, The George Washington University. November 5, 2020. https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/.

If you have participated with Arizona Town Hall before, you might notice that this background report is shorter than some reports in previous years, and the content is quite different. This report does not attempt to be comprehensive in outlining every approach to equity or addressing every area where increasing equity is important. Instead, think of the contents like a gallery or buffet—a diverse sample of a broader body of work. Unlike previous background reports, this one has been designed to be read to completion rather than as a reference document. The report prompts readers to examine equity applications at multiple scales, from personal relationships to statewide policies.

The first section of this report is an equity exercise that pairs self-reflection questions for the reader with selected answers from anonymous respondents from every part of Arizona and all walks of life. This exercise challenges readers to slow down and take their time to explore this exercise—and to find points of connection and difference with the responses shown alongside.

After the self-reflection, readers will find a selection of equity case studies. These case studies highlight equity successes and stories of collaborating and working together to achieve greater equity in a specific field, such as higher education or small business entrepreneurship. You can think of these case studies as "road maps," with each contributor offering different topics, strategies, and outcomes. These case studies are designed to inspire readers to consider what pathways to greater equity might look like in their own work.

The third section, "Equity in Action," attempts to capture the breadth and scope of equity-based work. These short contributions from Arizona equity scholars and experts showcase the many different contexts in which equity applies. They also outline how they incorporate equity into their own work, striving to not only create external equitable outcomes but also internal processes that elevate equity within the organization as well.

Lastly, there's one more equity self-reflection question in the conclusion—as well as a sneak preview of what Arizona Town Hall is planning for community forums and statewide convening.

Just as the contents of this year's report are different, expect this report's outcomes to be different from previous iterations. Whereas prior background reports have focused on outlining a community *issue* to prompt discussion of *solutions*, this year's report is focused on engaging with an *idea* to create *change*. It's a subtle but important difference. The groundwork for greater equity is laid when honest, respectful conversations happen in a space that protects, honors, and uplifts differences as much as similarities. Change happens when working together to understand the past, explore the present, and chart a shared future. What that change is, is up to you.

REFLECTING ON EQUITY

Before engaging with contributors' perspectives on equity, consider what equity means to *you*. Engaging fully with equity requires an open mind not only about other people, but about ourselves. Every person, including you, lives in a complex and interconnected web of social meaning. Some of those meanings are created *by* you, and some of them were created by other people and *assigned* to you. That web of meaning structures many things about our lives, including how we perceive ourselves, how other people perceive us, and how, where, and when we can make change happen.

The questions are not intended to make you feel positive or negative about yourself or your social experience. Anyone may find themselves in a situation where who they are benefits them, just as anyone may find themselves in a situation where who they are works to their detriment. Yet everyone must balance the knowledge that we are all individuals having unique experiences with the equally important understanding that we belong to social categories that have perpetrated and experienced long histories of injustice. Equity requires the reconciliation of these two opposing tensions and acknowledging past and current harm while also valuing individuals as more than the sum of their social categories.

In this section, you'll find seven open-ended questions designed to get you thinking about equity, identity, and your own distinct perspective on our shared society. These questions are not a test or exam, and you won't be asked to share your answers with others unless you chose to do so. You'll also notice that each question is paired with responses from fellow Arizonans from all walks of life. These contributions were selected from more than 150 survey responses gathered through partner organizations. They were chosen to include as many diverse life experiences and social identities as possible to highlight the range of perspectives on equity across the state. You may find our contributors' responses sound familiar, or they may be totally new and unexpected. You might be uncomfortable examining your own or others' experiences, or you might feel enlightened or proud or any other emotion you can name. The bottom line is: there are no right answers here, and the only way to fail is not to begin at all.

QUESTION 1. Everyone has social identities—traits that you share with other people. We use social identity to categorize ourselves in relation to others according to what we have in common. For example, part of a social identity might be based on where you live ("Arizonan") or your career ("writer"). Other social identities might be based on your race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, the language you speak, where you grew up, and many other traits.

What are your social identities?

Our featured contributors describe their social identities:

"I'm a native Arizonan, Christian, African-American, college-educated public servant."

"I'm a white female over 65 and disabled, [and a] retired entrepreneur."

"I'm a senior, Caucasian, middle-class college graduate, an independent voter, spiritual but not connected to formal religion, a social activist, a mother, a grandmother and great-grandmother, a pilot, a blue-water sailor, a traveler and more."

"I'm a mother, a melting-pot 'white' American, a world citizen, an educated critical thinker, past retirement age, and unreligious."

"Middle-aged; Hispanic; bilingual; college educated; descendant of immigrants; self-supporting; parent; husband; leader; hard-working."

"I'm a Black, heterosexual man from rural America with three degrees living in an urban environment."

"I'm white, middle-class, disabled, queer, nonbinary, pagan, college-educated, an abolitionist, and a Leo."

"Grandmother, nearing retirement, happily married, transplant to Arizona, college-educated, and spiritual."

"Middle-aged, white, male, divorced single father of three daughters, college educated with Masters and PhD degrees, small-business owner, citizen of the United States (American), Arizona native, international traveler, lover of the outdoors from the desert southwest to high mountain pine forests."

"White, male, middle-aged, husband, father of four children, heterosexual, agnostic, post-graduate degree, socially liberal, fiscally conservative, American (with a global view)."

"I'm a man of Mexican descent, a professional in middle-high income bracket, a Christian (actually Methodist), and retirement age."

"Bi-racial but Black-presenting African American woman."

QUESTION 2. Equity does not have a single, unified definition. Instead, what equity looks like varies based on the context in which it's placed. Equity can be about the fairness of a process, or the ability of people to access the resources they need to live a long and healthy life. It can be about making sure that the people affected by a decision get a chance to participate in decision-making, or it can be about making sure that historical injustices aren't carried through today. Equity has many facets, each with their own nuance.

What does equity mean to you?

Here's what some of our contributors answered:

"It means that all people have a fair chance to lead healthy lives free of fear, discrimination, and economic insecurity. People are able to participate in society to their full potential and how they wish to participate."

"Each person having an equal opportunity to grow, improve, learn, and succeed. Equity (personified) couldn't make me taller, but it would offer me a step stool or a ladder—or better yet, roller skates! It wouldn't try to force me to use these resources and it wouldn't make taller people kneel. It would give me choices and opportunities and help, but it wouldn't make us all artificially equal and 'fair' means we each get what we NEED (not just what we WANT or what everyone gets.)"

"The opportunity to sit at the table if I so choose. The opportunity to own the table. The ability to open the table for others to sit there."

"Equity to me means that every person is treated with respect. In an age of constant dehumanizing language and blaming/shaming, the loudest voices can drown out the softer, quieter voices. Equity means not only equal access but guarantees equal voice. We as a society do not do this well. Decisions are frequently in a 'top-down' way, and assumptions are made as to what equity means to the disenfranchised. Equity begins with the sincere use of inclusive language and requires active listening which may mean that persons in a place of power have to be silent for a moment and not move to immediate problem-solving mode."

"Equity is similar to unconditional love. Systems treat people fairly. Resources are available to all without bias of race, gender, physical, mental or emotional challenges, or income. Those who haven't had or been able to use opportunities are given a helping hand to take advantage of what is available."

QUESTION 3. Social identities are complex. Some of these traits might make other people perceive us positively, while other traits mean that we may be perceived negatively. These perceptions are shaped by explicit and implicit messages from all parts of society.

What social identities do you have that benefit you? Give an example of how they have benefited you.

What social identities do you have that disadvantage you? Give an example of how they have disadvantaged you.

Our contributors reflect on their identities:

"My entrepreneurial background and activity within the community help me to navigate advocacy for myself and others."

"Black without generational wealth presents several societal challenges."

"In our society, the fact that I am white, cisgender, and grew up middle class are all parts of my identity that privilege me."

"As I age into my seventh decade, older adults are frequently stereotyped in negative descriptions."

"As a highly educated white male, people often show me respect, and when out in my community or traveling most places in the United States, I don't attract any special attention. I lived in South Phoenix for several years, and for that brief period, got a glimpse of what it feels like to be a minority. Same when traveling to Jamaica, Africa, and Asia."

"Being a disabled female has impacted my ability to earn a living within 'normal' constraints. Earning less as a female to begin with and then having my income restricted in order to receive government benefits that enable me to remain independent and not be institutionalized are and will continue to disadvantage me."

"No doubt I benefit from being white. Being well educated is also an advantage, not because I am smarter, but because people assume I am. I am also a military veteran which often garners respect, though many assumptions about [my] political leanings are made."

"As the spouse of a formerly incarcerated person, I get reflected stigma."

"Older white male, followed by many stereotypes held by people who are certain they have determined my social identity."

"Being a fat woman, everyone makes assumptions about you, particularly that you're slow, lazy, and gross."

QUESTION 4. Psychology tells us that everyone is aware of their own and others' social identities, whether they realize it consciously or not. Social identities are how we determine who is "in" a group with us and who is "outside" our group. Often people outside the group are treated differently than in-group members.

Give an example of one time you were treated differently because of your social identity. How did you know you were being treated differently?

Our contributors tell their stories:

"Because I never married and had two children, it was assumed that I was not a professional but rather viewed as an unwed mom in need of support."

"Seeking employment opportunities. I was well-qualified and told I was in the top two or three candidates for a position and [was] then not offered the opportunity as an openly disabled person who uses a wheelchair. Prior to my disability, I had no issues with employment."

"Walking into a store and being followed; being outwardly called the 'N' word; being told by that the only reason I received a job was based upon my color."

"While walking through a Mesa park holding my girlfriend's hand, we were screamed at and cursed by a woman telling us we are going to hell. If I was in a heterosexual relationship and simply walking through a public park holding hands this would not have happened."

"I worked in a government/elected official's office, and the white residents used to call in complaints about their minority neighbors and would ask to speak to other office staff prior to relaying the complaints' details. It was obvious and outright during each call."

"While there are many, the most indelible moment where I recognized unequal treatment due to my skin color was at 12. Briefly, my white friends and I went to the local community pool one summer afternoon. After one of my friends' sisters dropped us off, I was told that I couldn't go swimming with my friends. I was forced to wait in the car while my friends enjoyed the pool without me."

"I was promoted at work and some people treated me differently because they assumed I got the position because of my nationality and not through my own merit."

QUESTION 5. Treating people differently and making assumptions based on social identities is easy to do because we are not taught to think critically about how social identities are formed. Instead, we absorb many subtle messages from society about what a particular social identity means. Just as other people may treat us differently because of our social identity, we often unthinkingly make assumptions about others because of their social identity.

Describe a time you made someone uncomfortable because of an assumption about their social identity. How did you learn that assumption was incorrect?

Our contributors talk about unlearning their assumptions:

"My sister married a person of color. I assumed a political identity he did not have and an early conversation was quite awkward. It doesn't take long to discover political differences, especially these days, so I learned not to assume someone bases their political outlook on their ethnicity!"

"I was in a grocery store purchasing a package of pre-made tortillas called 'Maria and Juan Fresh Organic Tortillas.' I assumed that Maria and Juan were hardworking immigrants who had opened a business, possibly with help from Small Business Administration. Turns out Maria is a university professor and Juan is an MD! I slid easily into my incorrect assumption despite the fact that I work very hard not to make incorrect assumptions about others."

"In college, when I first learned a friend of mine was bisexual, I immediately assumed she must have a crush on ALL girls... including me. I attended a religious university at the time, and was unknowingly homophobic. Spending more time with her and our other friends, it became very obvious she was NOT attracted to me, and I learned, unsurprisingly, that bi people are just like everyone else, with a wider range of attraction. It helped pave the way for me to realize I was bi myself."

"I absolutely must check myself and the language I use when talking with families who are involved with child welfare. I recently was talking to a kinship adoptive parent about their child and I jumped into problem-solving mode when the person had not asked for my opinion or my ideas. She suddenly went silent, and I had to apologize and ask her to please continue."

"One critical and incorrect assumption I made was the 'belief' that students who had come out were still nonetheless part of a family. My assumption was proven wrong when a number of students told us that they were no longer welcomed by family including parents!"

QUESTION 6. Everyone has 'spheres of influence.' Your spheres of influence are anywhere your values, ideas, and opinions are respected and you have the ability to suggest or motivate changes to business as usual. Your spheres might be your family, your workplace, your school, your circle of friends, or anywhere else you can connect with others to make change.

What are your spheres of influence?

Our contributors reflect on their own spheres of influence:

"The world of Arizona public education—meaning the education community (less so the legislative policy arena). I have influence among those who support public education and work in public schools."

"Right now, just somewhat coming out of COVID seclusion, my sphere of influence is definitely my family and close friends. A VERY small community."

"I am referred to as the 'matriarch' of my immediate family. This has tremendous responsibility, especially with grandchildren and their spouses. My professional work spans 40 years of volunteer work on behalf of a difficult and unpopular cause. It does provide assumed credibility with some groups in decision-making authority and/or in the media. This, too, carries responsibility with it. In my circle of neighbors and casual friends not associated at all with my work, I have a level of influence due to my professional work. For example, people will seek candidate and voting advice from me because they know I work directly with certain issues or officials."

