



Actualizing Equity 2019: From Principles to Practice

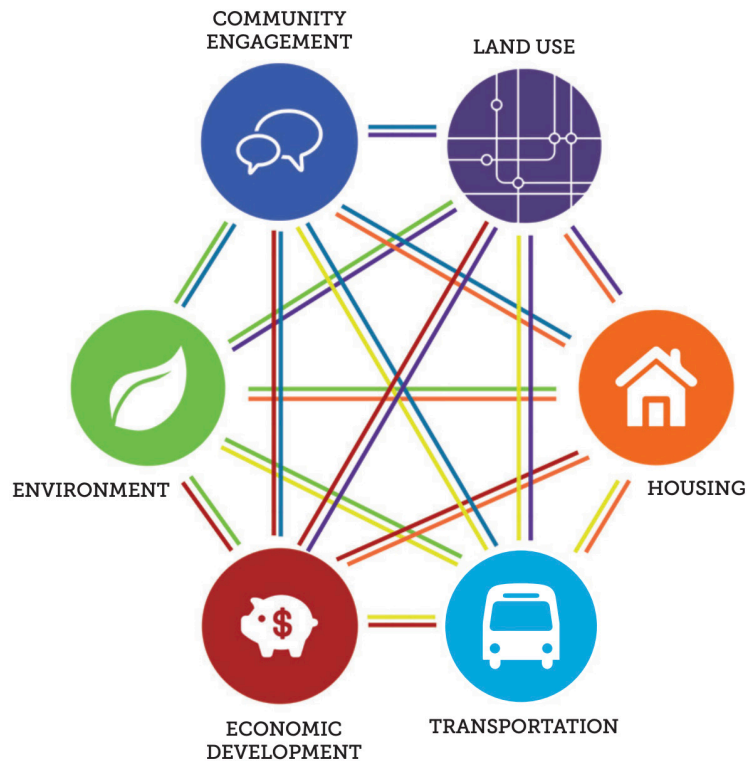
Creating our Vision for Equitable Housing

Renters now make up the majority of residents in Minneapolis, St. Paul and many other communities across the Twin Cities metro – and tenant organizing is building momentum to reframe how we approach housing justice. For years, “affordable housing” has been at the forefront of many advocacy efforts, with a focus on ensuring the cost of rent is within reach for historically marginalized, low-wealth households. But we know real housing equity goes far beyond affordability, encompassing tenant screening, unit size, cultural practices and so much more. Our **September 2019 Actualizing Equity event** included a panel discussion and collaborative visioning session to continue the leadership of Community Stabilization Project and set a new trajectory for equitable, not just affordable, housing.

EXPANDING OUR FRAME

In 2018, the Alliance Regional Equity Agenda (Our AREA) was developed with local leaders to highlight strategies to meet the needs and aspirations of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities to heal harm and trauma; stimulate regenerative power; dismantle structural racism; and end the displacement and gentrification of our communities. In it, community leaders **called for a reframing of our collective approach to housing advocacy:**

“Beyond affordability, we call for equitable housing. Equitable housing offers more than affordability—it must also be safe, dignified, and accommodating to the needs of the household in both size and location. Safe housing provides healthy and structurally sound shelter that provides a sense of peace and belonging without fear of displacement or harm. Dignified housing protects tenants from exploitative leasing practices and unjust evictions by property owners and allows individuals and families to establish a home. Accommodating housing meets the needs of all, including large families and multi generational households, giving families of all sizes a choice in where they live.”



Equitable housing is INTERCONNECTED

Leaders from **Community Stabilization Project** explained that historical and current approaches to housing advocacy have been narrowed to finding shelter that meet certain income levels. This fails to place housing in the greater matrix of needs facing any resident or family, including a healthy living environment, access to transportation and opportunities for employment. An equitable housing frame addresses these lived realities by explicitly considering housing as a key plank — not an isolated asset — in the ecosystem of regional equity.

“What would need to be included or emphasized in our current framework to move us from affordable to equitable housing?”

Insights from our panel of community experts including Antonia Alvarez from Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza; Carolyn Brown from and Jim Erkel representing Community Stabilization Project; Kaaha Kaahiye from Defend Glendale and Public Housing Coalition, Robert Lilligren from Native American Community Development Institute; Judy Moe from Richfield Disability Advocacy Partnership; and Ivory Taylor from HOME Line...

DISABILITY ACCESS

Equitable housing ensures that people with disabilities have housing options that are accessible to and meet their physical or other needs in ways that provide dignity, safety and connection without perpetuating or pushing a family or individual into poverty. It also requires that people with disabilities have the ability — not just the invitation — to participate in the housing planning and decision-making processes by requiring and promoting disability access and accommodations *as the standard* for meetings and community gatherings.

FAMILY UNITY

Equitable housing addresses the needs of families of all cultures, backgrounds and sizes. It not only creates homes that are big enough for multi-generational households, but also ensures that renters are able to extend shelter to any and all individuals in their care networks by removing barriers like overly restrictive occupancy limits or screening practices that exclude those who have experienced incarceration. It actively addresses the needs of those exiting foster care or immigrant detention to ensure no one remains separated from family because of lack of housing.

INTEGRATING HEALING

Equitable housing centers people and their lived experiences, acknowledging the social and systemic factors that lead to housing instability and homelessness. It recognizes the intergenerational and ongoing trauma present in communities that have been — and continue to be — impacted by structural racism, state-inflicted violence and intentional withholding of public and private resources. To address that, equitable housing replaces white social work saviorism with community-informed and culturally appropriate healing and knowledge.

RENTER POWER

Equitable housing integrates renters' rights to legal and other resources that ensure tenants have the power and agency to protect themselves against landlord exploitation, and address unsafe or unfair housing conditions. It deconstructs the social hierarchy that values homeowners over renters as essential community leaders and actively invests in tenant stability. And it creates opportunities for community ownership and stewardship of land, property and assets like sustainable energy technology.

UNIVERSAL SHELTER

Equitable housing, first and foremost, recognizes housing as a human right. It rejects homelessness as a fundamental and untenable injustice and creates systems that provide supports and dignified shelter for ALL, including those without immigration status, individuals with chemical dependency and other populations that face barriers to social services based on social and political norms of market capitalism and white supremacy. It recognizes the essential role of and adequately funds public housing, and prioritizes people over profit.

WEALTH GENERATION

Equitable housing does not restrict low-wealth families or individuals to apartments with affordable rent but rather envisions, co-creates and expands ownership models that acknowledge and seek to repair generations of land theft and racist housing policies that have barred communities of color from the wealth generation of homeownership. This could mean prioritizing rehab funds for distressed homes; providing insurance and inheritance safeguards for families without immigration status; and other community-defined solutions.