Advancing Equity

A guide for local governments
to build equity with
LEED v4.1 for Cities and Communities

June 2024

Introduction

As climate change risks are increasing in number and causing more damage, deaths and displacement than ever before, it is becoming more evident that the perils are being experienced unjustly[1]. As our cities continue to grow and become places of refuge, they must also become more resilient to the effects of increasing climate change events—and address systemic inequities at the same time.

The LEED for Cities and Communities rating system provides local governments with the tools to benchmark their sustainability performance across nine categories incorporating interrelated social, economic and environmental elements, founded on the understanding that sustainability in cities is intricately linked to many aspects of our built environment and urban life.

Centering equity in sustainability sets the standard that every action and goal can and should consider equitable outcomes. This standard results in a just distribution of resources to protect all communities from climate-related hazards. Intentional and equitable policies and programs must address local realities, as well as larger structures and systems that perpetuate climate change risk and inequity. While equity takes many forms, this guide focuses on procedural, distributional, structural, transgenerational and transformational equity.

Definitions of Equity[2]	
Procedural Equity	Inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement and representation in process to develop or implement programs or policies
Distributional Equity	Programs and policies result in fair distribution of benefits and burdens across all segments of a community, prioritizing those with highest need
Structural Equity	Decision-makers institutionalize accountability; decisions are made with recognition of historical, cultural and institutional dynamics and structures that have routinely advantaged privileged groups in society and resulted in chronic, cumulative disadvantage for subordinated groups
Transgenerational Equity	Decisions consider generational impacts and don't result in unfair burdens on future generations
Transformational Equity	The distinct notion that communities (internally) have the indigenous capacity to govern and sustain themselves and that communities (externally) have a voice, influence and agency in regional, state and/or national affairs

This document applies an equity lens to each credit within the LEED for Cities and Communities: Existing Cities rating system[3], providing guiding context and questions to encourage local governments to ingrain equity more robustly into their sustainability planning. Rather than identifying and creating separate credits for addressing equity, the guide emphasizes the importance of weaving equity into each credit in the rating system. Nearly every aspect of the rating system has explicit and/or indirect equity considerations. Highlighting the different types of equity present in the rating system is intended to help local governments think about the unique equity concerns in their jurisdiction in combination with their fight against climate change.

CITY, TOWN, COUNTY, JURISDICTION

All four terms are used interchangeably throughout this guide in reference to the geographical entities that have used the LEED for Cities and Communities rating system. Every credit/ prerequisite is made by and for local governments with cities, towns and counties of all sizes.

CASE STUDIES

PROCEDURAL EQUITY – KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Procedural Equity	Inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement and representation in process to develop or implement programs or policies

King County, Washington, which includes municipalities like Seattle, Issaquah and Bellevue, incorporates procedural equity through its robust community engagement strategies to support its Equitable Development Initiative (EDI)[4] and beyond. The county's EDI was derived out of the City of Seattle's Equitable Development Implementation Plan[5], published in 2016.
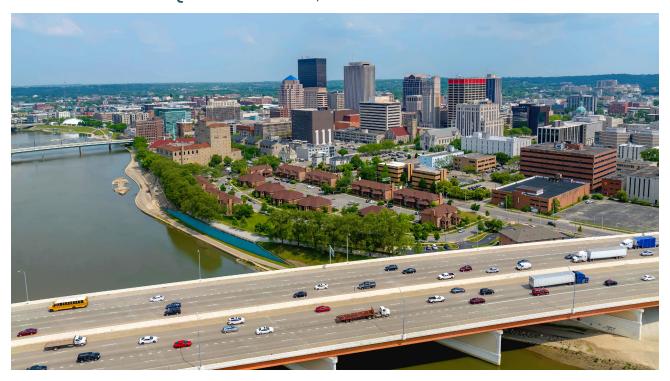
To support the development of the county's EDI, a community planning workgroup was formed. In early 2022, the King County Council passed Motion 16062[6], which outlined the requirement of a workgroup as part of the EDI. The motion states, "Planning and creation of the initiative shall be completed in partnership with a planning workgroup comprised of community membership emphasizing Black, indigenous and people of color leadership and broad geographic representation, who are appointed by the executive in consultation with the council using an open application process. Consideration should be given to individuals with lived experience or expertise relevant to the initiative. Appointees shall be compensated for their participation."

The working group acknowledges that when marginalized voices are included in planning and development processes, people are contributing vital knowledge and time to the work. Misunderstanding their contributions as civic engagement or devaluing their level of expertise based on traditional academic and professional ways of knowing is unjust. Community members deserve to be fairly compensated for all forms of effort and expertise in planning processes.

King County is also specifically embedding procedural equity principles in its climate action planning. As a vital part of King County's first climate justice framework, which is a section of the 2020 Strategic Climate Action Plans (SCAP), the county formed a Climate Equity Community Task Force. Not only is this section the first section of the SCAP focused on climate equity, but the task force is also the first community-driven policy-making group involved in the county's climate action planning. The task force is comprised of a multi-ethnic, multiracial group of leaders representing frontline communities and organizations. The climate justice section in the SCAP is titled "Sustainable & Resilient Frontline Communities" and lays out 31 community-driven and equity-oriented climate actions across eight key focus areas, put together by the task force over two years.