"My family, my newsroom, my slam poetry community."

"My sphere of influence is most prominent in my friend group. I think that group takes my opinion seriously and my ideas have an effect on the way my friends think and act."

"The town council I serve on and the town staff that I work with."

"Within my family (when I am not the 'bossy' mother and spouse!). Also, in my workplace where I am a board chair."

"Any time I have contact with a person with enough time to share some thoughts."

QUESTION 7. Part of working toward equity is being able to imagine a future world where equity is normal and valued.

What does an equitable society look like to you? How is it different than the society we live in now?

Our contributors share their own visions of a more equitable society:

"Where we celebrate 'differences' as strengths not weaknesses."

"It looks like a place where people value each other and assign worth to every person. It looks like a place where we are concerned for the good of others and not just our own circle of contacts... It also must include honoring each other and our lived experiences."

"A 'level playing field' is hard to make consistent for everyone because there are so many different kinds of people with a huge variety of individual circumstances. For this reason, what creates fairness and equity to some, creates an overly positive inequity for others and an overly negative inequity for still others. I believe that the United States continues to evolve into a more understanding and accepting society with each new generation, which is the foundation of and essential ingredient to greater equity."

"Systemic barriers are much reduced—schools, loans, opportunities are available regardless of race, religion, or sexual identity. There is a strong majority of citizens who defend 'equal opportunity.' We have figured out a way to create more opportunity rather than re-allocate scarce opportunities from one social group to another."

"Everyone has what they want and need to feel like they belong and are valued and comfortable, safe, and successful (however they choose to define that)."

"Absence of poverty and related social ills, absence of violence toward the other. People are likely always to feel oppressed, even in an equitable society, because of different assessments of what's fair. An equitable society presumably would eliminate the worst disparities and offer accessible pathways for people to improve their positions. This could reduce blaming and punishing the perceived sources of injustice."

"Creating an inclusive environment where generational and structural impediments no longer exacerbate disparities. Zip codes should not determine one's future prosperity nor life expectancy, so strategic investments in creating vibrant communities for the most vulnerable among us. Ultimately, the goal is getting people not to think of words such as 'equity' or 'social justice' as pejoratives but as assets."

"There will never be equity where intellectual or physical abilities are concerned. Obviously, we've not all been blessed with athletic ability or musical talent, or various intellectual gifts. However, we've all been blessed with *some* talents or gifts, and what we can do is allow everyone the opportunity to realize their full potential."

"One where all can achieve what they desire through their own hard work and effort."

EQUITY CASE STUDIES

If you completed the self-reflection exercise above, you now have your own working definition of equity, as well as a vision of what a more equitable world might look like. But how do you take a vision and make it reality? That question is at the heart of our equity case studies below. Although each contributing organization works in a different area and takes a different approach, each of these case studies showcases an equity "success"—an intentional and deliberate effort to increase equity by transforming business as usual.

As you read, consider takeaways for your own vision of equity. Try to more precisely define the context in which you would like to improve equity. Who will be your fellow champions of change? What first steps can you take? Who might have unexpected insight? What might surprise you along the way?

Case Study:
Arizona Equal Justice Alliance

"Conversations are so valuable because they are the way that we learn—I can't know what you're going through unless you tell me. It's an opportunity to see things from another perspective, person-to-person."

Creating a space for sharing experiences and fostering dialogue among people with different backgrounds is an essential part of building equity. It's also much easier said than done. The Arizona Equal Justice Alliance is an organization that hosts community conversations around equity and inclusion in the legal profession. Their case study can help you kick-start similar conversations in your own life.

Who are you?

The Arizona Equal Justice Alliance (AEJA) is a collaboration between members of the State Bar of Arizona and the ASU Center for the Study of Race and Democracy (CSRD). The AEJA collaborates with key stakeholders in the legal profession and community to advance our goals. Contributing to this report are the AEJA Steering Committee members, Honorable Carol Berry, Judge of the Phoenix Municipal Court (ret.), Honorable Roxanne Song Ong, Chief Presiding Judge for the Phoenix Municipal Court (ret.), Dr. Lois Brown, Director for ASU's CSRD, and ASU Foundation Professor of English, Carole Coles Henry, Board Chair, CSRD, Equal Opportunity Director of Phoenix (ret.), and attorney Elena Nethers, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the State Bar of Arizona. We are leaders in our various communities and what we do impacts our communities.

What is the goal of the AEJA?

The AEJA is committed to securing a fair, impartial, and just legal profession for all Arizonans. The AEJA initiates and promotes actions that advance legal, social, and economic justice through substantive dialogues and inquiry about equal justice. Our goal is to address institutional and implicit biases that impede equal justice and access to justice; focus on education for legal professionals, Arizona communities and community partners about the law, the justice system and the legal profession; and honor and preserve the diverse histories of legal professionals in Arizona.

How did the AEJA get started? What made you think now is the right time for this kind of work?

In 2018, ASU CSRD Advisory Board Chair Carol Coles Henry approached Judge Carol Scott Berry to gather support from the legal community for the CSRD 2019 Delivering Democracy program. Judge Berry contacted her friends and members of the State Bar to discuss possibilities. The conversations and meetings were dormant until 2020. In 2020, we were all shocked and dismayed by the deaths of unarmed African Americans. An email from a law school classmate ignited Judge Berry to restart the conversations between ASU CSRD, members of the State Bar, and State Bar affinity groups. Representatives from all core organizations listed below joined the conversations. Our goal was to create safe spaces for focused dialogue to discover ways we could address institutional and systematic racism and discrimination in the legal profession.

Who are the core members of the AEJA?

Our Steering Committee is the guiding entity for the group. The AEJA includes the Arizona Jewish Lawyers Association, Arizona Black Bar, Arizona Asian American Bar Association, Arizona Women Lawyers Association, Arizona LGBT Bar Association, Hispanic National Bar Association, Native American Bar Association, Iranian American Bar Association, the South Asian Bar Association, the Arizona Supreme Court Commission on Diversity, Equality and Justice in the Judiciary, lawyers, judges and members of the legal community, and organizations that address legal issues.

What was the first AEJA event like?

Our first event was held in September of 2020, at a time when many people were isolated, overwhelmed and grieving. Most people including members of the legal profession wanted to discuss and process the murder of George Floyd but lacked a safe place in which to do so. Our colleagues wanted the opportunity to share their personal and professional experiences of institutional and systemic racism. Individuals who were not people of color were beginning to realize the states of injustice in the United States and within their own professions, communities, and families. The AEJA recognized that purposeful dialogues about justice and the legal profession were needed.

This program included small-group discussions co-hosted by moderators and scribes from our core member organizations. The response to this event exceeded all our expectations. We had to close registration at 200 attendees to ensure that our Zoom platform could host all participants!

Critical to our success was securing Dr. Lois Brown of CSRD as the moderator. She came into this role understanding the power of the collective, how human rights and civil rights are at the heart of these complicated conversations about race, power, and society, and how best to sustain an environment in which people are confident that they can think aloud as they work through their experiences and challenges. It was significant, too, that Dr. Brown was not a member of the legal profession because that then eliminated for participants the fear of saying something that might offend or alienate a co-worker in the legal profession, future opposing counsel, or a judge before whom they might one day appear.

Our engagement with participants enabled us to identify key areas for action. These areas then shaped our action planning and culminated in the creation of four primary areas of focus: Advocacy and Accountability in the workplace, Mission Statements for firms and legal professionals, Continuing Legal Education on Equal Justice, and a Collaborative Bars History.

Our first AEJA event confirmed that there was broad interest in open, non-judgmental dialogue and opportunities to contribute and support for initiatives focused on equal justice and access to justice.

It sounds like that first event was a success. How did you build on it?

We have held events at State Bar of Arizona Convention for the past three years. We've refined our process, and now hold more structured discussions with prepared questions provided to smaller, facilitated breakout groups. We have moved from 75-minute zoom programs and virtual breakout room discussions with hundreds online to three-hour standing-room-only State Bar of Arizona convention programs featuring Arizona Supreme Court justices, judges from all levels of Arizona courts, legal advocates, and non-profits focused on equal justice, restorative justice, and access to justice. One retired Arizona judge who had attended State Bar of Arizona Conventions for more than three decades declared that this was the most impactful program she had ever attended.

Our sessions have always been interactive, and we continue to design forums that move from collective perspectives to individual reflection and back to collective assessments of what can be done. We invite and expect people to talk about racial equity, access to justice, systemic racism, unconscious and deliberate bias, leadership, and advocacy. We ask participants to take responsibility for how they bear witness to discrimination, inequality, and courageous acts of intervention. We have integrated evaluation mechanisms into our programming design, and we consistently use participant and facilitator feedback to inform our planning and program development.

We believe in the power of our personal stories. It is through open and ongoing dialogue that we are able to foster a greater understanding and respect for one another.

What happens after those conversations?

As important as the dialogue is, we emphasize that participants are there to create their own personal and professional action plans for change. Our programs, at their core, are calls to action. We want participants to ask what they can do to contribute to a more equitable world. Our facilitated small and large group discussions enable attendees to clarify which values, professional goals, and experiences will enable them to become agents of change. We don't tell participants where to focus their effort or how to get to their goals, and that's intentional. This is what is distinctive about our work—we consistently address the power of personal convictions on professional and community transformation.

We find that when participants chart their own course toward their goals, it leads to a much more sustained, focused, and hopeful energy. Individuals avoid half-hearted and ineffective gestures and instead tell themselves "I can, and I will do this essential work." A call to action for some is a declaration that they will commit to incorporating concepts of equal justice in their work. Others may commit to seeking out pro bono opportunities at their firms and calls to action for others may result in their determination to teach their children about inclusion.

Has anything, positive or negative, surprised you along the way?

Our biggest surprise has been the strong support and positive responses from our colleagues. Reputation and demonstrated impartiality are important in the legal profession and we weren't sure if our colleagues would engage on such difficult and sensitive topics. Their participation and enthusiastic support for future programming has been encouraging.

We did wonder whether our audiences would be made up of individuals who were already fully educated and onboard with the concepts of racial equity and justice. We have found that not to be the case. At every session, we've had participants who have never attended anything like this before. There will always be people who are unreachable, but we've been uplifted by how many more people are just waiting for the right time and place to have these conversations.

Another positive for us has been the high level of engagement from members of the judiciary, including Supreme Court Justices, County Attorneys, legal service organizations, and individual attorneys. The sustained efforts of our AEJA steering committee and members is also another beacon of light for us.

We have had to navigate the challenges of waning interest by some who aspired to do this work with us but then stepped away because of competing priorities. We also have had to reflect on how best to press on when we encounter hesitation or resistance to change within the legal profession.

What would long-term success look like for the AEJA?

We are building a replicable model for other groups seeking access to justice, equity, and inclusion. We want to create a training program to help others have conversations about equity, using best practices we have learned along the way. Success will be the expansion of our continued legal education offerings, collaborations with organizations within the legal community, and partnerships with those who share our goals.

Learn more at https://www.azbar.org/

Case Study:
American Indian Policy Institute

"A lot of the country really saw that broadband is essential and connectivity is essential. Now the general public has a better idea of why it's important and how much we need digital equity for Indigenous communities."

When you think of equity, you probably think of educational achievements, job opportunities, or access to healthcare—not infrastructure. The American Indian Policy Institute's focus on digital equity highlights why equity is impactful even in unexpected areas, and shows how historical patterns of neglect can structure equity needs today. Their case study demonstrates that raising awareness can be the first step toward new opportunities.

Who are you?

We are Dr. Traci Morris, Executive Director of the American Indian Policy Institute (AIPI) at Arizona State University and member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, and E.J. John, J.D., Senior Policy and Research Analyst for AIPI and member of the Navajo Nation.

What does AIPI focus on?

We are an applied policy research institute. Our expertise is in broadband technology, which is defined as high-speed internet access that does not rely on a phone line. For most broadband, your internet happens over dedicated wiring, like a coaxial or fiber optic cable. There's a lot of policy that goes into guiding and shaping the technological systems we use every day, like broadband. We also have a particular focus on "digital equity." Digital equity is a term that captures the need for everyone in society to have access to reliable, high-speed information technology—like the internet—in order to fully participate in that society. And we are specifically focused on broadband technology and policy and digital equity for Tribal sovereign nations, which often lack broadband infrastructure.

It is critical to highlight that we are an Indigenous-led, Indigenous-staffed research center. We aim to create and translate research and knowledge into on-the-ground solutions that meet community needs. We work to create change and build capacity by being deeply integrated with the communities we collaborate with, and it is important to us that we are not just coming in, telling them what to do, and leaving again. We work to intentionally build partnerships between academia and Tribal communities. We say intentionally because, historically, relationships between Indigenous peoples and higher education institutions have been very fraught. Universities have abused their power in all kinds of ways. We want to make sure we are not reproducing those dynamics, so our work is not *about* Tribal partners, it is *for* and *with* Tribal partners.

What makes broadband access so important to equity?

