2021 Event Series
Actualizing Equity in Community Development

Who benefits from new development, or redevelopment, in our cities? For generations, the answer to that critical question has too often been private interests focused on profit rather than community members invested in collective wellbeing. But the *Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard* is providing a powerful tool to organize Black, Indigenous and people of color communities, build power for equitable outcomes and create an actionable process to engage with developers and other stakeholders. At our July 2021 Actualizing Equity event we learned how the scorecard itself is evolving to include livability and heard from organizers and institutional allies who are using the tool in their work.

Integrating Equitable Livability

In 2020-2021, the Alliance worked with community organizers and stakeholders to add a new category and lens to the *Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard*: **livability.**

WHY?

Livability has been weaponized against communities of color.

The concept of livability has been — and often continues to be — used in narrow ways that have harmed, displaced and excluded marginalized communities. Distinct from smart growth priorities, like bike lanes or housing density, equitable livability centers the *ability* of our communities to *live* and thrive in their historic places, cultural centers and chosen neighborhoods.

Livability is embodied.

Stop. Take a breath. Feel your feet on the ground or your back in your chair. Much of our strategizing and organizing is thinking and doing; livability asks us to drop into our bodies to begin a conversation and relationship with belonging and wellbeing as it related to development.

WHAT?

Equitable livability:

- ensures *restorative, regenerative and healthy outcomes* for the people most impacted by an investment or project; puts intention and focus on the *history, power and wellness* of the community and promotes *inclusion and belonging*

- acknowledges the impact of structural and environmental racism on marginalized communities and works to ensure the project design *actively addresses past harms*

- considers opportunities for *community ownership* of material and natural assets, including housing and retail units, and green spaces for food cultivation and energy generation

- integrates elements that *enhance networks of community care* and encourage social interaction and belonging by creating or restoring spaces for residents to connect, heal and build power with each other

- *and more...*

Tips for using the *Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard* in community

From Monica Bravo (West Side Community Organization), Princess Haley (Appetite for Change) and Yordi Solomone (organizer / livability work group)

Start from a shared analysis

For the West Side Community Organization (WSCO) in St. Paul, this meant a strong racial equity analysis and hyper-local historical understanding of systemic exclusion and trauma for immigrants and communities of color on the West Side. Through its three-part "Action to Equity" workshops, WSCO engaged more than 100 participants over the course of multiple weekends to set the foundation for the development and use of its scorecard.

Define "community"

The term community can be co-opted by specific interests or used in broad ways that erase cultural or other important distinctions and identities. Be clear about whose voices are essential, what community means on your terms — and make that insight imperative, not just aspirational. For its scorecard, WSCO centered insight from youth, elders and renters — and made sure their strategies and process were designed with those folks in mind.

Center frontline organizers and residents

Without real community power behind it, a tool like the scorecard can be irrelevant or harmful. Being intentional about convening conversations that align with the availability of and provide financial resources to frontline organizers and directly impacted residents can ensure a scorecard is connected to the real priorities of community rather than a conceptual exercise for advocates or allies.

Reassess timelines

Initially, WSCO thought creating their scorecard would take a summer. Instead, it took several years. Aggressive timelines and internalized urgency can deplete capacity and undermine meaningful community input and leadership. Decisions around development projects themselves also tend to progress quickly. Co-creating a set of mutual agreements with government stakeholders and/or developers at the start of any project can ensure the process moves at the speed of trust, power and agency of directed impacted communities.

Prioritize accessibility

Advocacy around equitable development often uses language and approaches that are removed from the everyday lives of community members. As WSCO developed their scorecard, they constantly asked themselves, "If our materials were left on the bus, would a rider pick it up? Would they be engaged? Would they see themselves — and real power — in the process?" Prioritizing accessibility is an ongoing process, from translation into different languages to constantly refining how we talk about development in ways that connect and resonate.

Guidance for government and institutional partners

From Hannah Gary and Krysten Ryba-Tures from the Metropolitan Council's Community Development department

Step back from a narrow focus on numbers: Public sector staff are often very focused on data. How many jobs will be created? How many housing units will be built? Equitable development demands that planners, funders and government staff consider the experiences of residents, as well. For instance, will those housing units enhance or disrupt the sense of belonging for BIPOC residents or historically excluded communities?

Include historic metrics to understand community context: Current demographics and inequities are central to equitable development — but recognizing past harms is essential, as well. For instance, the Met Council has created overlays of racial covenants and redlining to inform and provide appropriate context for development decisions.

Recognize your positional power: From providing a building permit to allocating public subsidies, government and agency staff play a critical role in development and must acknowledge their power as a gatekeeper or bridge between developers and community.

Create and advance accountability measures: Too often, government and city staff abdicate responsibility by pointing to policies or processes that give developers more power than community. Find ways to embed equity into those policies and processes. For instance, Met Council has shifted the scoring for its Livable Communities Grants to not only *include* equity metrics but disqualify any development that scores poorly on those metrics, even if they score highly in other areas.

Download the scorecard, case studies and resources
thealliancetc.org/equitable-development-scorecard

Learn more about Actualizing Equity
thealliancetc.org/actualizing-equity