



Equitable Development Symposium Recaps

WHAT IS JUSTICE IN EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT?

In his keynote address, **NEERAJ MEHTA**, Director of Learning at the McKnight Foundation, explored the definition of justice and what it requires from us in repairing past harms and creating stronger, more inclusive and thriving communities. Prior to McKnight, Neeraj served as the director of community programs at the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, supporting the intersections of research justice and community organizing in partnership with community-based organizations and government across Minnesota.

RECOGNIZING RACIALIZED IMPACTS VERSUS UNDERSTANDING WHITE INTEREST

Using his own experiences, Mehta outlined how his perspectives have shifted in identifying the root of causes of injustice and seeing the patterns that lock us into moving pieces forward rather than changing the rules of a broken game.

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Watch a 4-minute clip
of Mehta’s remarks



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The American planning tradition was developed within the context of settler colonialism, slavery, and Black code laws, and has operated under Jim Crow, separate and unequal, white hysteria, and colorblind racism. From the outset, planning has not been characterized by an inclusivist, urban conversation, but an exclusive white conversation.”

Dr. Rashad Williams



“THE SOLUTION IS NOT GOOD GOVERNANCE BUT COUNTERVAILING POWER.”

Drawing on the scholarship of Dr. Danielle Allen, Mehta explored the distinction between traditional notions of community engagement that focus on increasing participation in institutional processes and equality in the distribution of resources to an orientation towards justice that provides pathways for communities to build and pull the levers of power themselves.

GOOD GOVERNANCE	JUSTICE
Civility: Replacing division, conflict and partisanship by increasing good-faith dialogue and common sense	Difference without domination: Being free from arbitrary interference and engaged in relational reciprocity
Transparency: Making public and private sector action more visible and subject to public opinion to improve responsiveness and accountability	Co-creation and co-ownership of political institutions: Pathways for all of us to pull the levers of power
Rationality: Using data and technocratic expertise to create neutrality and depoliticize various bodies and actors	Collective decision-making that draws on the knowledge sources of all of us



Dr. Danielle Allen

Freedom from domination is more than just protection from arbitrary interference. It also requires an equal share of control. Control over the institutions, the laws, the policies, and procedures that interfere with folks' lives. Justice cannot exist without people having greater control over their choices and lives and being freed from control that comes from a history of domination from an elite few.

“ARE WE SIMPLY BEING GOOD ROOMMATES OR ARE WE BUILDING A NEW HOUSE?”

Building on the metaphor Olufemi Taiwo explores in his book “Elite Capture,” Mehta asked participants to consider whether we’re targeting the architecture of injustice or focus on changing the interactions within the structures that already exist. When we don’t recognize the confines of our thinking, he argued, “the conversation is rigged.” Using the analogy of a house, Mehta asked...



“Is it possible that the questions we start with limit our ability to advance truly transformative change?”

“Our room is just one room in a house built by someone else on a foundation of values and principles like racial capitalism, extractive economics, and a society that values and deploys resources more to those who are white than others. This is a room that history has built for us.”

“My question is do we really want to live here? Do we want to do our work in this room? Who decided this was the question we should be discussing today? Rather than framing the conversation “how can development repair past harms and contribute to a stronger, more inclusive and thriving community” what if we instead asked “how do we stop the profiteering interests of predatory developers and the political and business elites that support them from building a Twin Cities where only some of us can afford to live?”

Access more resources from the symposium at thealliancet.org/equitable-development-scorecard