Broadband internet has become integrated into every aspect of society. There is a good chance you are reading this on a computer screen using broadband right now. If you are at your job, you almost certainly applied for that job using an electronic job application. You can look at your paycheck through your online bank and pay your rent or mortgage through an online portal. If you have to take a sick day, you might book a telehealth appointment that requires a working webcam and microphone. If you get a parking ticket, you might need to pay online—and if you can't, there can be serious consequences. At a broader level, not having broadband impacts a person's ability to make an impact as a resident of their community. Local advocacy groups are organizing through social media. It is extremely hard to run a local business without internet access. Most news media have now pivoted to prioritize online content over traditional media like radio and television. Not having broadband puts you at a disadvantage at every level—educational, health, economic, social, political, and your ability to access information. And this disadvantage is not random: people of color and rural residents are the most likely to be without broadband access. This lack of digital equity perpetuates and reinforces disadvantage for already marginalized communities.

What is the current state of digital equity for Tribal nations?

This is a hard question to answer with precision. The short answer is we know a lot of communities in Tribal nations lack the broadband infrastructure necessary to create digital equity. The longer answer is we know that there is a big infrastructure gap, but we don't know *how* big. There has long been a lack of consistent and reliable data about broadband infrastructure serving Tribal areas. This lack of data is part of a larger trend of lack of investment in Tribal nations more generally—not only is the infrastructure not there, but the information to understand what we even need is not there either.

Internet Access at Home (%)
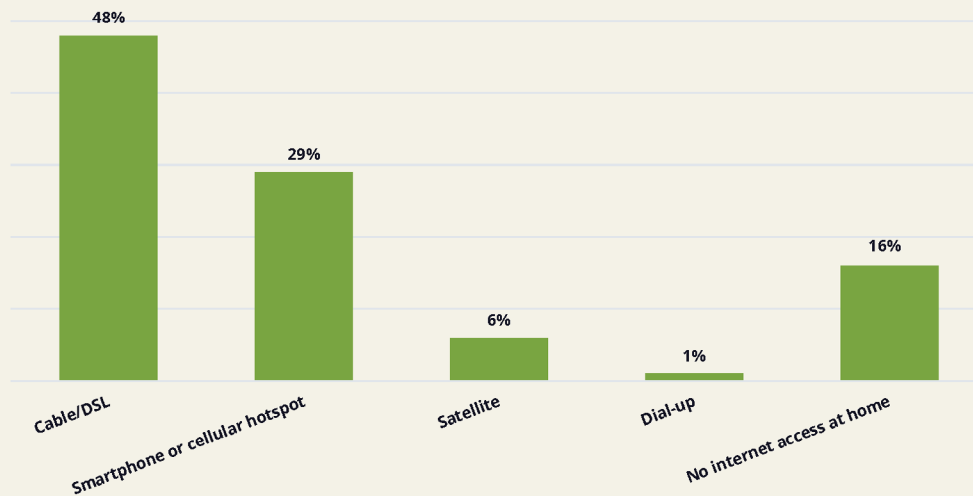
Method for accessing the internet at home among respondents. Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf.

In 2019, we conducted our own assessment and received responses covering Tribal areas in 19 different states. We found overall that the majority of respondents did not have access to broadband internet at home and that a substantial portion were able to access the internet only on a mobile device.[3] It may be easy to think that mobile connectivity through smartphones is a sufficient alternative and be satisfied with that, but our research shows that smartphones are not really a viable alternative to broadband. Many critical digital resources like educational platforms and employment applications are not designed for smartphones. Even when mobile-optimized versions are available, many participants used limited data plans, and cell phone coverage on Tribal nations can be unreliable. Smartphones can be helpful and have important functions in people's lives—but they're not a replacement for full internet access.

All of this begs the question, why isn't broadband internet access already available for Tribal communities? If there is such a need, why isn't it being met by the same internet companies that have brought broadband to households across America? The fact is, the market forces that mean connectivity for urban areas often do not see less densely populated, more rural areas as a good financial investment. That perception is even stronger for Tribal areas, because they are often situated in the most remote, most rugged terrain—a legacy of Indigenous peoples being forced onto land that European colonizers had no use for. It is further complicated by complex legal requirements when it comes to installing infrastructure on Tribal lands. Even today, sovereign Tribal nations do not own the title to their own reservation land: it is held in trust by the federal government. So even something as relatively simple as digging a utility trench has to go through multiple layers of permit and approval: multiple

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3   Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf.

federal agencies, private landowners, internal Tribal processes, and in some cases, the state as well. And all of the extra time and effort required adds up, whether it is the physical challenges of working in remote areas or the bureaucratic challenge of navigating land ownership.

The pandemic hit Tribal communities particularly hard. Can you tell us a little about the experience of the pandemic and how it highlighted the need for digital equity?

It is easy to say that Tribal communities were hit particularly hard by COVID-19, but it is more accurate to say that because of ongoing disinvestment and infrastructure underdevelopment in Tribal areas, Tribal communities did not have the tools they needed when COVID-19 came roaring in. Lack of reliable, adequate internet access exacerbated these hardships. Suddenly residents were not able to leave their homes. Adults could not work remotely, children could not go to school remotely, and people who got sick could not reach their doctors for help. Most Tribal communities scrambled to put up Wi-Fi access points, but many residents had to drive a long way just to reach one. Someone might drive for hours to get to a hotspot, then spend several more hours in their car trying to catch up on work or homework, then have to drive home. Apart from the extra time, that is a significant expense in fuel for a family already that is struggling to get by because of pandemic-related job loss. You might need a telehealth appointment for a prescription and have to drive to where you can connect for your appointment and then drive some more to get to a pharmacy. Older community members often relied on neighbors for news, and with community spaces closed for everyone's safety, sometimes that meant standing outside someone's door and shouting from six feet away. If someone had a COVID-related health emergency, there might not be reliable 911 coverage. You might have to drive to connection point just to get help. All of these infrastructure gaps have been true for many years—but the pandemic brought national attention to these issues in a way that had not happened before.

What were some of the outcomes of that attention and where did AIPI fit in?

Well, the ultimate outcome of the increased attention to infrastructure issues on Tribal lands was, happily, new funding streams for helping bridge the digital equity gap. The American Rescue Plan Act allocated $100 million to support Tribal governments and Indigenous communities through the Indigenous Communities Program, and broadband infrastructure funding is available in that package along with many other opportunities. Later the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program was enacted through the Consolidated Appropriations Act in 2021 and expanded by an additional $2 billion in 2022. That, in some ways, is a drop in the bucket—we estimate it would take between $8-10 billion to fully close the digital equity gap for Tribal communities, but it's far more than has ever been previously allocated.

Describing it that way makes it sound like the funding happened on its own, but in reality, it was part of an enormous awareness and advocacy push from Tribal governments and many supporting organizations, including AIPI. Our longstanding partnerships and connections really shined as we worked with the National Congress of American Indians and the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, among others, to make legislators understand how critical this funding is. That is what we want to emphasize: it took years of groundwork to get everything in place, and then we saw our opportunity, jumped on it, and ended up securing funding at what seemed like a breakneck pace (but still not fast enough!). When legislators asked for justification for the funds, we were able to share AIPI's previous research on Tribal connectivity—which was especially important since, as we mentioned, few other data sources are available. We were also able to assist in the creation of three resolutions recommending changes to the funding programs and those resolutions passed committee. And we continue to support efforts to move quickly on funding Tribal broadband by helping Tribal nations navigate eligibility requirements and identify funding opportunities. This round of funding may not be enough to provide digital equity for all, but it does show that we have the expertise and connections to motivate action.

What are some of the unique opportunities presented by working with Tribal communities on greater digital equity?

Tribes successfully rolling out broadband infrastructure are being very creative in their approach. We are seeing increasing use of the community broadband model, meaning that instead of a private company, the Tribe itself or the local municipality owns the infrastructure. Without the same demand to make a profit, connectivity becomes much more affordable for households. And the infrastructure many Tribal communities build is truly equitable—there is a firm commitment to building out to *every* home and no one is left behind. It may not always be the fastest internet, but it's for everyone. We are also seeing some innovative experiments with wireless connectivity, like community Wi-Fi, which can dodge some of the concerns around land ownership that can plague hardline internet infrastructure.

What's next for AIPI?

Our first task moving forward is to make sure that Tribal needs are not forgotten as pandemic-related attention and funding begin to fade. We are looking at new partnerships with organizations like the National Digital Inclusion Alliance to ensure we are not left behind. There has often been one-time investment in Indian Country that is not sustained—for instance, E.J. tells the story of growing up with landline phone service but one day, someone accidentally cut the phone line while doing farm work. They called the phone company, but the company headquarters had moved 200 miles away, and no one ever came out to fix the lines. That community still does not have phone service. That is exactly what we want to avoid now—a one-time fix. So, we will keep bringing the pressure to bear on federal agencies to live up to their promises.

We are excited to do more research into how the funds are used moving forward and support Tribal efforts by educating partners on the unique needs of Tribal communities. We are also partnering with a group of educators called "digital navigators" who work in parallel with infrastructure-building efforts to assist Tribal communities in understanding the ins and outs of broadband technology. That means how to use the internet but also the system as whole: how broadband works, what the process of constructing it looks like, and the regulatory agencies in charge of it. The digital navigator program is a recent addition, but in 2022 when all this funding became available, Tribal nations were encouraged to apply—but there are so many complexities to planning out broadband infrastructure that they did not always have the knowledge needed to apply. By pairing policy, infrastructure, and social expertise, we can secure greater investments in broadband infrastructure and hopefully begin to close the digital equity gap for Tribal communities.

Learn more at https://aipi.asu.edu/

Case Study: Arizona Health Improvement Plan

"Our success is a plan that isn't just a document. It's a tool for convening, sharing, and building a future."

Re-imagining a statewide planning document with dozens of stakeholders is no mean feat! Sheila and Carla kindly shared their experience moving from an approach that addressed only health outcomes to one that reaches the root causes driving those outcomes. The Arizona Health Improvement Plan case study is for anyone wanting to transform their perspective on a problem to examine deeper issues of equity.
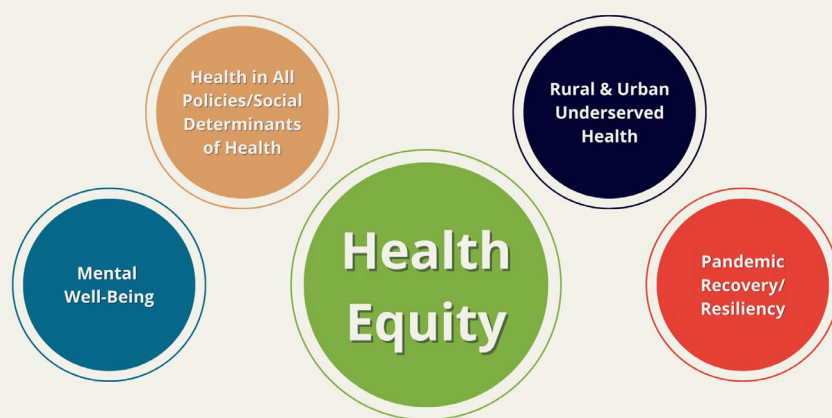
Who are you?

I am Sheila Sjolander, the Assistant Director of the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). I serve as one of the primary staff for the Arizona Health Improvement Plan (AzHIP). My colleague Carla Berg, former Deputy Director for Public Health Services at ADHS, also staffed the AzHIP initiative.

Can you give us a little background? What's the context for your work?

The AzHIP is a comprehensive, statewide planning document produced every five years that sets priorities for improving health across Arizona. As the guiding document for health priorities, it has an enormous impact on the health equity of Arizona residents. Creating the AzHIP is a process that involves effort not just from ADHS but also from our partners, including county health departments, professional and community-based groups, tribal organizations, and subject matter experts. Our steering committee alone has representation from 23 different agencies and organizations. In 2021, we transformed the way our document's priorities were created to highlight five key areas (see below).

2021-2025 AzHIP Priorities

Health in All Policies/Social Determinants of Health

Rural & Urban Underserved Health

Mental Well-Being

Health Equity

Pandemic Recovery/ Resiliency

"Arizona Health Improvement Plan Summary Document, 2021 – 2025." Arizona Department of Health Services. June 2021. https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/operations/strategic-initiatives/azhip-2021-2025.pdf.

What was the catalyst for change?

The previous iteration of the AzHIP (2016-2020) used a list of statewide leading health issues to set priorities. Each priority had a plan and a workgroup was created around each issue. For example, substance use and suicide were both listed as priorities in the 2016 AzHIP—meaning both suicide and substance use had a separate workgroup that identified strategies and action items. Over time, however, we realized this was not the most useful way to

organize ourselves. Having so many priorities was challenging to manage and at times, inefficient. While suicide and substance use are not the same, they share many of the same causes, like trauma and social isolation. We also discovered that having strongly siloed working groups was counterproductive as many stakeholders were in multiple working groups, and participating became a significant time commitment. Workgroups were often having similar conversations about root causes, such as how our neighborhoods are built. And we ran into roadblocks because some of the right players were not at the table to help solve complex problems. While we had movement forward in many of the priorities, it became clear that the planning process needed improvement to maximize impact.