King County achieved certification in the STAR Community rating system (STAR) in 2016. STAR, which was developed by and for local governments committed to measuring and managing sustainability performance, contains a robust Equity and Empowerment section which King County uses as a framework to continue institutionalizing and operationalizing equity post-certification. The LEED for Cities and Communities rating system evolved from the discontinuation of STAR in 2019.

DISTRIBUTIONAL EQUITY – DAYTON, OHIO

Distributional Equity	Programs and policies result in fair distribution of benefits and burdens across all segments of a community, prioritizing those with highest need

The City of Dayton prioritizes future community investments by uncovering unjust historical patterns through a community-wide social equity vulnerability assessment. The city assesses vulnerability using a mapping tool that identifies how certain factors compound to form a level of negative impact severity in a given geographic area. The assessment focuses on prominent environmental, health and demographic factors and helps the city understand who in the community is most severely impacted by multifarious hazards.

Compiling data across 30 different indicators, the City of Dayton can better understand how neighborhoods in the city experience vulnerability in varying ways. Internally, equity is one of five pillars of the Sustainability Office's framework and is considered in every project carried out by the team. The vulnerability assessment is a long-lasting tool used for decision-making that helps the city ensure an equitable distribution of resources and allocation of infrastructure and programs.

Every year as a part of the City of Dayton's budget process, the Sustainability Office must report on equity metrics such as who benefits from the office's programs and investment, how many of those people are living in historically disinvested communities, and how much staff time is going towards those communities. Tracking this data while carrying out projects keeps equity front of mind and holds other departments accountable to do the same.

In September 2023, the City of Dayton achieved LEED for Cities and Communities Platinum certification, earning a spot among the highest-scoring jurisdictions in the world. Despite being a smaller-sized city with a limited budget, Dayton continues to make strides toward both sustainable and equitable solutions to its most pressing needs.

STRUCTURAL EQUITY – BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Structural Equity	Decision-makers institutionalize accountability; decisions are made with recognition of historical, cultural and institutional dynamics and structures that have routinely advantaged privileged groups in society and resulted in chronic, cumulative disadvantage for subordinated groups

The City of Baltimore ingrained structural equity across its city departments by passing the Equity Assessment Ordinance in 2018[7]. The ordinance invokes training, assessment, action, monitoring, budgeting and annual reporting around equity in the city.

The ordinance requires the following:

- Training for city agencies to conduct equity assessments on each agency's impact
- An appointed equity coordinator per agency who is responsible for managing the equity assessment
- Tracking of the outcomes and effectiveness of policies, practices and investments per assessment
- An equity assessment conducted by the director of planning for any proposed capital budget
- The creation of an annual equity report

This ordinance results in equity being a part of nearly every decision-making process at the City of Baltimore—meant to reverse past harm rooted in structural injustice. Institutionalizing and operationalizing equity across an organizational structure through an ordinance aims to ensure a long-term commitment to impactful and just action.

The City of Baltimore was first certified as a 5-STAR Community in 2015. They earned LEED for Cities and Communities Gold certification in May 2023. Baltimore adopted a sustainability plan in 2019 with an equity lens and in alignment with the STAR Community Rating System[8]. Together, the Office of Sustainability and Commission on Sustainability[9] compile an annual report and release it at the Sustainability Open House event.

TRANSGENERATIONAL EQUITY – TUCSON, ARIZONA

Transgenerational Equity	Decisions consider generational impacts and don't result in unfair burdens on future generations

The Land Back movement is centered around returning land initially owned by Indigenous peoples to their generational survivors. This movement goes beyond the reclamation of land to the reclamation of culture, language, governance, sustainability practices and food. Returning land to Indigenous communities preserves transgenerational practices around sustainability, symbiosis and equity.

In 2023, the Tucson City Council decided to move forward with the returning of ancestral homeland to the Tohono O'odham Nation for its continued preservation and reverence. The unanimously approved motion returns 10 acres of land at the base of Sentinel Peak and honors the care for the land that the Tohono O'odham people have possessed for generations. In addition to returning the land to its rightful owners, the City of Tucson also moved forward with incorporating more Indigenous voices in climate action planning. In doing so, the city's future planning aims to incorporate Indigenous knowledge of land care to take a physical stronghold in the community.

The City of Tucson achieved its STAR certification in 2014 and is currently in the process of recertifying under LEED for Cities and Communities, to be completed in 2024. Plan Tucson, a 20-year land use plan for the city, is also in process. Tucson Resilient Together[10] is the climate action and adaptation plan.

TRANSFORMATIONAL EQUITY – LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Transformational Equity	The distinct notion that communities (internally) have the indigenous capacity to govern and sustain themselves and that communities (externally) have a voice, influence and agency in regional, state and/or national affairs

The history of the Parkland neighborhood in West Louisville tells the story of how a vibrant, predominantly Black neighborhood went from being nearly wiped out to bouncing back—with even more green space. In the early 20th century, Parkland was a business hub where theaters, bakeries, hardware stores, a bank, a record store and a gas station lined a six-block main street, and streetcar access brought customers from all over the city. A predominantly Black population resided in Parkland, which led to a portion of the neighborhood being referred to as "Little Africa."

