Framework for Equity

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MAPC

Prioritizing Equity

Just as climate change is an existential challenge, so too is it an opportunity to re-imagine our region's future, and to make that future both safe and equitable for all who live and work in our communities. Massachusetts municipalities are increasingly undertaking climate mitigation and adaptation strategies and are starting to seek out ways in which to advance equity within those measures. By centering equity in our plans, we can build a future that not only is safer for all, but also allows each individual in the region the ability to thrive.

An equitable net zero carbon future must be the goal for all our communities. In equitable planning, we must be conscientious of the history of our region,

the differences in how populations are able to respond to a changing climate, and the needs of residents. We recognize that the effects of climate change systemically impact Environmental Justice communities and other vulnerable populations inequitably. The comparatively negative health outcomes that people of color in the Metro Boston region experience are one example. The inequities we see today will persist in the future if we do not act.

Accordingly, it is essential to assess the potential social equity impacts of climate mitigation strategies. MAPC's **Net Zero Framework for Action** is therefore informed by this **Framework for Equity**. For our plans to be actionable and for our vision of the future to be equitable, we

must center equity throughout the planning and implementation of our net zero strategies. An equitable **Net Zero Plan** investigates the anticipated outcomes of its proposed actions on environmental justice communities and other vulnerable populations.

There are many ways to define equity. To the right is a definition we can use to orient the development of our **Net Zero Plans:**

Equity

Equity is a practice that takes into consideration the history, policies, power structure, and culture of a community and responds to these existing dynamics by calibrating tools and resources according to each population's needs.

Defining Equity

Definition of Equity from MAPC State of Equity Policy Agenda[1]

In MAPC's State of Equity Policy Agenda, we describe equity as the state of being we are striving towards:

Equity is the condition of fair and just inclusion into a society. Equity will exist when those who have been most marginalized have equal access to opportunities, power, participation, and resources and all have avenues to safe, healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives. It requires restructuring deeply entrenched systems of privilege and oppression that have led to the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens over multiple generations. Society will be stronger when the promise in all of us is actualized.

It is important to note that equity is both a practice and a state of being. Progressing toward equity is a communitywide effort that involves ongoing and innovative solutions. Equitable solutions change power dynamics in order to correct inequitable outcomes.

Related Terms:

Multiple terms are commonly used interchangeably in conversations about equity. In creating an equitable plan, it is important to be intentional and specific regarding the terms employed and to identify the populations that a measure seeks to impact. We often hear the terms diversity, inclusion, and equality used. Diversity and inclusion each denote important steps toward equity but are not themselves the same as equity. The word equality can be confused for equity. However, when equality is held as the goal, policies that can sound neutral but perpetuate existing inequalities can result.

Diversity[2] is the presence of different groups, populations, and identities in a community.

This term refers to the demographics of a community or organization. While fostering a diverse community can be important to a municipality's planning process, increasing diversity is not the same as creating equity.

Inclusion is the state whereby diverse groups have access within the community.

Increasing access can involve centering populations that have historically been left out of discussions or decision-making processes. Within the context of the planning process, inclusion can encompass thoughtful community engagement and partnerships with community organizing groups. Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging.
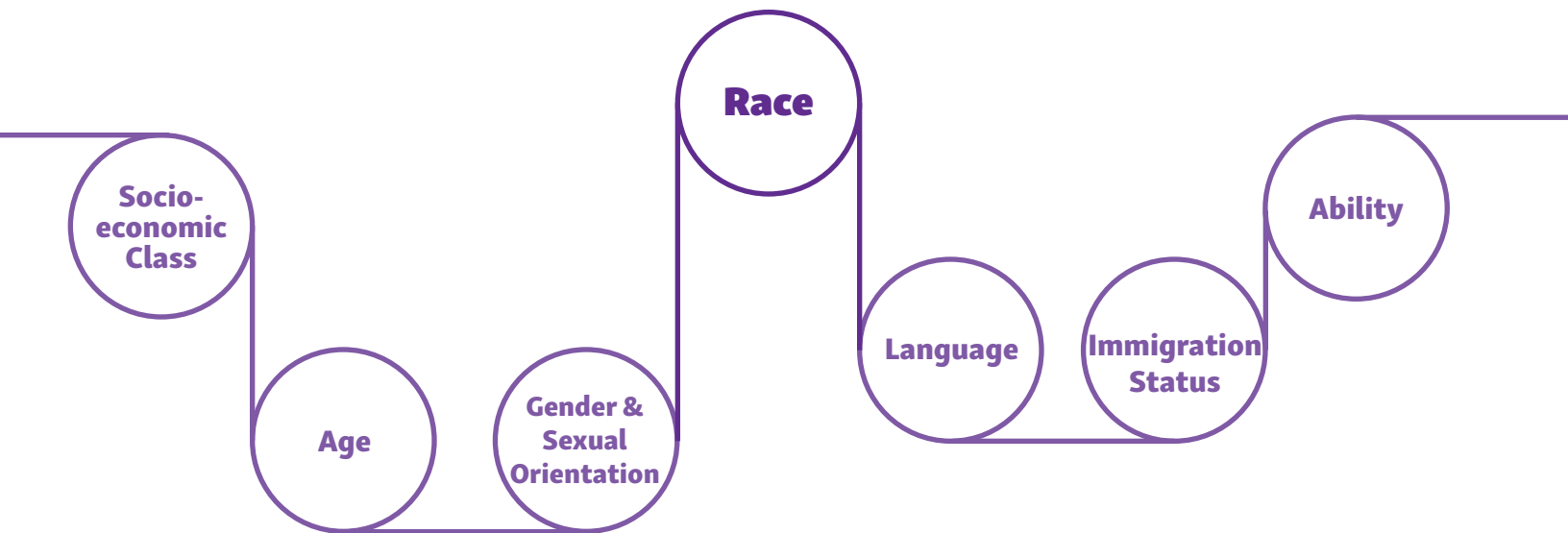
What about Equality?