How did you get from Point A (old plan) to Point B (new plan)?

We began the process of planning for the 2021-2025 HIP in 2020. And we were lucky to have such great relationships with our partners because they were coming to meetings and saying, "Look, our local health assessments are all showing the same thing. We're tracking different diseases but we're seeing the same disparities in outcomes across all of them. Whether it's cancer or heart disease, there are differences by race and ethnicity, by gender, and by rural areas compared to urban areas. We need to think about how to organize differently." They showed us that the unifying factor in all of these outcomes was a lack of health equity, and that lack of equity was driving who got sick from what and whether they could get care, and whether they died from their disease or recovered. And from the ADHS perspective, we knew there were too many priorities and working groups. It ended up being the perfect time to come together and examine how we structure our plan and imagine something that was more cross-cutting, more multi-dimensional, and spoke to the common underlying contributors of health.

We were also careful with the scope and timeline of implementation in the new plan. We chose to focus on specific, tangible actions that we thought we could be accomplished in the next two years. Since the plan took effect in 2021, that means we will be revisiting and updating this year in 2023. That was intentional on our part since we found in previous iterations of the AzHIP that trying to project what will be impactful or necessary too far in the future is not realistic. For instance, none of us could have foreseen a global pandemic when we were meeting in 2015 to plan for 2020! So, we learned if we build out detailed actions for five years from now, they will not be relevant by the time we get there. Instead, we are keeping our large-scale goals around health equity and addressing root causes in focus, while also making sure we stay flexible and can pivot quickly in pursuit of those goals as things change.

How does equity fit in?

The new planning process we implemented in 2020 centered around prioritizing the root *causes* of health outcomes, not just the outcomes themselves. And thanks to the data in our health assessment and the input of our partners, we knew that health inequities and injustices were at the heart of these root causes, driving everything from differences in life spans to rates of disease to access to treatment. Centering health equity as a priority means paying particular attention to communities and populations where the impacts of health injustice and inequity are being felt every day and co-creating solutions and systems with those communities. The health equity priority is also a guiding light for how we achieve our other AzHIP priorities. Health equity should be in everything we do, whether engaging with non-traditional stakeholders that have previously been excluded to build relationships or embracing cultural humility by asking a community to help us understand their needs. We have put our focus on health equity into action by prioritizing funding for program implementation based on its ability to advance equity.

What's one big challenge you faced along the way?

We've faced two significant barriers while re-envisioning the AzHIP. The first is funding to make sure that we are financially supporting the work. In the past few years, public health funding has seen a big uptick in investment from both governments and private foundations. The downside is that a lot of that funding is very targeted and relies heavily on a grant or funding application being able to fit into a specific category. Much like the priorities

in our previous iterations of the AzHIP, those categories and targets do not always allow for a broad perspective on solutions. It can be hard to succeed when applying for funding opportunities if your work is more holistically focused on root causes than a single intervention program. Fortunately, we were able to leverage some funding from Proposition 207, which specifically identified the Arizona Health Improvement Plan as a program that could be funded from a one-time allocation. In addition, a certain percentage of tax revenue from marijuana sales is distributed to a Justice Reinvestment fund on an ongoing basis. That fund is designed to support communities disproportionately impacted by high rates of arrest and incarceration during marijuana prohibition. The AzHIP also focuses on positive impacts in underserved communities, so it was a natural fit to receive some of those funds.

The second, related challenge is evaluation. Most public health evaluation is set up to track program outcomes through quantitative data indicators. In previous iterations of the AzHIP that focused on specific diseases, this was sometimes as simple as seeing the number of people with that disease go up or down. It is not quite so simple when you are talking about these cross-cutting thematic priorities like mental well-being or health equity. Those bigger priorities intersect with concepts that can be very hard to measure, like quality of life, and sometimes the best indicator is not even something related to health. So, we had to be creative in what we use: for instance, one of our measures for how we are doing on improving the social determinants of health is the percentage of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing. That may not seem health-related at first glance, but we know from research that safe, affordable housing is one of the biggest factors in mental and physical health. It is also something we can track and measure over time.

Tell us about your success, and what's next for the AzHIP?

We've been surprised and delighted at the support from stakeholders and partners in the current version of the plan, and we have seen a big increase in stakeholder buy-in for plan implementation. Working groups are now much more connected to one another because they are no longer siloed by topic, and complex issues can be examined from multiple angles. We are also seeing new organizations and agencies feel able to participate even if they are not explicitly health-related. For instance, the Arizona Department of Housing has become a valued partner since housing and health are so closely tied. We have also been able to establish an Office of Health Equity within ADHS to support the AzHIP priorities, which is a huge win.

As previously mentioned, it is hard to measure the success of something like the new AzHIP purely in numerical terms. We will be thrilled if in two years we are updating the plan to show full implementation, even if we do not know what the final outcomes of our programs will be yet. We are also seeing success in the way that stakeholder groups are pulling together to achieve common goals. Part of success for the AzHIP is showing partners how much their local efforts strengthen and contribute to our overall priorities for health improvement. The AzHIP is a requirement for ADHS is meet standards for national public health accreditation. It would be easy to produce a document that is designed only to check that accreditation box, but that has no real impact on health. However, we have never wanted to do that, and we have always thought of it instead as an enormous opportunity to coalesce partners around common goals. The AzHIP is a way to tell the story of health in Arizona and highlight our strengths as well as opportunities to improve. Reinvigorating the plan through incorporating health equity as the thread that runs through all our priorities and programs was a great way to build momentum and connect with each other in order to better health outcomes for all Arizona residents.

> ### *Learn more at*
> ### *https://www.azdhs.gov/operations/strategic-initiatives/index.php#azhip-home*

Case Study:
Arizona State University Bridging Success Program

"They don't have to talk about their history, although they can if they need to. It's a place to share or not share, but they always belong. They don't have to explain themselves. They know we get it"

Building a program that serves individuals with unique life circumstances is hard to begin with. Building a program that creates genuine bonds of shared support is even harder. Bridging Success at ASU shared their best practices for collaborating with their students to create a space that honors, respects, and supports their experiences. Their case study is a blueprint for anyone who wants to advance equity by building a community for self-advocacy.

Who are you?

We are Justine Cheung, MSW, Program Director of Bridging Success, and Kalah Villagrana, MSW, MPA Social Worker for Bridging Success within the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University.

What is Bridging Success?

Bridging Success is an ongoing higher education support program for students at Arizona State University (ASU) who are entering college who have been or are currently in the foster care system. Our work starts even before admission, as we provide one-on-one guidance for students the moment, they decide they are interested in coming to ASU. We can help with things like applying for college, navigating financial aid, and enrolling in classes. We have an Early Start program that brings students who have a background in foster care to campus early to get familiar with their space, learn more about what campus offers, and connect with other students with similar backgrounds. We work with these students throughout their time at ASU, including personal coaching for academic and personal success, workshops that teach psychosocial skills, and social events. If a student gives us permission, we can also interact with their' "supportive adults" to coordinate resources. These adults may be foster parents, group home staff, biological family members, high school counselors, teachers, or other adults who are involved in a young person's life.

Most importantly of all, Bridging Success staff and fellow students help by being a support network and providing a place for students with unique life experiences to connect with staff and fellow students. We are a community that can listen to their needs, share their successes and challenges, guide them through the complexities of a large university, and recognize them as people with full, complex lives beyond the box they might tick on a demographics form.

How did Bridging Success get started?

Bridging Success was born from a senate bill (1208) passed in the state legislature in 2013. The bill mandated that the Arizona Board of Regents create a five-year pilot program that provided tuition waivers for any student who was in foster care at the age of 16. The impetus for the senate bill was the gap between educational aspiration and achievement for youth in foster care. When asked, more than 80% wanted a bachelor's degree, yet graduation rates for two- or four-year degrees were 11% for women previously in foster care and 5% for men by the age of 26.[4] The tuition waiver program is a way to help close that gap.

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4   Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. "Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni." Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf.

Higher education institutions around the state realized the new tuition waiver program was going to create an influx of students who were or had previously been in the foster care system. We also realized that this student population would benefit from additional support in order to succeed academically. In that sense, Bridging Success was created to be an equity program. We knew that there was also an achievement gap in K-12 education between students who were in the foster care system and those that were not, with lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates for students that were in foster care.[5] They also tended to move from school to school due to unstable living situations and placement changes, which disrupts learning and makes it hard to form lasting connections with peers and educators.[6] We thought, "Wow, these students are getting admitted to ASU despite all these challenges, and now the tuition waiver program means they are financially able to attend." So, they are in, and they are here; now, how do we make sure that ASU is giving them the things they need to succeed? They are doing their part; now, let's do ours.

In 2018, the bill was updated, and the tuition waiver program was made permanent. They also widened the criteria so that all students who were in foster care at the age of 14 are now eligible for a tuition waiver.

What makes Bridging Success different from other academic support programs?

We try to be very holistic in defining "support." We're an academic program, but academics are just the tip of the iceberg. It does not work to only worry about someone's classes and focus on what will improve their grades if they are having challenges in their personal life. More importantly, it is not fair or equitable to treat people like their personhood is the same as their GPA. We see our students as whole people with more going on than just college. The kinds of things they might ask for support go far beyond academic coaching. We might be asked to help them find safe, stable housing, connect them with legal experts for a court case, or get copies of their vital records like their birth certificate to apply for a new Social Security Card. Having someone in their corner when dealing with complex life issues can be just as—or even more—helpful than having another academic writing seminar. Of course, we do those too!

Our focus on the student rather than only on the academic outcome carries over to other types of work we do. We advocate for change within the ASU system to better accommodate students from foster care backgrounds. Sometimes the way the university operates unintentionally excludes our students or makes it more difficult for them to access resources because the system is not designed with their experiences in mind. For instance, the option to select that you are currently in foster care when you apply for ASU is a recent addition that we worked to implement. An ongoing example of this is housing. Many of our students need to stay in on-campus housing for their entire college career, but there is very little housing for upper-division students like juniors and seniors available. So, we are working with ASU Housing to ensure our students receive priority for the upper-division housing that does exist. It is about bringing awareness of our students' needs to the people who can create change.

It is important to mention that we are fortunate to have our own supportive community, just like our students. Bridging Success and programs like it are larger than just ASU: all Arizona Board of Regents universities and the Maricopa and Pima County Community College systems have similar programs to support foster youth. We take a collaborative approach between institutions and share a lot of lessons learned. It is an unusual arrangement because if you think about it, all these colleges and universities are technically in competition for these students. However, everyone's perspective has always been to put our students first and make sure these programs are as successful as we can make them, and that overrides any sense of competition.

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5   Barratt, Vanessa X, BethAnne Berliner and Natalie J. Felida. "Arizona's invisible achievement gap: Education outcomes of students in foster care in the state's public schools." WestEd. 2015. https://foster-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Arizonas-Invisible-Achievement-Gap-2015.pdf.

6   Barratt, Berliner, and Felida. 2015.

**What are some of the challenges of running a program focusing on students who are foster care alumni?**

We have two major challenges: integrating students from foster care backgrounds into an educational system not set up with them in mind and securing funding. We have already talked about the first challenge, but it bears repeating that these students are coming into an environment that doesn't intentionally have barriers but is not built to meet their needs. We get unique situations all the time, like one student who came to us after being in foster care with the Navajo Nation rather than the Arizona Department of Child Safety. Does that student still qualify for the tuition waiver program? New challenges come up so frequently that we have a running joke about it. It feels like it's always, "Hmm, this is a barrier we've never seen before." Thankfully, we are usually able to resolve it by connecting students with experts in admissions, housing, or financial aid. When it is not a problem the university can tackle, we reach out to our amazing external advisory council, which includes community-based organizations that are often able to provide other forms of support.

At the program level, funding is an ongoing issue. The tuition waiver mandate from the state legislature is an unfunded mandate, meaning that colleges and universities are expected to use their own financial resources to fund tuition for students from foster care backgrounds. The legislature did not dedicate any money for tuition or to additional support programs like Bridging Success. We were lucky enough to be grant-funded by the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust in the past, and it was fantastic to have that launching point, but grant funding is not viable long-term. Moving towards more sustainable funding means we need to demonstrate program impacts—and that takes a while. In the meantime, students have needs right now that we are trying to meet. It is a balancing act.

How do you measure success?

That is an interesting question because we think of success in several different ways. In terms of program outcomes, we recently partnered with the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at ASU to evaluate indicators like enrollment and retention. We are happy to report that we have increased enrollment among students from a foster care background by 31% and that our student retention after one year is 82%. Our graduation rate is 53%, which is below the general student population but higher than the national average (31%) for students from foster care backgrounds. We are very pleased with the results of the evaluation, but they also show we have room to be even more ambitious in the next few years. We also just received with ASU's President's Medal for Social Embeddedness, which recognizes work at the university that contributes to the success of the community as a whole. That is an enormous honor.