The urban renewal movement, which brought population growth, rezoning, redevelopment and gentrification in the 1940s and 1950s, led to the erasure of this neighborhood. Following this change, tensions increased between residents and local police officers on the accounts of police brutality. A major encounter between residents and police in the 1960s resulted in two Black residents dying, 472 arrests and millions of dollars in property damage. Businesses began shutting down and residents fled.

Over the next 40 years, the area remained neglected, but in the 1980s a portion of Parkland earned historic designation. This prevented the character of the neighborhood from being entirely altered by a gentrifying influx of new construction, businesses and residents. Local residents, property owners and city leaders worked hard to successfully reawaken parts of Parkland's commercial hub.

As improvements started adding up, in the summer of 2022, Parkland Plaza opened as the neighborhood's first public park. The outdoor gathering space, encompassing a green oasis, community venue and natural playground, allows Parkland residents to feel pride, power and purpose in their own neighborhood, and the plaza serves as a physical and cultural symbol of transformation[11].

The City of Louisville earned the 4-STAR Community Rating in 2015 and achieved Silver-level certification in LEED for Cities and Communities in 2021. The city earned innovation credit for the Green Heart Louisville initiative, which seeks to demonstrate the scientific link between nature and human health[12].

RATING SYSTEM ANALYSIS

DIVING INTO ADDRESSING LOCAL INEQUITIES AT THE GLOBAL SCALE

By understanding the equity implications surrounding each credit, local governments are better equipped with tools to assess their current status and implement actions rooted in equity tied to their LEED for Cities and Communities certification. It is also important to note that the designated equity alignment(s) for each prerequisite and credit may not be the only aligned forms of equity. Readers should continue thinking about the connections and synergies of all equity forms as they relate to LEED for Cities and Communities and sustainability planning in their local context.

Each credit/prerequisite listed in this guide is analyzed through the following format:

- **Equity Alignment(s):** One or more of the five equity definitions that align with the given credit/prerequisite.
- **Credit/Prerequisite Intent:** Direct content from the LEED for Cities and Communities[13] rating system.
- **Contextual Equity Analysis:** A short contextualization explaining which equity considerations may be relevant to each credit/prerequisite. Recognizing that there are several ways one credit/prerequisite can be unpacked under an equity lens, the brief analysis may not capture every uniquely relevant connection.
- **Guiding Question(s):** Questions that aim to prompt equity-centered thinking through the history, process and action of each credit/prerequisite.

INTEGRATIVE PROCESS (IP)

Credit: Integrative Planning and Leadership
Equity Alignment: Procedural Structural

This credit intends to support an early and ongoing analysis of the interrelationships among systems in a city to deliver high-performance, cost-effective programs and services which result in positive and equitable outcomes.

Internally, if there is limited diversity in the voices in a staff environment, it is important for underrepresented voices to be integrated into meetings at all levels, including the highest level. In order to obtain LEED for Cities and Communities certification, several departments in a local government are typically involved in the process. An expectation around representation and uplifting marginalized voices should cross departments. Having community stakeholders representing various groups present at a table will more effectively address equity in a local jurisdiction.

Guiding Questions:

1. Who are the voices of your community? How can a group representing every voice in your local community be assembled? Who has access to the integrative planning and leadership opportunities?
2. In what ways can a local government ensure that deeply involved community members receive just compensation for their leadership?

Credit: Green Building Policy and Incentives
Equity Alignment: Transformational Transgenerational Distributional

This credit intends to encourage the design, construction, and retrofit of buildings using green building practices.

Green buildings are an essential component of a city's strategy for sustainable development. The LEED for Cities and Communities rating system targets macro-level strategies, while individual green buildings support micro-level strategies to help cities be more sustainable. Green public buildings help the city lead by example, and green building policies and incentives ensure alignment of future development with the city's long-term strategy.

Green building policies advance sustainability practices that lower emissions and decrease waste. They benefit the health of our environment and the health of individuals who access these spaces. Green buildings offer long-lasting community benefits that should be accessible to all community members, including historically marginalized communities in the city or county.

Guiding Questions:

1. Is there a mandate to build all schools and publicly owned buildings and facilities to LEED green building standards?
2. Does the city or county incorporate green building standards in construction of public housing?
3. Has the city or county considered an overlay district or other policy mechanism to incentivize new, green affordable housing in the community?

NATURAL SYSTEMS AND ECOLOGY (NS)

Prerequisite: Ecosystem Assessment
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational

To assess the existing ecosystem conditions and services provided by ecosystems, built landscapes, and other open spaces to inform the city development along with conservation and restoration efforts.

An ecosystem assessment evaluates environmental features that cities and communities should consider as part of an integrative planning process. Assessments identify assets, such as unique land features, steep slopes, forests and habitats, native plants, bodies of water, and coastal shorelines, as well as liabilities, such as unhealthy soils, invasive species, pollution sources and contaminated lands. Overlaying this assessment with demographic data could reveal inequities around who has access to the positive elements of a jurisdiction's ecosystem and who is burdened by its shortcomings.

