

Equity for All Arizonans

FLAGSTAFF COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

October 11, 2023 – Flagstaff, AZ; and Online via Zoom

DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equality results in treating everyone the same, regardless of their demographic, economic, cultural, educational, geographic, and other differences. Equity is fostered by bringing diverse groups together to increase the understanding of each group's needs and aspirations. As leaders, it is incumbent upon us to meet people where they are and recognize that people do not always know how to reach us nor feel comfortable doing so. This is especially important for those in low income and rural areas, as well as historically marginalized groups. Equity is fostered by providing individuals and communities with the tools to do it themselves. This allows for the maximization of potential at all levels, increases engagement, and builds a sense of accomplishment.

Philanthropy must be trust based. Direct efforts to what people tell us they need rather than what we think they need. In Flagstaff, for example, safe, comfortable, and affordable housing continues to be a recurrent theme.

Educational and recreational resources and opportunities are not equal across Coconino County. School counselors perform a vital function by helping students see what can be available to them and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. Teachers serve best when they recognize differences in how their students learn. Programs like Open Space, Kids Café, and Rec on Wheels offer recreational opportunities across a broad area and often additional services such as a free lunch and health and wellness education.

We also have individuals “living in the gap” between eligibility for public support and financial security. It is incumbent upon many of us to recognize our privilege and be sensitive to those who are just getting by or falling through the cracks.

OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

It is of the utmost importance to optimize the potential of every individual, group, and community for us to thrive. This requires starting with meeting basic needs and providing educational opportunities that build our strengths. Creating a level playing field directly impacts how people interact with the community, nonprofits, and government.

The availability to everyone of health, wellness and outdoor activities enables connections and builds potential for participants. The Buffalo Park Accessibility Trail with universal access fitness equipment is the result of a state grant that helped repair and resurface the trail. Community gardens, such as the one at the Hal Jensen Recreation Center, allow everyone the opportunity to garden, raise plants, and raise healthy food.

Leaders need to bring everyone to the table, especially those who have never had a chance to be heard or contribute. We must find a place for everyone to feel that they belong and are valued. Decision making needs to be story-based and built upon trust. Grant making organizations need to be flexible enough to support changing needs, unanticipated events, and special opportunities.

What we have always done is not working. Yesterday's solutions may not address today's problems. We must hear every voice and think outside the box. Ask the community before establishing rules and setting priorities. The most creative ideas and successful solutions are generated through collaboration. We are always stronger together.

IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest opportunities happen every day as we meet people and share learning and teaching moments. Meeting people where they are, identifying their needs and concerns and understanding their relationship with healthcare in the broadest sense. This includes medical dental, mental and behavioral health as well as housing, food security, and access to green spaces.

A focus on prevention needs to be embedded in our definition of healthcare. This includes providing ongoing support and training to healthcare providers such as trauma response, triage skills, cultural competencies, public health, and the newest treatment modalities. School nurses and counselors must be available in every school, all day, every day. Early detection and response are the key to reducing the extent and duration of issues. Consider the Medical Reserve Core of the Coconino County Health Department as well as a volunteer medical core. Ensure that treatment modalities are integrated with native healing practices.

COVID brought us telehealth, which still accommodates some patients, while others need in person meetings with providers. More than ever, we recognized the impact of the social determinants of health when testing and vaccinations needed to be accessible to everyone. Health literacy and advocacy took on significant roles and will continue to do so.

Our best opportunities lie in partnerships and collaborations, which are happening more in Flagstaff. An example are the plans for an indigenous cultural center. Community gardens bring people together to grow healthy food. There is inequity in the mental and behavioral health area that can be addressed by bringing people together to share their experiences and learn about available resources. Collaboration is the key to achieving the best outcomes because we learn from each other and are better able to support our shared values and approach healthcare from a holistic perspective.

NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Community conversations, surveys and town halls are a good place to start. The information gathered must be shared with community leaders, elected officials, government agencies, nonprofits, and healthcare providers. The most important action to be taken at any level is listening and listening to a diverse population. Be sure to get all voices into the conversations.

Neighborhood conversations that bring together those with different views to recognize common interests can reduce fractionalization. Democracy does not work if people do not participate. Citizenship involves responsibilities and obligations as well as rights.

Flagstaff has limited services for substance use, detox, and mental and behavioral health. City leaders need to look at how these situations impact public services, public health, and community vitality.

Funders of nonprofits and government agencies need to offer a trust based, community involved process in developing guidelines and requirements for grants. Visit the service providers to understand their challenges and appreciate their impact.

Collaboration between nonprofits makes funds go further and recognizes that most situations involve multiple issues. Programs like Front Door help people get directed to all the services they need with one stop.

There were numerous approaches offered to increase equity for all Arizonans such as:

- Restructure healthcare billing and reimbursement to allow more time for meetings with patients.
- Diversify decision making by including young people on boards, commissions, and task forces.
- Level the playing field by distributing resources and dollars based on need, not local taxes.

An overriding theme was we should not be looking to some other group, agency, organization, or government to address the issues and opportunities identified in these discussions. Instead, **“There is no ‘they’ when it comes to responsibility for action. It is us!”**

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Flagstaff Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Share ideas learned at this Arizona Town Hall with others whom I interact with.
- Commit to listening to the voices of the unheard.
- Reach out to people I do not know to ask them questions.
- Advocate for equity in personal and professional conversations.
- Be reinvigorating some of my own work and encouraging sustained resiliency in pursuit of equity in the communities I serve. This work can cause a lot of fatigue, and practicing both DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and MHFA (Mental Health First Aid), etc., is hard heart work... I need to refuel and revitalize!