Equality is the state of equal treatment across all groups. Equality does not take into consideration differences in needs between groups of people or the historical and systemic differences in condition. There |are often unattended impacts of ignoring this context.

If existing systems and power dynamics are not addressed, outcomes will continue to be inequitable. For this reason, we focus on equity in this framework and throughout our work.

How Climate Intersects with Existing Inequities

Socio-economic Class

Age

Gender & Sexual Orientation

Race

Language

Immigration Status

Ability

Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities[3]

This term highlights communities that are experiencing disproportionate effects of climate change due to inequalities that currently exist.

Massachusetts lists a community as an Environmental Justice Community if any of the following are true:

- Block group whose annual median household income is equal to or less than 65 percent of the statewide median ($62,072 in 2010); or

- 25% or more of the residents identify as a race other than white; or

- 25% or more of households have no one over the age of 14 who speaks English only or very well – English Isolation

To develop equitable climate solutions, it is important to identify which groups climate change has affected in the past as well as which populations a measure or solution will seek to serve. In equitable climate plans, strategies are tailored so that they serve the same groups that have been or are most impacted by the issue addressed.

For example, we can consider a strategy to transition heating loads from oil and gas infrastructure to heat pumps and solar thermal technologies. This strategy could present barriers for many groups.

In our region, people of color disproportionately experience poor indoor air quality, so an equitable planning process would engage people of color throughout the development of an electrification strategy. The resulting strategy might highlight ways to ensure people of color benefit from the improved indoor air quality that these technologies produce. An equitable electrification planning process would also focus on low-to-moderate income residents. These residents would be less likely able to afford an energy retrofit and may also be at risk of displacement if naturally occurring affordable housing is updated and rents increase. An equitable strategy here might include ways to maintain the affordability of housing and subsidize the cost of heat pumps.

There are additional groups that would be disproportionately affected by an electrification strategy. The key to making an equitable plan is to both identify as many of these potential impacts as possible, as well as to prioritize the input of those impacted.

Here are some examples of how existing inequities can be compounded either by the effects of climate change or by an inequitable mitigation or adaptation strategy. By thinking through how different populations are impacted differently, we can plan equitable solutions to better reach and serve vulnerable populations.

These examples are not, and are not meant to be, representative of the experiences of all individuals within these populations. Instead, they highlight just a few of the many ways that our climate challenges intersect with existing inequities.

Race

Housing in the Metro Boston region has long been, and continues to be, segregated by race. Residents of color are more likely to be renters and, because of that, face barriers in adopting solar PV since they do not own their rooftops.

Socioeconomic Class

Low-to-moderate-income residents are more likely to require public transportation in an emergency storm event, which may not be available.

Ability

People with disabilities may have uninterruptable electric needs, such as an elevator, stair lift, or refrigerated medicines, that would make them vulnerable in the event of a power outage.

Immigration Status

Undocumented or mixed status families face barriers to engaging in the planning process such as the fear that engagement would endanger their ability to stay in the community. Consequently, their voices are often not represented.

Language

Households with limited fluency in English may find a community's climate plan and related resources inaccessible unless translated.

Age

Since our youngest and oldest residents are more susceptible to changes in temperature, urban heat island effects disproportionately affect these groups.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Since women are twice as likely to suffer from anxiety disorders[4] and since both natural disasters and changes in heat and flooding increase the rate of anxiety and depression in communities,[5] climate change would likely exacerbate this disparity.

Conducting an Equity Assessment

MAPC's State of Equity Indicators report can be a resource to help understand who has been historically impacted in your community. MAPC's new research on social vulnerability to climate change can help unpack who will be most impacted by changes in our climate.

To ensure that a potential measure or policy will address equity impacts in the community, a municipality can conduct an **Equity Assessment**. An **Equity Assessment** relies on research, both from quantitative and qualitative data, and analysis that is guided by the following questions as they pertain to the measure or policy:

Who has been historically impacted?
- Who has been impacted by the change this measure aims to mitigate?
- Who has been impacted by previous or current solutions?
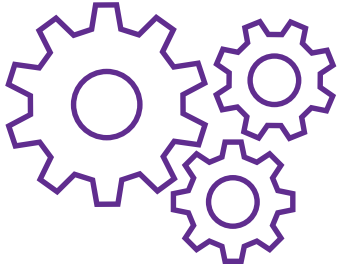
Who may be impacted in the future?
- Which populations are most vulnerable to increasing climate change?
- Who is least likely to enact this solution without action?

