



## Actualizing Equity 2019 : From Principles to Practice

# Holding the Line: Equity in Transit Oriented Development

At our **May 2019 Actualizing Equity event**, we explored how organizers have mobilized – and are mobilizing – to integrate affordable housing, health, economic development and other equity issues into the visions and implementation of coming transit investments. We heard from Denise Butler, Program Manager for African Career, Education and Resource Inc; Nestor Garcia, Community Outreach Director for the Harrison Neighborhood Association; and Kenya McKnight, Founder and President of the Black Women's Wealth Initiative – with facilitation from Avi Viswanathan, Program Director for the Nexus Community Engagement Institute at Nexus Community Partners.

### White dominant decisionmaking

While transit is often relied on most heavily in immigrant and communities of color, our perspectives are still vastly underrepresented at transportation decision-making tables. Even when we are, the emotional and intellectual toll is high due to microaggressions from tables that are guided by the worldview of white leaders, who need constant education around racism.

### Unaddressed barriers to public input

Given the years-long development timelines for transportation projects, community is often engaged in ways that don't ask the right questions, nor provide the full context and information to provide meaningful input. Participation – especially for projects with long-range outcomes – is particularly challenging for historically marginalized communities, a reality that is often overlooked and seen as indifference by government and public agencies.

### Understanding history and repairing harm:

For government and public institutions, engaging and connecting with community requires historical context. "Not just the past 50 years of trauma that the government has created but the much bigger and broader picture," says Avi Viswanathan. "You're not always going to be able to know everything about a community, but you have to be in a place to learn it and want to learn it. That makes a huge difference."

### Centering community in driving solutions & resourcing engagement:

Public projects succeed when community voices are integrated and drive solutions – and hit roadblocks when that input is absent. Government agencies are often constrained by internal lines of hierarchy and accountability but make notable gains when they recognize and resource the expertise of community organizations, rather than allocating scarce dollars exclusively to consulting firms with no connections to community.

## Government

## Disconnects and challenges

## Community

### Lack of transparency and trust of community expertise:

Even when community is at the decision-making table, our ideas and proposals are not considered viable but the processes or assumptions of government leaders are not fully transparent. "Break down the dollars to us so we can understand and say this is the problem with your equation right here – and here's another way to solve it so everyone is considered," says Denise Butler.

### Inability to capture economic benefits:

Because of structural racism and active disinvestment, impacted communities are rarely positioned to cash in on policy wins. "As activist-organizers, we're very effective at shaking the trees and apples are falling everywhere – but we don't have baskets to catch them ourselves," says Kenya McKnight. "We need to develop the businesses and institutions that can capture and implement those opportunities."

### Articulating vision and stakes:

Community wins when there is a clearly articulated vision that encompasses the interests of local residents, along with the public and private sectors. To achieve equitable transit-oriented development, McKnight explains, we must recognize and be transparent about the economic realities and profit motives of all actors at the table and find areas of mutual benefit so community doesn't lose out on opportunities to access transit AND to build wealth.

### Sustained power and influence:

Shaping the vision and co-creating the project scope and goals is just the first step. "For us, it's about implementation and execution and keeping community involved," Butler says. That means being involved in station area plans to ensure truly affordable housing is included. It means gaining seats on advisory and oversight bodies, so businesses and impacted residents have power to influence and hold stakeholders accountable to stated outcomes, not just provide initial input. "But we still need to be very vocal and consistent with how we want to be treated and what we want to get out of the process," Butler adds.

## Alignment and equity

# Resources and tools to advance equitable transit-oriented development

## Southwest LRT Equity Commitments

The Southwest LRT transitway is a critical opportunity to increase economic prosperity and advance racial equity in North Minneapolis, as well as across the region. The Alliance supports a network of community-based organizations focused on how communities of color can benefit from the project, which developed targeted strategies intended to create wealth and economic opportunity.

### Examples of commitments include:

- Investing in infrastructure and amenities like heated bus shelters and transfer stations
- Expanding affordable housing by funding housing choices affordable to residents and workers within corridor
- Working with local business districts and neighborhood associations on station planning
- Developing a system that connects job seekers with employment and entrepreneurial opportunities

[Download the Commitments](#)

## Blue Line Coalition Housing Policy Platform

During the engagement process with residents along the Bottineau LRT Corridor, the Blue Line Coalition found that concerns around housing affordability and displacement were common themes. They identified an increase in housing costs will have a significant impact on the most vulnerable corridor residents. Currently, 42% of Bottineau Corridor households are cost-burdened and 56% of non-white corridor residents live in areas experiencing development pressure.

So the Blue Line Coalition created a housing policy platform calling on elected leaders to enact the following policies:

- Just Cause Eviction
- Tenant Relocation Assistance
- Notification of Sale and Right of First Purchase
- Inclusionary Housing
- Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Affordable Housing Acquisition Fund

[Access the Platform](#)

## Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard

The Alliance partnered with the Harrison Neighborhood Association, Umoja Community Development Corporation, and members of the Community Engagement Steering Committee to create the Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard, which helps communities, developers and planners ensure that the principles and practices of equitable development, environmental justice, and affordability are available to all residents.

### The tool includes metrics around:

- Community Engagement
- Transportation
- Housing
- Land Use
- Economic Development

Organizations have adapted the scorecard for their particular neighborhood needs, to address transportation and as a tool to help determine grant allocation.

[Access the scorecard and review case studies](#)

## Speakers

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