Graduated Within Six Years

- Eligible but did not participate: 44%
- Bridging Success students: 53%
- ASU general population: 69%
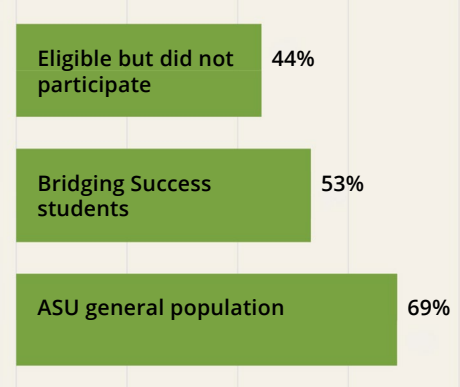
Comparison of Bridging Success graduation rates. Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. "Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni." Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf.

Student Retention After One Year

- Eligible but did not participate: 68%
- Bridging Success students: 82%
- ASU general population: 86%
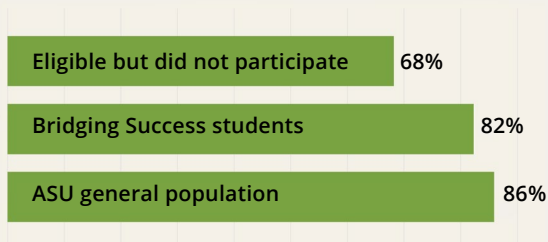
Comparison of Bridging Success student retention after one year. Quintana, Erica, and Alison Cook-Davis. "Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni." Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University. April 2022. https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/bridging_success_may_5_2022.pdf.

At the same time, the most important measure of success will always be our students and how we are impacting their lives. Retention, graduation, and having our students go on to master's degrees is wonderful, but what matters most is that our students are doing what is right for them. We will support that any way we can. So sometimes success looks like helping someone who has not found their footing at college make an exit plan, so they have what they need to transition successfully. Sometimes it is helping a student transfer to a different university or enroll in a community college instead. We have gotten heat from colleagues at times: "Why didn't you do more to keep them?" Because it was not in their best interest to stay, and that is our guiding principle. Are we enabling students to pursue their own best interests? Then we are doing our job.

What do the next five years hold for Bridging Success?

In the short term, we want to build out our program to offer more opportunities for upper-division students. We have created a program that focuses on transitioning into college and the ASU community, and now we need to think about something similar but opposite: how can we help prepare our students to leave ASU? How can we empower them to find careers or decide if graduate school is a good fit, and how do we help them build their next safe, supportive community along the way? So that is our target for the next few years. We would love to find a funder that would be willing to invest in our students directly—for instance, through a small grant that would allow us to reward them financially for every successful semester. These rewards would culminate in our students graduating with a small savings account, a nest egg that could help set them up for success after obtaining their degree.

In the longer term, we are looking at ways to capture our best practices and share the knowledge we have learned across not just Arizona but to all of higher education. We are working on a program manual that hopefully will help other institutions set up programs like ours. A program like Bridging Success takes a lot of effort and a lot of willingness to listen to your students and learn from your mistakes, but it is worth it. Building community is how we make change.

> ***Learn more at***
> ***https://fosteryouth.asu.edu/***
> ***services-support/bridging-success***

Case Study:
Fuerza Local (Local First) Arizona

"We're building community, not just revenue streams."

> Small business entrepreneurship can be a critical part of building equity in underserved communities. Building up small businesses, however, requires strong relationships between local governments, organizations, and communities that have previously experienced discrimination. Fuerza Local's case study is a guide to engaging residents and building trust through cultural humility and a willingness to try new things.

Who are you?

We were lucky enough to closely collaborate with city partners on Fuerza Local's first business accelerator program outside of Maricopa County, so we have both city and Fuerza Local staff telling our story. We are: Jenna Rowell, Director of Rural Community Development for Local First Arizona; Elaman Rodrigeuz, Senior Manager of Spanish Rural Programs; Tricia Lewis, Tourism and Economic Development Director for the City of Cottonwood; and Molly Spangler, Economic Development Director for the City of Sedona.[7]

Can you give us a little background on Fuerza Local?

Fuerza Local means "Local Strength" and is a program of Local First Arizona, a non-profit organization working to strengthen communities and economies by supporting local businesses throughout Arizona. Fuerza Local is a Spanish-language business accelerator designed to help Latino/a micro entrepreneurs gain the skills needed for success. Our participants meet weekly to learn about financial literacy, cash flow management, business planning, and more. They set a goal to save $1,000 throughout the program, and if they meet that goal, their contribution is matched by a $1,000 scholarship to support their business. They also build a strong support network through relationships with other entrepreneurs in their cohort and past alumni. In 2022, we piloted our first cohort outside of Maricopa County through partnerships with the cities of Cottonwood and Sedona.

What does small business entrepreneur training have to do with equity?
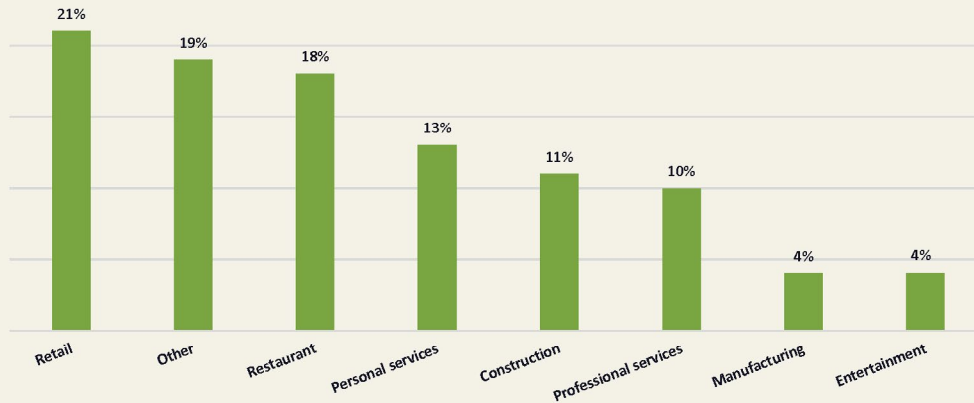
We believe that offering inclusive programs that support local businesses across Arizona helps create a more equitable economy for everyone. We find entrepreneurship to be the most effective way to battle racial wealth gaps by building self-sufficient, sustainable local businesses that can support their communities and diversify economic development. We also believe that local businesses, which foster community relationships and connections, can be powerful agents for systems-level change.

There are so many aspects of small business ownership, especially for rural and Spanish-preferred entrepreneurs, that are impacted by a long history of discrimination and disadvantage. Fuerza Local's creation was in direct response to an increase in the number of predatory lenders that were targeting low-income, Spanish-preferred business owners. Many of these owners either did not know about or did not have access to more reliable capital. Prior to our work, the average lending interest rate offered to our entrepreneurs was 48%—an exorbitant rate compared to those offered to white business owners.[8] During our 2021 business accelerator programs, 67% of our Fuerza Local graduates opened a checking account for the first time, and all of them participated in a micro-lending program to build a positive credit history. We also help them connect with local credit unions, accountants, city staff, and other institutions that support the infrastructure of running a small business. By doing so, we increase equity not just for local businesses but in the community at large by encouraging investments, wages, and profits to stay local.

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7   Note: Molly Spangler has since the time of this interview taken a position with the Town of Camp Verde.

8   "Fuerza Local Business Accelerator 2021 impact report." Local First Arizona/Fuerza Local. 2021. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eda8042168e9a1a9ba78e80/t/6266d670e2ecc72d7f518878/1650906746586/Fuerza+Local+-+Impact+Report+2021+-+Final.pdf.

Business By Industry (%)

Method for accessing the internet at home among respondents. Howard, Brian and Traci Morris. "Tribal technology assessment: The state of internet service on Tribal lands." American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University. 2019. https://aipi.asu.edu/sites/default/files/tribal_tech_assessment_compressed.pdf.

Why now? What made this the right time to start the program outside of Maricopa County?

The idea to expand beyond Maricopa County really started several years ago. Several Fuerza Local organizers are from rural areas, and they came to us saying, "We can see the need is there. How can we take what's been done in Phoenix and do it in places like my hometown?" We know that young people are moving out of rural areas because there aren't career opportunities available, and they do not feel engaged and supported. A thriving small business community can be the difference between needing to move and retaining that sense of place and community. And we knew a significant population of rural, Spanish-preferred entrepreneurs throughout Arizona that could not access services. Many of them are first-generation Americans or the first entrepreneurs in their families, and we felt it was very important to support their success.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Rural areas and smaller cities in Arizona took an especially big hit in employment as many industries laid off workers. That was the catalyst for a lot of folks to start or expand their small businesses, and suddenly we had a whole new crop of entrepreneurs. So, when the cities of Sedona and Cottonwood approached us about starting a business accelerator program, we jumped at the chance. The cities wanted to build stronger relationships with their Spanish-speaking business owners, and we wanted to move beyond Maricopa County, so it was a perfect partnership opportunity.

What was launching the first Acelerador de Negocios in these new locations like?

Well, first of all, it was very different than how we have launched business accelerator programs in the past. We had to reorient ourselves and take an experimental, "let's see what works and be ready to change course" approach. We tried to embrace cultural humility and understand that the program was as much a learning process for us about how we could help these entrepreneurs as it was for our participants to learn about running a small business.

We discovered that working in more rural areas brings its own set of logistical challenges that we needed to overcome before we could even start soliciting participants. Sometimes there are simple but tricky problems, like making sure the internet access where you are holding the classes can handle the type of material and number of people that are going to be using it. We had to think through what participants might need to be able to attend – could we provide childcare? What about a meal so that participants are not choosing between feeding their families dinner and coming to class? Transportation can be an issue too. Geographically speaking, can all the participants meet in a central location or do you need to go to them because they do not have the time and resources to devote to a long commute? Instructors and mentors need the right kind of expertise, because doing business in a

rural area or smaller city has a different set of challenges and opportunities than in a metropolis. What works in downtown Phoenix does not always apply elsewhere.

Once we had the logistics figured out, we could think about recruiting. We knew that our normal methods like announcing the application on social media and sharing with our professional networks would not work in this scenario. So, we built the program from a very grassroots model because that is what helps you meet people you don't already know. We asked every member of the city staff to tap into their personal networks and reach out if they knew someone who might be interested. Our organizer, Elaman, literally went door-to-door to small, Spanish-speaking businesses in Cottonwood and Sedona and just talked to the owners about the opportunity to join the program over and over again. He spent hours doing outreach in person and driving through our communities looking for candidates. Sometimes it took more than one visit for business owners to understand exactly what the program was and coming back multiple times to keep discussing it helped hammer the point home that this was not a scam and that our team was reliable and legitimate. Sometimes a successful relationship was built even if the business owner decided not to participate! In one case, we went to a business, walked in, pitched the program, and were told very emphatically to "get out" by the owner, who wanted nothing to do with local government. Elaman, however, kept coming back, and by the time we completed recruitment, although he still did not want to join, we were on much better terms. In the end, all the hard work paid off, and we had an amazing first cohort of business owners. Now word-of-mouth is fueling interest, and we even have neighboring communities asking for a program of their own.

Were there any surprises along the way or in the results?

Some of the surprises we talked about already but one of the biggest was how much the trust we built between the community and Fuerza Local paved the way for better relationships with city government. It is hard for our Spanish-preferred participants to believe they will see an extra $1,000 incentive at graduation because so many promises have been made and broken to them in the past. When we write those checks at the end of the program, we have really earned their trust. That is huge, especially in rural communities, where there is not a lot of trust for government generally. Our entrepreneurs are taking a big risk with their time and business by coming into the program. And when we do keep our word about the benefits, it opens the door to accessing other resources, because that trust is there. Suddenly participants feel able to walk into a city office and apply for seed funding or ask for help with a problem because of their positive experience with us.

Another surprise was exactly how much support our entrepreneurs received from their families and communities. There were over 100 people at our graduation ceremonies and it was truly a community-wide celebration. We were not anticipating that it would be so emotionally impactful, not just for the families but for city partners as well. Many kids got to see their parents graduate for the first time and there was such a sense of family pride. Staff were excited to attend too, even if they did not speak Spanish. Even the city mayor and other elected officials were there! It was amazing to see people who had worked so hard, with so little, for so long, be uplifted by their community and finally get the recognition they deserve.

What does success mean for Fuerza Local, and what's next for the program?

The traditional models for measuring success of an entrepreneurship program are all about economic impact. That means tracking things like sales revenue, private investment, and number of jobs created by businesses participating in the program. Fuerza Local does track some of that internally, but our city partners have chosen not to because we do not want to create barriers to participation. So many Spanish-speaking small business owners are already fighting an uphill battle to stay afloat, and we do not want them to feel that they are being graded on their return on investment.

We are more interested in looking at our own success in terms of making sure we are maximizing impacts. What are our completion rates? Are we giving people what they need to stay in the program? Fuerza Local is really a wealth-creation program meant to help populations that have faced a long history of discrimination find self-sufficiency and build generational wealth. So, our metrics are designed around the idea of sustainability. Do the businesses we support open bank accounts and can they access capital and loans if needed? Do they still have a bank account and an active business a year later? How about five years later? That helps us understand if our program is really contributing to their long-term success. We are working on new programs with city partners that will build on our past work; for instance, Sedona has expressed interest in creating a small business accelerator of their own to continue to support entrepreneurs.