Guiding Questions:

1. What intersectional patterns around race and class are present in your ecosystem maps?
2. How can residents experiencing the effects of local ecosystem liabilities be given a voice to actively participate in planned improvements?

Credit: Green Spaces
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational

This credit intends to provide accessible green spaces that positively impact physical, mental, and psychological health and well-being of the community while also enhancing the environmental quality of the city or community.

Access to green spaces confers many benefits upon people, including improvements to mental, physical and environmental health[14]. This credit measures the percentage of residents living within a half-mile walking distance of public green spaces. Beyond meeting the threshold, local governments can go further, uncovering disparities in access by neighborhood and exploring how green spaces look different across neighborhoods. All residents within a jurisdiction deserve to experience the respite and benefits these spaces offer as a result of distributional equity.

Guiding Questions:

1. How have past and current policies influenced the current distribution of green spaces in your jurisdiction?
2. Are there gaps in green spaces coverage or amenities, and if so, who is most impacted?
3. Who is able to access green spaces that offer water features (splash pad, pool, etc.) for cooling in hot weather months?
4. Can these gaps be addressed in an upcoming planning process or capital improvements program?
5. Are there existing community-based organizations or neighborhood action groups who could be invited to share feedback about future amenities, community needs and/or park acquisition?

Credit: Natural Resources Conservation and Restoration
Equity Alignment: Transgenerational Distributional Structural

This credit intends to conserve existing natural resources, restore degraded areas, improve habitats and promote biodiversity within the city.

Historically, access to parks in the United States has been based on factors of race, income, and age[15]. This limited or lack of access has transcended generations and created social and cultural norms around a lack of experience with such spaces (e.g., the stereotype that Black and brown people do not participate in outdoor recreation such as camping, hiking, kayaking, etc.). Sustainable access to and care for such spaces results in equity for both human and non-human forms of life.

Guiding Questions:

1. What limits access to natural conservation and restoration spaces in your city or county today?
2. Has the city or county considered classes, training or other educational programming to encourage outdoor recreation and activities like fishing, hiking or rock climbing?
3. Are parks and natural resource areas only accessible by car?
4. What transportation infrastructure improvements might help residents in communities further away from such spaces to affordably and sustainably access them?

Credit: Light Pollution Reduction
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural

This credit intends to minimize and manage ambient light levels to protect public health and the integrity of ecological systems and increase the night sky access, improve nighttime visibility, and reduce the consequences of development for wildlife and people.

Experiencing thoughtfully designed lighting, balancing both adequate visibility and beneficial darkness, is not afforded to all neighborhoods in a city equally. Historically marginalized communities often endure insufficient and/or overly bright, glaring lighting[16]. Distributing the balance of light to protect both human and non-human life is lighting justice.

Guiding Questions:

1. How have past and current policies dictated the current distribution of lighting infrastructure in your jurisdiction?
2. How can access to safe street lighting be distributed fairly throughout your jurisdiction?
3. How can a balance be struck between the need for street lighting for safety in certain urban areas and the reduction of light to benefit people and wildlife in other areas? Can this be part of a vulnerability assessment or community mapping project?

Credit: Resilience Planning
Equity Alignment: Structural Distributional Transformational

This credit intends to strengthen the resilience of cities to adverse events like climate change risks, natural and man-made hazards and extreme events.

Every neighborhood and resident within a city or county will have varying vulnerabilities to the different natural and man-made hazards local to an area. A thorough vulnerability assessment can ensure that structural and systematic inequities will inform the way resources for resilience are allocated to communities for both short- and long-term scenarios.

Guiding Questions:

1. How will your city or county ensure resilience plans take priority in addressing its most vulnerable communities to natural and man-made hazards?
2. How does your resilience plan ensure proactive, long-term, sustainable change?
3. Have you been deliberate about the stakeholder and community engagement process associated with your plan?
4. Is a diverse group of community members engaged in the plan and its implementation? Are their voices and needs articulated in the goals and actions?

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE (TR)

Prerequisite: Transportation Performance
Equity Alignment: Distributional

To promote non-motorized transportation, encourage use of public transit and reduce pollution from the transportation sector.

To avoid redundancies, see Safe, Multimodal Accessibility Credit for relevant guiding context and questions.

Credit: Compact, Mixed-use and Transit-oriented Development
Equity Alignment: Distributional Procedural Transgenerational

This credit intends to concentrate development in compact, mixed-use centers, which allow efficient use of shared infrastructure and permit people to meet their daily needs without reliance on single-occupant vehicles.

Residents who rely on affordable housing options benefit greatly from access to reliable and safe public transportation to and from major employment areas. In addition, having close access to affordable fresh foods, public amenities and health care is vital to maintaining a high quality of life. Site selection for such projects is important, as the intended community must be met with locally relevant services from this model for urban development.

Guiding Questions:

1. Who benefits from access to compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development?
2. Are there affordable housing requirements for development projects in your city or county?
3. How is the city or county stabilizing the impacts of gentrification in these areas?
4. Are there programs in place to avoid displacement?
5. How can long-term employment opportunities (such as in the housing and transportation developments) be included as a part of the CCC model?