How will the co-benefits of this measure be distributed?
- If there are assets associated with this measure such as a park, a building, or a renewable energy system, where will they be located?
- Where and how will health benefits be realized?
- Who will reap any economic benefits from the measure?
- What other benefits, if any, will be generated and who will receive them?

The **Equity Assessment** should aim to be transparent both in its creation and communication by including the communities impacted.

Implementing Equity in a Community Net Zero Action Plan

An equitable process should be thoughtful and center the voices of those most impacted. This approach often will be a change from previous ones. In this centering, communities should remember that intent is not the same as impact. Communities that continually challenge their assumptions about their approach, measure equity impacts, and actively listen to and encompass new voices in their decision-making will more likely be successful in this process.

The following list is meant to guide communities through high priority actions that can be taken to implement equity at each stage of the net zero planning process. This list is not comprehensive. Communities should build upon and customize the list as they map out their planning processes.

Stage of Planning	Actions
Budgeting and Scoping	• Include equity and an **Equity Assessment** of climate mitigation actions in the scope of work for the municipality's **Net Zero Plan**. • Scope and budget for additional community engagement sessions both before and after the plan is created. This is a priority budget item since an equitable plan needs to provide a variety of accessible ways for feedback and ideas to be raised. • Budget for translation and interpretation services and childcare during stakeholder engagement meetings. • Budget for and create a plan to compensate community organizing groups and other stakeholders for their time and efforts to bring vulnerable populations to the process.

Research	Conduct an **Equity Assessment** to find:
	• Which populations currently live and work in the municipality
	• Who attends existing meetings, and who has found previous processes to be inaccessible
	• Who has lived in the community historically, and where have forces like gentrification, redlining, and other types of displacement taken place
	• Which languages are spoken
	• Which populations are disproportionately affected by air quality, flooding, urban heat island effect, and other climate impacts in the community
Stakeholder Engagement	• Involve local community groups that represent hard to reach populations.
	• Create a variety of ways to engage in the planning process.
	• Prepare to tackle difficult conversations with your internal team before stakeholder meetings, determining how the team can be supported and how coded language or micro-aggressions will be handled.
	• Administer surveys and ask for feedback on integrating equity in the planning process.

Coded language
can take the form of questions or comments that, on the surface, are about the issue at hand, but functionally serve to maintain the status quo of inequity.

Resources on Equity in Climate Planning

The following are a sampling of Net Zero and Climate Action resources that include language on advancing equity.

NAACP: Just Energy Policies Model Energy Policies Guide

This model, part of NAACP's "Just Energy Policies and Practices Toolkit," outlines how municipalities and states can enact equitable energy policy.

King County, WA: Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan

The plan includes an Environment and Climate chapter.

Washington, DC:
Clean Energy DC: Climate and Energy Action Plan

The plan includes a chapter on "An Equitable Transformation" and analyzes equity impacts alongside climate impacts.

Boston, MA: Carbon Free Boston Report

Carbon Free Boston includes a "Social Equity Report" as well as action items related to equity. The Social Equity Report analyzes how equitable policies can be designed within the sectors of buildings, transportation, energy and waste. Carbon Free Boston informed the 2019 update of Boston's Climate Action Plan.

Providence, RI: Climate Justice Plan

The City of Providence created a Racial and Environmental Justice Committee (REJC) to lead this plan's creation. The REJC began with anti-racism trainings and created a racial equity analysis as well as priority policies and best practices. The committee is composed of residents of color who represent frontline communities in the city. The Plan includes Future Stories which present nine visions of a transformed and equitable Providence to guide the planning process of the present.

To learn more about MAPC's approach to equity in all of the agency's work, visit https://www.mapc.org/get-involved/equity-at-mapc/

End Notes

1 MAPC State of Equity for Metro Boston Policy Agenda https://equityagenda.mapc.org/. Definition with inspiration from Policy Link, King County Office of Equity and Social Justice

2 With inspiration from Dr. Arnisa Amante, CEO of Disruptive Equity Education Project (DEEP). https://digdeepforequity.org/ via The Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance. Race Talk: A call for a diversified planning and development field. June 13 2019. https://www.great-neighborhoods.org/post/race-talk-a-call-for-a-diversified-planning-and-community-development-field

3 https://www.mass.gov/environmental-justice "Environmental Justice (EJ) is based on the principle that all people have the right to be protected from environmental pollution and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment."

4 Nina C. Donner and Christopher A. Lowry. Sex Differences in Anxiety and Emotional Behavior. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3805826/

5 American Public Health Association. Making the Connection: Climate Changes Mental Health. https://www.apha.org/~/media/files/pdf/topics/climate/climate_changes_mental_health.ashx