Ultimately, the success we are all most invested in is increasing inclusivity. Success also is a greater voice for marginalized groups in institutions where there has not previously been trust. Success is more local businesses at our community events, applying for funding opportunities, taking advantage of the resources that we and our city partners offer. It is the fact we were able to reach out and invest in Spanish-language entrepreneurs in the first place, and that those relationships are now leading to greater input on city development, climate action planning, and strategic goal-setting for municipalities. Success is a future that builds a diverse, participatory, and equitable community for all.

Cottonwood and Sedona's first Fuerza Local cohort at program graduation in 2022.

Learn more at https://localfirstaz.com/fuerza-local

UNPACKING EQUITY

As you read this report, you might be wondering how to identify areas that need additional equity efforts in your own spheres of influence. While the purpose of this report is not to document or measure inequities in Arizona, thinking about the concept of equity often leads to asking questions about where equity could be improved. The questions below are one way to start thinking through how to increase equity using some of the "big picture" context about influences, outcomes, and key players.

The questions are paired with examples of the kind of data that might be useful when you're considering how to approach an equity issue. This list isn't meant to represent every area where equity could be improved or comprehensively demonstrate which groups of people have less access to equity. Instead, it's designed to be a jumping-off point for your own thought process as you consider how using an equity perspective might improve your own life, community, and the state of Arizona.

Define the scale: Are you trying to increase equity in your own life, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, in your community, in your state?

Define the issue: Can you explain the inequity you are correcting in one or two sentences to someone not already familiar with the issue?

Define the solutions: What would an equitable <u>process</u> look like in this context? What would an equitable <u>outcome</u> look like in this context?

Find the decision-makers: Which people, organizations, or agencies are making decisions about these processes and their outcomes?

Identify the rules: What policies, common practices, or norms are impacting these processes and outcomes? Who enforces them? Who has the authority to change them?

Find your allies: What people or organizations are already tackling this issue elsewhere? Are there lessons you can learn from their experience or other examples that might provide a useful roadmap toward change?

EXAMINING EQUITY THROUGH DATA

Interested in equitable *access* to *healthcare* for a *rural community*?

Consider the ratio of providers to residents: In 2019, there were 80.1 providers per 100,000 residents in **urban areas**. In **rural towns**, the ratio was only 10.1 providers per 100,000 residents.

Or the cost and time involved in accessing healthcare: In some rural areas, the **nearest medical care** can be nearly 80 minutes of drive time away.

Source: Kochb, B., Coates, S., Campos-Outcalt, D., Carter, H., and Derksen, D. "Arizona primary care physician report." October 2019. University of Arizona Center for Rural Health. https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2022-04/20191010_AZ_PCP_Workforce_Report_Final.pdf.

Want to know if *funding* for *business entrepreneurs* is equitable?

Examine who is most likely to receive funding: 215 Arizona **startups** received external **funding** between January 2020 – February 2022. Only 31 of these companies were founded or led by **women or people of color**.

Source: Blye, Andy. "Arizona's startup founders of color, women get far less funding from investors, data shows." March 15, 2022. Phoenix Business Journal. https://www.bizjournals.com/phoenix/news/2022/03/15/arizonas-founders-of-color-snubbed-by-investors.html.

Curious about equitable *homeownership* for all Arizonans?

Look at differences in homeownership by race: In 2021, 72.6% of **white** residents in Arizona owned their homes in Arizona. Only 59.4% of **Latino**, 56.5% of **American Indian**, and 40.8% of **Black** residents owned their homes.

Source: "Arizona Prosperity Now scorecard outcomes – homeownership by race." Prosperity Now. 2021. https://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/data-by-location#state/az.

Investigating equity in *education* for students with *disabilities*?

See if educational outcomes are different between groups: In Arizona during the 2020 – 2021 school year, only 17.2% of high school graduates with a **disability** enrolled in **postsecondary education** – a 7% **drop** in enrollment from one year previous.

Source: "Postsecondary attainment report." Arizona Board of Regents. November 18, 2021. https://www.azregents.edu/sites/default/files/reports/2021-postsecondary-attainment-report_0.pdf.

EQUITY IN ACTION

If the case studies were roadmaps towards greater equity, you can think of the contributions in this section as portraits in a gallery. Each contribution is distinct in terms of context and content, but each shows why equity is a necessary component of the work they do and how they strive to enact it in their sphere of influence. These pieces are designed to give you a feel for equity beyond the contexts that probably come to mind, such as a workplace training. This section will broaden your horizons about what equity means and who benefits from incorporating equity not just as a goal but as a way of thinking, working, and living.

Equity in Action: Goodmans Interior Structures

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, I found the performative virtue signaling of businesses—mine included!—was insufficient. Our Black Lives Matter post on Facebook just wasn't going to reverse the impact of structural racism. What could we do as a company that might actually have an impact?

My business, Goodmans Interiors, is a 69-year-old, third generation office furniture distributor in Arizona and New Mexico. We have 200 employees and $100M in annual revenue. More importantly, we are a benefit corporation which has declared our stakeholders to be our employees, the community, and the environment. Goodmans is the first certified B Corp in Arizona. In 2012, we won the overall Impact Company of the Year Award from the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce and a year later were honored with the Better Business Bureau's International Torch Award for Ethics. Goodmans was recognized as the Top Social Responsibility Company by the Arizona Republic in 2018 and is a 12-time winner of the Best Places to Work award.

Yet, I theorized that if structural racism is everywhere in the structure of society, then it must also be present in my own, ostensibly "woke" business. One easy way to investigate discrimination is in hiring practices, so I looked at the demographics of our company employees. While I found that the overall census of Goodmans' workforce matches the demographics of Arizona more broadly, I also learned that hiring discrimination is only one form of racial bias. Another, called 'occupational sorting,' was baked into my company through an unconscious bias that steers people of color to lower-paying blue-collar jobs in the warehouse or field. Conversely, 93% of our salespeople—the highest paying job—were white.

Occupational sorting exists in societies (e.g., boys are doctors and girls are nurses), in industries (e.g., women in Silicon Valley), and even in companies. At Goodmans, the occupational sorting was at its most insidious when we promoted employees we saw as high performers with high potential. Historically, if you were successful as an installer in the field, then your career path steered you toward managing others in the field, where your career growth and earnings would plateau. A more equitable alternative would have been also considering installers for more lucrative positions with higher earnings potential, like sales or design.

I thought fixing this unconscious bias would be as simple as announcing at a meeting that we were no longer steering people in one direction or another. I stood in front of our entire field operations team, which includes many of the individuals who may have previously been steered away from higher-paying positions, and asked for volunteers who were interested in making more money and providing for their families better with a career in sales or design. Nobody raised their hand.

It turns out that systemic racism is, indeed, systemic. The occupational sorting bias was just as pervasive in our field team as it was in the management team. Our field personnel later told me they had never seen anyone follow that career path, so it was impossible to even imagine themselves in higher-wage, office-based jobs like sales or design.

Unconscious bias can't be trained away in an instructional video or seminar. It might be temporarily elevated in your consciousness, but that isn't a sustainable course of action. The only way to remove the bias from our promotional decisions is to remove subjectivity from the process. We needed a better process for retention and promotion that didn't rely so much on our own unconscious biases.

We engaged a consultant to assess our entire company for their skills, motivators, working styles, and personalities. The company benchmarked our highest performers in each job classification. Now, when we are career counseling a high performer with high potential, we can take an objective look at their assessment and compare it to the highest performers in each job. If a candidate expresses interest in a particular job, we can create a development plan to help the candidate acquire the proficiencies necessary for success, regardless of their race or ethnicity. For example, a high-performing installer with high potential expressed an interest in growing his career. We compared his assessment to our benchmarks and concluded his logical next step was in customer service. To do this, he would need fundamental computer skills training, plus some writing development. We established an 18-month timeline for building those skills, at which time he will transition into a customer service role.

There are only a few examples of stories like this, and the slow pace was frustrating for us. We finally accepted the fact that systemic racism took 400 years to get where it is; we're not going to undo its effects in one or two years. We believe it will take ten years or more to make a meaningful change. As a 69-year-old third-generation family business, we're not deterred by long timelines because we have the luxury of thinking about change in terms of decades, not months, quarters, or years. This project is born out of a sense of responsibility to our stakeholders. Goodmans is a benefit corporation, and that requires us to think deeply about our impact on employees, suppliers, customers, our industry, and the community at large.

Beyond the moral obligations, we believe there is a business case to for equity and inclusion. Goodmans is battling a talent war on a daily basis and today's employees are demanding this kind of transparency and proactive engagement from their employers. This gives us a massive employment advantage against our "less woke" competitors who are stuck in their own unacknowledged unconscious bias. Our customers, for the most part, seem uninterested in what we are doing about the challenge of systemic racism. I like to joke that customers only care about this if we are the low bidder.

There are some exceptions, of course. There is a well-known owner's representative in Phoenix who controls a massive amount of business. He publicly stated that he will never do business with Goodmans because of our "ridiculous" position on systemic racism. We're not sorry to see him go, and we won't miss his business.

Other CEOs have celebrated our approach, and many have accepted my challenge to do this kind of analysis in their own businesses. This has been immensely gratifying to me because it moves business leaders away from sitting in judgment of bad societal actors and engages them to make an impact in the place where they have the most influence.

When I describe occupational sorting to employees, they instantly get it because they can see it. Our entire company has rallied behind our call to eliminate unconscious bias and supports our assessments and frank discussion about skill gaps and development opportunities. I look forward to the day when our average compensation by race is equal. That will mean we have given equal opportunities to all of our high performers with high potential, and we are no longer unconsciously steering certain people to certain jobs.

Author: Adam Goodman, CEO of Goodmans, is the third generation to lead the 69-year-old family business. Adam currently serves on the boards of Greater Phoenix Leadership, Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting, Banner Health Foundation, The Phoenix Symphony, Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC), and the Jewish Community Relations Council. He lives in Paradise Valley with his wife, Stephanie, and has three children ages 22, 20, and 17. He hopes you will try a racial compensation study for your organization. Ignoring seniority, experience, and competency, look at the average wage for people of each race. What is driving the discrepancy?

Learn more at https://www.goodmans.com/

Equity in Action: Dr. Aaron Guest

We are all aging. Whether we like it or not (I am a fan)—we are. Beyond our individual aging experiences, communities, populations, and nations are also aging. We are an aging nation in the United States—we have more people over age 65 than under age five.[9] In Arizona, 18.5%, or about 1.374 million individuals, are over age 65, and as such, Arizona ranks 12th amongst states with aging populations.[10] Yet even though aging is something we all experience and is a natural part of our biological processes, it is something many people fear. Promises of "anti-aging" products surround us. People regularly look for the next pill that can "reverse" aging. We use words like "fight" and "battle" to describe our efforts against aging. We cheer when people say they have "embraced" or "accepted" their aging. But what is there to accept but a typical experience of being human? Why should we fear older age, which constitutes nearly a third of our life?

The Troubling Triumvirate

In part, I believe many people's relationship with aging is biased due to a lack of gerontological literacy, our beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of aging. Many people are gerontologically illiterate—they have no basis for understanding aging. Our work has argued that this occurs through three-interrelated processes.[11] The first is gerontophobia, a morbid fear or dislike of older persons that remains pervasive. We fear our future selves. Gerontophobia is reinforced and a product of ageism, or the prejudice and discrimination against a particular group due to their age. This then informs what cultural critic Margaret Gullette termed a decline ideology.[12] Essentially, ageism and gerontophobia are so ingrained in our culture that aging is associated with decline, regardless of data that continues to indicate productivity, knowledge, and experience increases throughout life.

The result is a society where age equity, or the equitable treatment of individuals regardless of age, is not achieved. Instead, we find ourselves in a gerontologically illiterate society where ageism is prevalent and has direct health and economic effects. Levy and colleagues have pegged part of this effect at nearly $63 billion in additional healthcare costs due to ageism alone.[13] But the effects of an inequitable age society extend beyond increases in health costs and the prevalence of chronic health conditions. It results in a community in which there is a lack of intergenerational connectedness and learning in which knowledge is not fully passed down.

$63 BILLION

The estimated cost of additional healthcare due to ageism.[13]

It creates false dichotomies that we must fund either preschool or long-term care. It creates distrust among generations and us versus them mentality. Above all, it distracts from the reality that living in an inequitable society prevents individuals of all ages from achieving their most significant potential.

Yet, this only shows half of the story. We also know that there is a lack of equity within the aging experiences and older adult populations. For example, lesbian and gay older adults are more likely to experience loneliness, increased rates of chronic conditions, and more lifetime discrimination than their heterosexual peers.[14] African American and Hispanic populations experience a higher prevalence of Alzheimer's Disease and related dementia.[15]

9   "2020 profile of older Americans." Administration for Community Living. May 2021. https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/aging%20and%20Disability%20In%20America/2020Profileolderamericans.final_.pdf.

10   "Arizona – U.S. Census Bureau quick facts." U.S. Census Bureau. July 1, 2022. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/AZ.