Credit: Safe, Multimodal Accessibility

Equity Alignment: Distributional

This credit intends to encourage use of diverse transportation alternatives to reduce the reliance on single-occupant vehicles within the city.

Providing equitable access to safe and affordable multimodal transit options is an important function of local and regional government, as is creating an environment where is it easy for new users of transit modes to learn and ask questions. For example, public education workshops or signage on how to switch from driving to using a bike as primary public transit would lower the barrier to entry. Taking equitable access one step further and providing guidance in transition can result in increased use and benefit.

Guiding Questions:

1. Can access to safe transportation infrastructure be prioritized for communities that are presently transit-disadvantaged?
2. Can incentives be provided to encourage ridership?
3. Who is being disproportionately affected by unsafe traffic conditions in your community?

Credit: Clean Transportation

Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational

This credit intends to reduce pollution by supporting the transition to electricity, and alternative fuels as a means of powering vehicles, trucks, and buses.

Diesel trucks, buses, heavy equipment and other gas-powered engines create exhaust, impacting local air quality and affecting human health. The burden of poor air quality is not equally shared[17]. Cities and counties can identify those areas most affected by air pollution and put programs and policies into place to reduce traffic and encourage or incentivize the transition to electric vehicles. Taxes and fees associated with owning a vehicle that does not meet current emissions standards are often regressive and disproportionately affect low-income residents[18].

Guiding Questions:

1. How have past and current policies dictated the transportation infrastructure in your jurisdiction?
2. In which communities should the rollout of clean transportation/freight be prioritized?
3. What are creative solutions to EV charging infrastructure deployment that support residents living in multifamily residential communities?
4. Are you collaborating with the school districts in your region to prioritize routes for EV buses?
5. How can clean transportation goals be paired with air quality management goals?

Credit: Mobility Management
Equity Alignment: <mark>Structural</mark> <mark>Procedural</mark>

This credit intends to reduce vehicle miles traveled, emissions, and congestion associated with single-occupant vehicles.

Transit Demand Management (TDM) programs, especially those geared toward employees, maximize traveler choices and can encourage more sustainable modes of transportation. Strategies such as universal transit passes, enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities, carpooling and ride-matching support a transportation system with a lower carbon footprint. Employers are not required to offer TDM programs, so there is limited access to incentives around decreasing single-occupant vehicle use.

Parking management policies can be aligned with TDM programs to limit the amount of space occupied by parking lots in a city or county. This can be done by evaluating where parking is needed and identifying where parking lots can be redeveloped into green/community space, with an emphasis on historically disinvested neighborhoods burdened by large, empty concrete parking lots. While mobility management is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it may be that only certain members of a community can afford to adjust their mobility choices.

Guiding Questions:

1. Who benefits from employer TDM programs? How can these benefits be distributed beyond a single workplace?
2. Are there areas where unused parking lots can be redeveloped into public green spaces in your city or county?
3. Are there certain communities that should be prioritized for implementing transportation demand management strategies? How can these communities be included in the decision-making process?

Credit: Priority Sites
Equity Alignment: <mark>Transgenerational</mark> <mark>Structural</mark>

This credit intends to preserve historic structures and sites and focus growth and redevelopment on infill sites and other priority locations.

In the United States, historically designated neighborhoods tend to be white and wealthy[19], while neighborhoods historically populated by Black and brown residents have been subject to disinvestment and/or gentrification. Historical designation can advance racial equity, w hen done right, and communities can still be uplifted through official designations to preserve a transgenerational story. The same applies to vacant lots deemed infill or brownfield sites.

Guiding Questions:

1. Are there opportunities to advance new historical designations for buildings or cultural sites in the city or county?
2. How can future growth and development of priority sites serve as a catalyst for new employment opportunities coupled with workforce development and affordable housing?

WATER EFFICIENCY (WR)

Prerequisite: Water Access and Quality
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational Structural

This prerequisite intends to provide equitable access to clean drinking water and sanitation services.

Sufficient water access and quality is a basic human right[20]. Understanding where water access and quality declines in a jurisdiction, and overlaying that with race and class characteristics, may illuminate environmental injustice. While often ignored in the past, piecing together these layers now can create more urgency in a call to action on this historically repetitive distributional inequity.

Guiding Questions:

1. How have past and current policies dictated the water infrastructure in your jurisdiction?
2. Does the data from this prerequisite highlight any disadvantaged areas in terms of water access and quality? If so, who lives in those areas?

Prerequisite: Water Performance
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational Structural Procedural

To support water management by minimizing water use and demand as a means to conserve water.

To avoid redundancies, see the Water Access and Quality Prerequisite and Integrated Water Management Credit for relevant guiding context and questions.

Credit: Integrated Water Management
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural

This credit intends to support water management, reduce freshwater consumption and encourage to move towards net zero water use.

Identifying the sectors of your jurisdiction that have the highest water usage is the starting point of consumption reduction. Creating a policy that sanctions all residents equally is unjust when there are certain groups that should take more action, due to their higher contribution to the issue or ability to better afford fines and penalties associated with overuse. Where sanction rules and policies must be applied to all residents (such as in California), counteracting programs with funds designated to alleviate the inequitable consequences of sanctions can be prepared.

Guiding Questions:

1. Which areas of your city have the highest water demand/consumption?
2. What programs and/or incentives are in place to encourage water efficiency and conservation? Are they successful? Why or why not?

Credit: Stormwater Management
Equity Alignment: Distributional

This credit intends to prevent erosion, and reduce runoff volume, pollution, siltation, and sedimentation while recharging groundwater and providing accessible green infrastructure.

Stormwater management and green infrastructure are often not distributed equally throughout a jurisdiction. Areas especially prone to climate-induced hazards should receive priority resilience,

adaptation and mitigation resources. It is a common issue that such infrastructure is challenging to change or improve, so thinking of creative, holistic climate resilient solutions may be necessary.

Guiding Questions:

1. Which areas in your jurisdiction are disproportionately burdened by poor stormwater management?
2. Is the community involved in decision-making around infrastructure and stormwater management issues?

Credit: Smart Water Systems
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural

This credit intends to improve the operational efficiency of the water management systems through use of smart technology.

Smart sustainability infrastructure tends to be expensive and only afforded to those who have access to them. However, it is often those who lack access that can benefit from innovations the most. Looking into ways to subsidize and make such systems more affordable can create a greater impact.

Guiding Questions:

1. Who in the community is experiencing the economic and environmental benefits of smart water infrastructure?
2. How can smart water infrastructure be made more accessible?

ENERGY AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (ER)

Prerequisite: Power Access, Reliability, Resilience
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural Transgenerational

This prerequisite intends to provide safe, secured, reliable, resilient, and equitable access to power.

Access to power provides access to other important resources, such as lighting, heat, air conditioning and high-speed internet. Reliable access to power can save and significantly improve lives and should not be unjustly distributed, especially in a time with increasing climate threats causing more power outages.

Guiding Questions:

1. How have past and current policies dictated the current distribution of power in your jurisdiction?
2. In which neighborhood(s) is power reliability and resilience poor?

Prerequisite: Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Performance
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural Transgenerational

To support energy management and move towards net zero energy and emissions.

To avoid redundancies, see the Power, Access, Reliability, Resilience Prerequisite and Energy Efficiency Credit for relevant guiding context and questions.

Credit: Energy Efficiency

Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural

To improve energy efficiency in the city.

Improved energy efficiency of street lighting, water and wastewater, and district energy systems at the city level can have profound effects on carbon emissions. At the individual or neighborhood level, energy efficiency can have profound cost-saving effects. Local governments have the opportunity to equitably distribute the benefits of energy efficiency through incentivizing and subsidizing upgrades and retrofits.

Guiding Questions:

1. Which buildings in your city or county are performing poorly, and where are they located?
2. Which neighborhoods experience the highest energy costs relative to energy use?
3. How can your city or county provide incentives or subsidies for energy efficient upgrades/ retrofits?

Credit: Renewable Energy

Equity Alignment: Structural Distributional Transgenerational

This credit intends to transition the local energy supply towards renewables.

The science and technology of renewable energy is key to moving toward net zero carbon emissions. In addition, a just transition must still be prioritized amid the promising innovation. Laborers losing employment in this process must have equitable access to training and opportunity in the energy sectors of the future.

Guiding Questions:

1. Are there examples of community solar projects in all neighborhoods and districts?
2. Who is receiving the benefits of your renewable energy deployment?
3. How can the city or county support a just transition to the clean energy economy through workforce development training and other programs?

Credit: Net Zero Carbon and Climate Action

Equity Alignment: Transgenerational Structural Procedural Transformational

This credit intends to progress towards carbon neutrality by decoupling economic growth of the city from greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to a changing climate through mitigation and adaptation efforts.

It is becoming increasingly common for cities, towns and counties to be addressing frontline communities, disproportionate investment and harm, and systemic environmental injustices in climate action plans. Some local governments are also publishing separate climate action plans solely centered on equity and sustainability. The dedication to and acknowledgement of equity at the forefront of adaptation and mitigation efforts leads to institutionalizing and operationalizing just climate action.

In addition, local governments can act uniquely to deliver on their net zero emissions targets through climate action plan adoption, estimating the GHG intensity of the economy and devising equitable strategies for urban decarbonization.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can climate action in your jurisdictions address both your net zero emissions target and climate justice goals?
2. How are the climate adaptation and mitigation efforts identifying and serving the most vulnerable communities?
3. How can systems changes ensure that future impacts of climate change do not disproportionately burden your community?

Credit: Grid Harmonization

Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational

This credit intends to improve operational efficiency of the energy system and encourage consumer participation in energy use optimization.

The operational efficiency of an energy grid must prioritize those most vulnerable to outages. Energy use optimization must target those who are already benefitting from being able to afford high energy bills, who use the most energy and who are among a higher earning group within the grid's reach. Regressive measures such as fines around energy use limits will disproportionately burden lower-earning residents on the grid.

Guiding Questions:

1. Can all residents benefit from load management and demand response strategies?
2. Do you have examples of pilot or demonstration projects in the neighborhoods most affected by past outages?
3. Are there opportunities for community members to participate in conversations about the city or county's grid resilience efforts?