11   Guest, M. Aaron, Katherina Nikzad-Terhune, Tina M. Kruger, and Graham D. Rowles. "Exploring college students' attitudes toward older adults: A description of methods used by the gerontological literacy network." *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education* 42, no. 4 (2021): 578-588; Newsham, Tina MK, Amy M. Schuster, M. Aaron Guest, Katherina Nikzad-Terhune, and Graham D. Rowles. "College students' perceptions of 'old people' compared to 'grandparents'." Educational Gerontology 47, no. 2 (2021): 63-71.

12   Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by culture*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

13   Levy, B. R., M. D. Slade, and E. Chang. "S., Kannoth S. & Wang S.-Y.(2020) Ageism amplifies cost and prevalence of health conditions." *The Gerontologist* 60, no. 1: 174-181.

14   Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen I. "Dismantling the silence: LGBTQ aging emerging from the margins." *The Gerontologist* 57, no. 1 (2017): 121-128.

15   "Alzheimer's disease facts and figures: Special report." Alzheimer's Association. 2022. https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf.

Older immigrants are more likely to be below the poverty line.[16] Compounding these challenges is the fact an estimated 40% of Arizonians live in a healthcare professional shortage area—resulting in increased challenges in accessing care.[17]

These are only a few examples of the internal age-equity challenges facing the older population in the United States. They highlight the critical nature of living in an inequitable aging society. We must consider not only the broader community and culture but also the inequities within the aging population and our state. Alarmingly, disparities between racial and ethnic groups in Arizona seem to widen.

Opportunities to A More Age-Equitable World

Examining and naming inequities is one thing, but we also must work to address and reduce these inequities actively. Historically, this has come from laws and policies in the United States. Social Security was enacted, in part, to provide an economic safety net for low-income older adults. Thirty years later, Medicare sought to provide a health safety net for older individuals. The Older Americans Act of 1965, and its subsequent amendments, buttressed these safety nets and developed an infrastructure capable of addressing the needs of the social and well-being of older persons. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) aimed to protect older adults in the workforce.

Over the last 20 years, these policy-level efforts have been supported and enhanced by the growth of the Age-Inclusive Ecosystem. Based on the principles of Universal Design and known more commonly by the most significant component, Age-Friendly Cities, the age-friendly Ecosystem aims to create environments inclusive of individuals of all ages.[18] For example, in Arizona, several cities noticed that older adults were missing appointments for medical care. Through Age-Friendly Arizona, they worked to develop and centralize rideshare information through AzRide. In the city of Tempe, community members worked together to gain the AARP Age-Friendly Livable Communities designation and, in doing so, designed a city-wide plan on how to make Tempe more accessible for all.

By critically examining the communities, health systems, public health systems, and educational systems we function in, this ecosystem model aims to generate community-led interventions to influence individual outcomes and macro-level policies. Notably, these efforts aim not to make an older, adult-friendly environment but rather an age-inclusive one that provides equitable access and opportunities to all. Throughout Arizona, residents can work together to identify community barriers to the full participation of all ages.

Conclusions

While we may live in a gerontologically illiterate society, we do not have to remain illiterate. The emphasis here has been on the aging process leading to older adulthood, but we know that challenges of age-equity exist throughout the life course. We can and must work to address these challenges. In doing so, we can create a more age-equitable society as well as a society in which there is equity in aging.

Author: M. Aaron Guest, Ph.D., MPH, MSW, is an Assistant Professor of Aging at the Center for Innovation in Healthy and Resilient Aging and Senior Global Futures Scientist at Arizona State University. A socio-environmental gerontologist, his primary research addresses the health inequities among older adults in rural communities. His wish for the reader is to consider what type of world you want to age in and make it happen.

> ### *Learn more at https://aging.asu.edu/*

16   Margolis, Rachel, and Ashton M. Verdery. "Older adults without close kin in the United States." *The Journals of Gerontology*: Series B 72, no. 4 (2017): 688-693.

17   "Designated health professional shortage areas statistics: Designated HPSA quarterly summary, as of September 30, 2022." Bureau of Health Workforce, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 30, 2022. https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas.

18   Fulmer, Terry, Pinkey Patel, Nicole Levy, Kedar Mate, Amy Berman, Leslie Pelton, John Beard, Alexandre Kalache, and John Auerbach. "Moving toward a global age-friendly ecosystem." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 68, no. 9 (2020): 1936-1940.

Equity in Action: Rising Youth Theatre

Rising Youth Theatre (RYT) is a youth leadership organization in Phoenix that uses theatre to position young people in advocacy spaces. Founded in 2011, RYT works locally in Arizona and in national and international partnership with young people, adult artists, and communities. RYT produces original plays around topics that matter to our community, including, race, mental health, student push-out, and more and works with more than 500 young people each year through school residencies, community partnerships, training and consultations, and learning exchanges, in addition to our ensemble production work. Thousands more people of all ages attend and engage with free performances. RYT is the recipient of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Outstanding New Children's Theatre Award, the inaugural recipient of the Phoenix Mayor's Arts Award in Theatre, a finalist for the Governor's Arts Award, and is the 2023 recipient of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America Medallion Award.

The company works with youth and professional adult artists to create multigenerational, socially relevant, original plays and processes, operating on a power-sharing, horizontal leadership model. In practice, that means youth and adults lead our organization together, in our artistic ensembles, as teaching artists, as organizational staff, and on our board of directors. When we speak publicly or publish as the organization, we do so as youth and adult teams. The diverse young people in our ensemble are central to our decision-making process and organizational structure.

Youth leadership at Rising Youth Theatre.

Rising Youth Theatre believes that change happens when we listen to young people. There are very few spaces in our state where young people are positioned as leaders, working alongside adults to make a difference. Through artmaking, storytelling, and embodied research around issues that matter in our community, we are able to create opportunities for young people to advocate for themselves and their peers. This includes creating original productions and engaging in collaborations with partner organizations to co-create and sustain spaces that center the lived experiences of young people in our communities and their expertise. One example is our touring production and workshop residency Keysmash, where youth and adults come together to be in dialogue about the mental health needs and considerations of young people.

As a multi-generation organization based in Phoenix, Rising Youth Theatre is committed to the constant dismantling of traditional power structures by uplifting and amplifying the voices of young people in the community. The decision-making is shared by both youth and adults in the space. As artists, facilitators, and community members, we use our artistic practices to learn and unlearn harmful practices to effectively work with our young people in a collaborative model. We work from the understanding that the people closest to the problem are closest to the solutions and are experts in their own bodies and lived experience.

An equity perspective, for Rising Youth Theatre, is not one single initiative, committee, or training, and it is not something that can truly be separated from any other part of our work. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are built into every layer of who we are as an organization. Our work cannot and should not exist without a practice of equity *and* justice at the center. When equity is seen as a lens which can be put on or taken off or as a subset of the work instead of woven across the fabric of the entire organization, that means typically that harm will happen. All of our organizational practices move from our mission and values, which are our guiding principles. Also important is our practice of power sharing, which guides our premises for collaboration and guides a more equitable way of being with each other, offering a roadmap for what power sharing looks like and feels like in our rehearsal rooms, planning processes, leadership spaces, and more.

Participating Artists - Racial and Ethnic Diversity
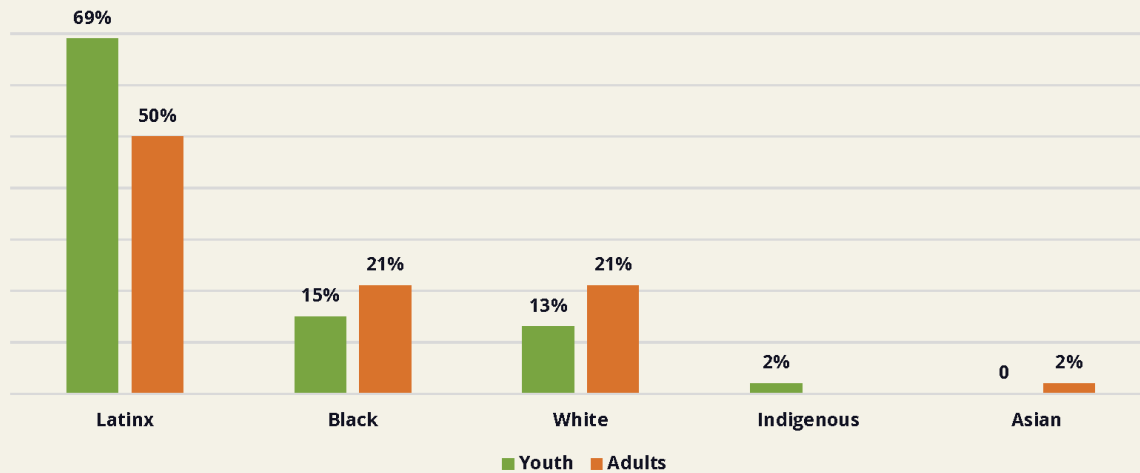
Participating artist demographics by race and ethnicity. Xanthia Walker, personal communication to editor, February 2023.

We have a diverse ensemble of youth and adult artmakers and a team of core staff leaders who drive our work forward. Our staff, board, and artistic ensemble are all more than 75% people of color. The demographics of our participants at every level reflects the perspectives of our community. We know that the young people participating in our programs are racially diverse. It is then imperative that the adults work with also reflect our community. Our paid staff (13 people) is 77% Black or Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and our board (seven people) is currently 100% BIPOC. We are constantly in process un-learning the toxic practices of traditional non-profit structures in our field of practice. Part of our responsibility in our work is also to invite our field at large to move to practices that truly center the whole humanity of people, especially young people. We regularly offer workshops, trainings, and present at conferences in our Theatre field, and we participate in coalitions and learning exchanges with other organizations to ensure we have consistent spaces to be in a learning/un-learning community.

We operate on a horizontal leadership model, practicing shared power and transparency at every level. Shared power is critical to youth leadership. Shifting material power and leadership to be shared with young people in our space must be an action, not just talk. Ideas and words are not enough unless they come with specific, ongoing, change-oriented steps. These steps look different for each project we work on, but are focused on how our creative practices move from idea to action in the workshop/rehearsal room/performance and beyond. And so, for us at Rising Youth Theatre, power sharing, anti-racism, and equity are ongoing, everyday learning and growing processes. We developed an accountability checklist that we use in our rehearsal rooms, staff meetings, board rooms, and community spaces. We share this checklist with our partners and artists of all ages who work with us. And when we're not meeting these standards, we stop and talk about why, repair harm that was caused, and work to shift accordingly. This has made our overall organizational practices stronger, our artistic work more engaging and meaningful, and has allowed us to be more resilient and effective as we have weathered some very challenging years.

Author: Raeana Casillas, Sofia Fencken, Trinity Lugo, Thameenah Muhammad, Julio-César Sauceda, Sarah Sullivan, and Xanthia Angel Walker are the Rising Youth staff leadership team. They hope you will open yourself to the possibilities of multi-generational collaboration that centers people's full humanity across all their identities.

Learn more at https://risingyouththeatre.org/

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation

Rung 8 – *Youth-initiated shared decisions with adults:* Youth-led activities in which decision-making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners.

Rung 7 – *Youth-initiated and directed:* Youth-led activities with little input from adults.

Rung 6 – *Adult-initiated shared decisions with youth:* Adult-led activities, in which decision-making is shared with youth.

Rung 5 – *Consulted and informed:* Adult-led activities, in which youth are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

Rung 4 – *Assigned but informed:* Adult-led activities in which youth understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role.

Rung 3 – *Tokenism:* Adult-led activities, in which youth may be consulted with minimal opportunities for feedback.

Rung 2 – *Decoration:* Adult-led activities, in which youth understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned.