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES (MR)

Prerequisite: Solid Waste Management
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural

This prerequisite intends to effectively and efficiently manage waste in the city.

Poor and inconsistent solid waste management can greatly affect neighborhood property values, public health, residents' pride in place, and attitudes toward certain areas in a jurisdiction. Illegal dumping affects many cities and, like waste management services, is largely out of residents' control and disproportionately impacts low-income neighborhoods. Lifting communities up by providing thorough solid waste management services can increase neighborhood property value, pride and investment.

Guiding Questions:

1. Where do solid waste services in the jurisdiction fail to serve residents equally?
2. Are solid waste services affected by scheduling, frequency, funding and access issues? Any other issues not listed?
3. Who does/doesn't have access to recycling and/or composting (if relevant) services?

Prerequisite: Waste Performance
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural

To support waste management and move towards net zero waste.

To avoid redundancies, see Solid Waste Management Prerequisite for relevant guiding context and questions.

Credit: Special Waste Streams Management
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational

To divert special waste streams from landfill and incinerators and recover and recycle reusable materials.

A special waste stream is non-municipal solid waste generated within the city, including industrial, electronic, agricultural, chemical, biomedical, hazardous, pre-consumer food waste and/or construction, deconstruction and demolition waste. Some of these can greatly impact air quality, rivers and streams, drinking water, and many more aspects tied to quality of life and public health. Diverting these waste streams from landfills and incinerators to recovery and recycling facilities can greatly reduce the environmental and public health implications of exposure. Historically, in the United States, minority and low-income communities are disproportionately burdened by exposure to hazardous waste and pollution from special waste streams[21].

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the special waste streams in your jurisdiction? Who lives close to or downstream from hazardous waste sites?
2. Where are landfills and incinerators currently located? Who lives nearby?
3. Is there consistent monitoring of special waste stream sites for pollutants and contaminants? Does it need to be improved or done more frequently?

Credit: Responsible Procurement
Equity Alignment: Transgenerational Transformational Structural

This credit intends to rethink the entire approach to purchasing and encourage use of products and materials that have environmentally, economically, and socially preferable life-cycle impacts.

Reliable life cycle information when procuring and importing products and materials from outside a jurisdiction may be difficult to find. Supporting local manufacturing businesses has multiple benefits for current residents and future generations. Local residents benefit from wealth-building opportunities, while carbon emissions are lowered by decreasing embodied carbon in the building sector and shortening the transportation distance of materials.

On the topic of procurement and equity, it is also important to acknowledge the history of inequitable extraction of resources, largely from countries in the global South, by the United States. This extraction often contributes to environmental degradation and human rights violations.

Guiding Questions:

1. From where are the majority of your jurisdictions' materials sourced?
2. How are human and non-human lives affected/benefitted/harmed during manufacturing/ procurement/use?

Credit: Material Recovery
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational

To recover materials from the waste stream which have a high value and provide mechanism for the reuse, repair, remanufacturing, repurposing, collection, and recycling of such materials thereby moving towards a circular economy.

Repair and reuse practices can contribute to climate change mitigation by preventing resource depletion and diverting materials away from landfill or incineration. The labor-intensive nature of repair and reuse activities aids job creation, and the availability of such building materials reduces the costs of construction at any scale. Taking this one step further, accessible education and training around repair and reuse ensures that all people can gain skills from this resource in a safe and effective manner.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can a diverse stakeholder group be formed to support and incentivize material recovery policy and incentives?
2. In what ways can education around repair and reuse be made more accessible to the community?
3. Where are the reuse centers and drop-off facilities located? Do they reflect distributional equity?

Credit: Smart Waste Management Systems
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transformational

This credit intends to improve operational efficiency of the waste management system.

Similar to the context around the Solid Waste Management credit, it is imperative that waste services are equitably distributed throughout a jurisdiction. When it comes to smart waste management especially, a local government body must assess which parts of a city, town or county can benefit most greatly from such a service.

Guiding Questions:

1. How is everyone in the community experiencing the benefits of improved waste management systems?
2. In what ways/when/how do certain communities have more access to this resource? Why?

QUALITY OF LIFE (QL)

Prerequisite: Demographic and Social Equity Assessment
Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Procedural

This prerequisite intends to understand the population demographics, socio-economic conditions, community assets, and housing characteristics of the area to reveal potential disparities among socio-cultural groups or neighborhoods.

Overlaying data from different factors directly tied to one's quality of life may reveal surprising trends, unintended gaps and geographical inequities. Doing such an assessment using a mapping tool is essential to understanding the history of movement, disinvestment and race/class disparities in your jurisdiction.

Guiding Questions:

1. How does this assessment bring to light internal equity gaps, improvements and/or opportunities?
2. After overlaying data, which statistics are surprising/expected? What next steps are needed to address identified equity gaps?

Credit: Social Services and Infrastructure
Equity Alignment: Distributional Transgenerational Structural Transformational

This credit intends to provide facilities and services to residents that help meet their social needs, maximize their potential for human development, and enhance community well-being.

Equitable distribution of social services and infrastructure is an important first step in uplifting your jurisdiction's most disinvested communities. As important, if not more important, is the sustainability and adequate upkeep of such services and infrastructure to ensure long-term benefits.

Guiding Questions:

1. What neighborhoods are especially in need of increased social services and infrastructure? How is this need determined?
2. Which specific services are most beneficial to different neighborhoods?
3. Who is responding to community surveys?
4. Have you implemented a demographic survey for your boards and commissions to ensure they are reflecting the community's diversity?

Credit: Economic Growth and Opportunity
Equity Alignment: Structural Distributional Transgenerational Transformational

This credit intends to promote inclusive, equitable, economic growth and prosperity.

Equitable access to wealth-building opportunities is vital to breaking out of systemic and racialized cycles of poverty.

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the current barriers to employment in the jurisdiction?
2. How does the city's workforce represent diverse employees in leadership roles?
3. How can the local government sustainably support small businesses?

Credit: Environmental Justice
Equity Alignment: Structural Distributional Transgenerational Transformational Procedural

This credit intends to ensure equitable protection from environmental pollution.

While protection from pollution is a substantial component of environmental justice (EJ) and initially started the EJ movement, it is important to note it is just one of many components. Environmental justice is also about having a voice in local decisions, pollution-related or not, and having equal access to essential needs. Ultimately, environmental justice ensures all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or income, have the right to experience the benefits of a clean and healthy environment.

Using tools like vulnerability assessments and strategies like compensated community knowledge-sharing can greatly aid in creating the targeted policies and programs aimed at eliminating environmental injustice.

Guiding Questions:

1. Who is experiencing environmental injustice?
2. How can environmental justice be served without physical/social/cultural displacement?

Credit: Housing and Transportation Affordability

Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational

This credit intends to provide an adequate and diverse supply of location-efficient and affordable housing options.

Housing and transportation affordability is intricately linked to land use, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, climate policy and equity. Locating affordable housing near transit centers that provide reliable service to employment centers, affordable fresh food, social services and institutions, and green spaces is vital to reducing a city's carbon footprint while increasing quality of life.

Guiding Questions:

1. In what areas are affordable housing with access to transportation to major employment centers being built or planned?
2. What is the site selection process for such projects?
3. How successful have you been in producing and preserving affordable housing in the community? What are lessons learned that you could share with others?
4. As a frontline community to extreme weather caused by climate change, how are resources distributed to the unhoused and unsheltered population?

Credit: Public Health

Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational

This credit intends to promote positive public health outcomes and reduce health risk factors.

Public health is intricately linked to almost all aspects of our built environment. The health of people is fundamental to livability, yet the quality of health is profoundly influenced by factors outside the traditional health care system. The social, economic and physical conditions in which people live, otherwise known as the social determinants of health, affect choices regarding behaviors that ultimately affect health outcomes.

Guiding Question:

1. How are factors, including food access, air quality, housing quality, industry, congestion, noise, access to care and access to education, influencing the public health of the various communities?

Credit: Educational Opportunity and Attainment

Equity Alignment: Distributional Structural Transgenerational Transformational

This credit intends to achieve equitable attainment of quality education for individuals from birth to adulthood.

The quality of education and school facilities in the United States is linked to where one lives. Funding and resources should be based on need and equitably distributed to all schools within a district, regardless of neighborhood. Schools often serve as resilience hubs in times of emergency and recovery, subjecting entire communities to distributional inequity.

Guiding Questions:

1. How are learning performance and graduation rates different among schools in your jurisdiction? Why?
2. How are education quality needs assessed, and how are resources distributed?
3. In what ways are schools relied on as emergency and recovery hubs, and what infrastructure is in place for schools to meet those needs?

Credit: Civil and Human Rights

Equity Alignment: Transformational Procedural Structural Transgenerational

This credit intends to uphold a process that ensures the civil and human rights of all people is fundamental.

This credit speaks to the true institutionalization and operationalization of anti-racism, equity and community-first efforts into processes to reverse past harms and transform communities to be just and sustainable.

Guiding Questions:

1. In what ways do the demographics of your voters match the demographics of your jurisdiction?
2. How can diversity, equity and inclusion principles be fully integrated into everyday work and policy?

INNOVATION (IN)

Credit: Innovation

Equity Alignment: Transformational Distributional

This credit intends to encourage cities to achieve exceptional or innovative performance.

Innovation in cities is typically associated with cutting-edge technology and smart systems marketed to younger and wealthier populations. These innovations are important, but they must also serve all people. Unfortunately, due to decades of historically unjust city planning practices, ingraining equity in climate action somewhat requires innovation in going against the status quo.

Guiding Question:

1. How may there be disproportionate benefits from the innovation happening in your jurisdiction?

REGIONAL PRIORITY (RP)

Credit: Regional Priority

Equity Alignment: Transformational Distributional Procedural

This credit intends to provide an incentive for the achievement of credits that address geographically specific socio-economic and environmental priorities.

Ensuring cohesion and connection between rural, suburban and urban areas in a region through fair housing, transportation and access to services can lead to greater sustainability, equity and economic prosperity while decreasing carbon emissions.

Guiding Questions:

1. Which areas of your region are more vulnerable, and how are they being prioritized through regional policy decisions?
2. If there are rural communities in your region, how are they being uplifted?

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