Rung 1 – *Manipulation:* Adult-led activities, in which youth do as directed without understanding the purpose of the activities.
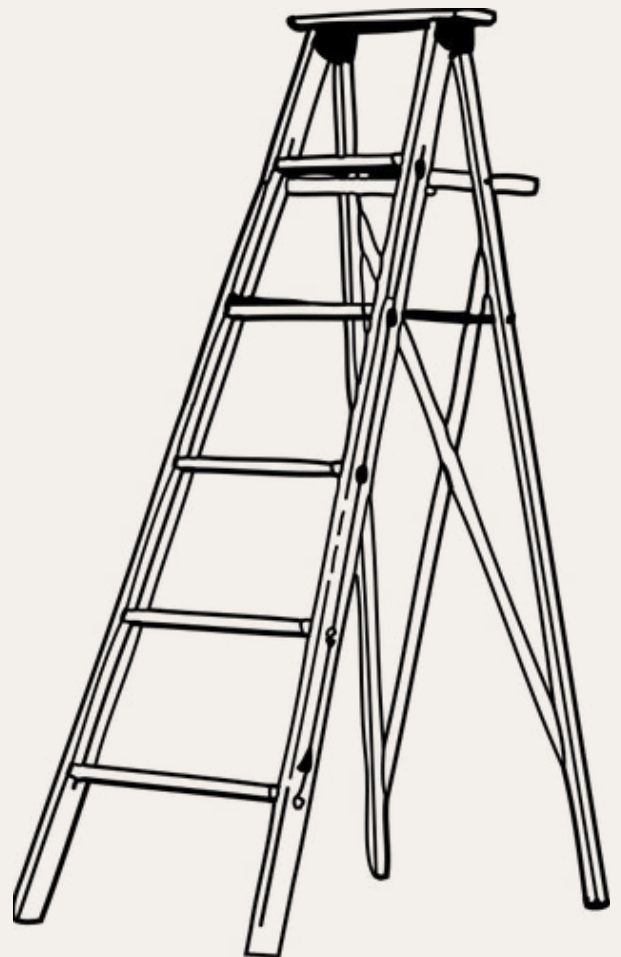
Equity in Action: Equality Arizona

For Equality Arizona, equity is more than a value add: it's the fundamental goal of our work. We are committed to the values of equity and inclusion—that everyone should have a say in the decisions that will shape their lives and communities. Our organization exists to ensure LGBTQ+ people in Arizona have the opportunity, capacity, and confidence to make change as advocates, voters, and civic leaders. Wherever decisions are being made in Arizona, it's our job to make sure LGBTQ+ people are involved in that process. What that looks like for us is three categories of activity: civic advocacy, political organizing, and "context creation" through education and community-building activities. One of our more recent accomplishments includes partnering with the City of Mesa to enact an ordinance protecting LGBTQ+ and other minority groups from discrimination that would affect their ability to be housed, employed, shop at local businesses, and participate in their communities.

Equality Arizona social hour at Brick Road Coffee in Tempe, Arizona.

We've always been committed to equity in terms of our outward-facing work, striving for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people at every level of the decision-making process. To achieve that goal, however, we've had to examine how we think about equity *within* our work as well. It can be easy for organizations like ours to prioritize getting things done by doing them the same way others have before us. This can lead to a 'business as usual' attitude that means valuing potential contributors only if they have experience and expertise in lobbying or political work, and then investing a lot of money in their approach. But we find it's not sufficient to simply gather together a lot of credentialed people or throw a lot of capital at a project. Doing so creates a cycle where only a select few voices are heard over and over.

Instead, we try to create a different cycle: a feedback loop that recognizes the expertise of lived experience, not just professional credentials. For us, this means recruiting individuals who are able to transfer their own expertise to our work from a potentially unrelated field, bringing new perspectives. It also means that we don't silo our team by field or by program. Organizers at Equality Arizona work across all three of our areas of activity, so when the time comes to pivot from legislative advocacy to elections work, the expertise is already shared across the entire team. We can quickly scale up one project while scaling down another. Many of our contributors are volunteers, and we've learned to assume their expertise as well—instead of deprioritizing the knowledge of volunteers compared to paid staff, we now rely on it. This has opened up a wealth of opportunities, and in some cases, we find our best volunteers when someone calls us out on a shortcoming and offers to use their own expertise to help us correct it. We don't need people who have all the answers, but we do need people with fresh approaches to problem-solving. It's rare to capture that lightning-in-a-bottle set of conditions under which creativity can thrive in an organization or team, but we can help set the stage by valuing expertise beyond professional experience.

Our organization was founded in 1992 during the height of another pandemic, the AIDS crisis. At that time, we focused on fighting for the rights of people living with AIDS and promoting the legalization of LGBTQ+ lives and identities at a time when many forms of sex and gender expression were against the law. Since then we have campaigned for the repeal of policies that prohibited openly LGBTQ+ people from serving in the military ("Don't Ask Don't Tell"), supported marriage equality, and much more. But despite advances for legal rights for LBGTQ+ people at local, state, and federal levels, we still face organized opposition from individuals and groups who believe that LGBTQ+ people have no place in public discourse. We are at a precarious moment where progress towards greater equity through increased legal rights and cultural acceptance of LGBTQ+ people could stall or, heartbreakingly, even regress. Pushing forward requires a commitment to trusting and depending on each other and to pursuing equity within our organization as well as outside in the public sphere.

Author: Jeanne Woodbury is the interim executive director for Equality Arizona and is a living example of how expertise comes in many forms. She has worked in advocacy and organizing for many years but has a background in mathematics, English literature, and anthropology. She hopes the reader will find opportunities to challenge and be challenged by others, and to both offer and accept tough but teamwork-oriented criticism.

Learn more at https://equalityarizona.org/

Equity in Action: First Place AZ

First Place AZ's vision is to ensure that housing, healthcare, and community options are as bountiful for adults with autism and other neurodiversities as they are for everyone else. Our innovative approach recognizes that current policies and systems are not yielding optimal results and provides an alternative model focused on meeting needs articulated by autistic adults and their families.

Autism research and diagnosis have historically focused on children rather than adults.[19] Forty years ago, the DSM-III (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) first included the diagnosis of infantile autism, considered primarily a childhood condition. The DSM-V, published in 2013, modified the term to autism spectrum disorder, including four previously separate diagnoses: Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, autism disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.[20] Autistic individuals assert that the spectrum is not linear but better viewed as a circle with skills, symptoms, and challenges increasing and decreasing depending on environment, available supports, and overall development of the individual.[21]

A 2017 review revealed that only 3.5% of published research on autism focused on adults; specific research on supports and services is estimated to be even lower. This is of great concern as the rate of autism diagnoses continues to increase. In the 1970s, autism in the U.S. was reported to affect one in 10,000 individuals. By 1999, it had increased to one in 500; by 2004 it was one in 150. Today, one in 44 children has autism spectrum disorder. Data is based on children aged eight years across cities in 11 states, including Arizona. That means that the eight-year-olds from the 1970s are now middle-aged, while the individuals from the 1999 and 2004 cohorts are in early adulthood. While many studies demonstrate positive changes in individual functioning with age, it is evident that many individuals, regardless of IQ and ability, remain highly disadvantaged as adults.[22]

To reduce these disadvantages, First Place has established a housing and community development responsive to resident needs. With over 100 Transition Academy graduates and 75 current and former residents, we have utilized our community-led approach to advocate for more robust research, policy changes, and investment on behalf of this population. Our residential prototype aspires to be an international model. The apartments and residential Transition Academy life skills program are home to individuals who live there, provide peace of mind for family and friends who come and go, and create an inspiring and enriching environment for those who work and learn there.

We also champion a broader array of solutions. The First Place Global Leadership Institute is focused on pressing issues of accessibility, advocating for more affordable housing and community and independent living options for this population. We collaborate with autism and disability advocacy and research groups, housing and human services organizations, healthcare institutions, philanthropic organizations, universities, state agencies, and local businesses to advocate for the resources and opportunities needed to create those options.

As part of our work advocating for housing and living options, The Global Leadership Institute and partners completed the Greater Phoenix Housing Market Analysis in August 2022. We contacted over 80 organizations to recruit autistic adults and their families and/or supporters to self-advocate and participate in educational sessions on housing, long-term care support services, and supportive amenities. Sessions were held virtually and in person in English, plain-language English and Spanish. Responses were received from 165 individuals. Through the analysis of those responses and current prevalence data, our efforts are focused on making the needs of the estimated 63,000 adults with autism and/or intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (A/I/DD) living with a caregiver over age 65 heard and visible to housing developers, legislators, and policymakers.

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19   The term autism and/or intellectual and/or development disabilities (A/I/DD) encompasses a larger population than those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), research and data may refer to ASD only, or ASD as part of the larger A/I/DD population.

20   Faroy, Michal, Gal Meiri, and Shoshana Arbelle. "DSM-5 and autism: Diagnostic changes and clinical implications in early childhood." *Harefuah* 155, no. 5 (2016): 291-5.

21   Burgess, Rebecca. "Understanding the spectrum: A comic strip explanation." March 30, 2022. https://the-art-of-autism.com/understanding-the-spectrum-a-comic-strip-explanation/.

22   Howlin, Patricia. "Adults with Autism: Changes in understanding since DSM-111." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 12 (2021): 4291-4308.

Part of making these needs visible is understanding how many adults are affected by A/I/DD. To address the ongoing challenge of a lack of data, First Place utilizes prevalence data to create estimates. Additionally, approximately one-third of individuals with A/I/DD are eligible for and served by the Arizona Long-Term Care System, and many of them reside with their families—whether they want to or not. It is necessary to segment the data and explore the specific challenges encountered by this population to attract the attention of policymakers as they address overall employment, housing, and healthcare policy improvements. It is also essential to acknowledge the intersectionality of the challenges—disability, race, socioeconomic disparity, gender and orientation. Many individuals with A/I/DD rely on public benefits in whole or part and as a result, have low or very low income. This income disparity is exacerbated by the Supplemental Security Income marriage penalties.

Healthcare systems also present challenges for autistic adults and their families. To equitably and inclusively address those challenges, First Place AZ developed the 360 Health & Wellness® curriculum and supporting collateral and tools easing communication barriers for health care professionals and patients while improving system navigation and outcomes. The curriculum is designed for three separate audiences: Staying Healthy for adults with A/I/DD; Supporting Independence for family members, supporters of and caregivers for autistic adults and others with A/I/DD; and Implementing Care for healthcare professionals who provide care to autistic adults and others with A/I/DD. First Place AZ also serves as a site for educational efforts by Creighton University, which offers courses for medical, pharmacy, occupational therapy and physical therapy students to improve their ability to serve autistic adults on a holistic level.

Law enforcement agencies similarly require training and support to improve interactions with autistic adults. Collaborations with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and local police agencies include training opportunities enabling both law enforcement officers and neurodiverse adults to learn more about expectations and roles and responsibilities, as well as to reduce the possibility of negative outcomes. Law enforcement officers can expect commands like "pull over" and "license and registration" to be followed without resistance; however, autistic adults may need more time to process the requests and learn that they need to ask for clarification before putting their hands in their pockets.

Employment can also be challenging for neurodiverse adults. Individuals with A/I/DD are often unemployed or under-employed. Myriad root causes add to this challenge, including limited educational attainment, myths about the challenges of employing individuals with disabilities, concerns regarding maintaining access to public benefits and low expectations. Through a variety of supports, First Place works with First Place–Phoenix residents and Transition Academy students to help them gain skills through volunteerism and employment to chart a vocational path. We aim to create 1,000 new jobs for autistic adults in the Greater Phoenix area by educating and encouraging employers to hire adults with A/I/DD.

Lastly, First Place is raising awareness of the diversity of the autism spectrum and the challenges encountered by autistic adults on a daily basis. The documentary "In A Different Key" recently premiered nationally on PBS and features First Place–Phoenix and the Transition Academy. While we are proud to be included, awareness is just a starting point not the endpoint. Equity requires acceptance, planning and accommodations that ensure this population can not only access needed supports and services but can thrive alongside neurotypical peers.

Adults with A/I/DD have a different way of thinking and finding order in their world, they also have much to contribute to society. Creating a neuro-inclusive community that supports and celebrates these differences can and will lead to a better world for all. Belonging is a human right, and we believe that just as the Americans with Disabilities Act created physical curb cuts decades ago benefiting most of us today, neurological curb cuts can do the same as they advance community accessibility for this population and more.

Learn more at
https://www.firstplaceaz.org/

Authors: Denise Resnik is the founder and president/CEO of First Place AZ, and co-founder of the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC). Her adult son Matt, who has autism, and others with different abilities inspire her work. Maureen Casey has worked in the disability community as both a family advocate and professional for almost three decades. She leads efforts to demonstrate innovative practices and collect data on efficacy to ultimately expand the opportunities to create neuro-inclusive communities. They hope you will learn and respond with all your senses – and sensibilities!

CONCLUSION

How do we build a more prosperous, vibrant Arizona where everyone has the opportunity to realize their full potential?

Arizona Town Hall hopes this report has prompted you to consider equity as one answer to that question. While equity is far too broad to capture every aspect in one document, this report's contents were designed to introduce new perspectives, ignite readers' curiosity about the social world around them, and broaden individual definitions of equity to show its applicability to many contexts and situations.

Arizona Town Hall also hopes you see yourself reflected in these pages, if only for a moment. It can be easy to assume that equity is a niche concern and make a hasty judgment about whether greater equity is something that could impact you. But equity goes beyond any one definition, any single social category, any distinct identity, any unique issue or profession or field. Instead, equity is a basket, holding inside it many related concepts of fairness, justice, recognition, and understanding. It involves acknowledging where people are presently while intentionally building the road toward a shared future. Equity is about providing all Arizonans, including you, what they need to reach their full potential.

This might be the end of the report, but it doesn't have to be goodbye. Arizona Town Hall hopes this sparks a desire to discuss and pursue equity within your own spheres of influence, and would love to continue this conversation with you as part of a community town hall discussion. Please consider this an invitation to discuss, share, question, and collaborate. Visit aztownhall.org to learn more.

The Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Arizona Town Hall extend heartfelt thanks to our contributors, both named and anonymous, who trusted us with their stories and without whom this report would not have been possible. A heartfelt thanks to you, the reader, as well, for taking a risk and engaging on a complex, challenging, and rewarding topic.

This report leaves you with one last question...

...what will you do next?

... In your neighborhood?

... In your community?

... In your organization?

... In your state?