

Equity Assessment Tool

City of Austin, Texas

#Reality Focused, Results Driven

Population: 974,890

Innovation

Criteria:

- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)

OR

- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
- The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

Describe Your Innovation

(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)

The Equity Assessment Tool is a new strategy used in City departments to identify and address inequitable policies, practices, procedures, and outcomes. It has four assessment sections: department/institutional inequity, resource allocation, community engagement, and alignment with Austin City Council priorities.

The tool was developed through a co-creative process with community members and city staff who are interested in promoting equity in the City of Austin through a collective called the Equity Action Team. This body of more than 100 individuals dedicated over 850 hours to this development process. The City's Equity Office began piloting the tool in the summer of 2017 with eight City departments (Courageous Eight): Human Resources, Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Libraries, Transportation, Austin Water Utility, Public Works, and Austin Public Health. These eight departments volunteered to pilot the tool, and most had some familiarity with the purpose of the tool and equity concepts.

These eight departments are now entering the "Action Plan" phase of the Assessment, in which the Equity Office collaborates with them to identify at least three items identified in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis of their department. The department then establishes actions to address these items, along with specific internal and external metrics to measure the action. A further 13 departments are now undergoing Assessment as part of our second cohort, implementing process improvements and Tool refinements learned from the pilot cohort, with a third cohort planned for next year.

Collaboration

Criteria:

- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative

In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?

Our primary initiators were Austin Immigrant Rights Coalition, Mama Sana/Vibrant Woman, allgo, and the African-American Health Alliance, who advocated the Austin City Council for the implementation of a Racial Equity Assessment Tool to be used on the City's programs and services. Concurrently, the Hispanic/Latino Resource Advisory Commission was advocating for the creation of a Diversity Office. In response, the City Council directed the City Manager to "evaluate the impact that existing City policies and practices have on equity, evaluate best practices in other cities, and develop recommendations for addressing current race and socioeconomic-based inequities throughout the City."

We have and continue to engage these stakeholders by creating a city-wide community group called the Equity Action Team. This team meets monthly, and is open to any individuals or organizations who request to join. Currently, this Team is over 150 members, representing a diverse group bridging City Staff, community organizations, county officials, and national organizations who are all located in Austin and want to participate in the ongoing conversation around equity in Austin

If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.

Significance

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

We do believe this is replicable in other jurisdictions, and have advised other local Cities exploring the creation of their own Equity Offices to model our framework. This framework is a process of Normalizing, Organizing, and Operationalizing. Normalizing is the training we do with departments to ensure we have a collective understanding of definitions as we move into doing the work. Organizing is the work we do with the community, connecting those most directly affected by the programs with those who are designing the programs. Operationalizing is the

Assessment Process, in which we work with departments to dig into their history and policies, and how that impacts their current programs, services, and relationship with the community.

Effectiveness

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

The most significant obstacle has been our policy of leading with race. We do this with the recognition that the creation and perpetuation of racial inequities has been baked into government, and that racial inequities across all indicators for success are deep and pervasive. We acknowledge there are other groups of people marginalized, such as by gender, sexual orientation, ability and age. Focusing on racial equity provides the opportunity to introduce a framework, tools and resources that can also be applied to other areas of marginalization. In this, chiefly important is our racial equity framework that is clear about the differences between individual, institutional and structural racism, as well as the history and current reality of inequities, which has applications for other marginalized groups. Further, looking at the particular history of Austin, race and ethnicity has been an issue that keeps marginalized communities from effectively coming together. An approach that recognizes the inter-connected ways in which marginalization takes place can serve to bring people together and build relationships that have not existed in the past.

What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?

We measure our success by the percentage of City departments who have undergone Equity Assessment, which currently stands just under 50% and is on schedule to reach 100% by 2020. This includes 90 Staff members who have received Undoing Racism training. The second is the Action Plan completion percentage. After the results of our departmental Assessments are analyzed by our third-party partners, we work with the departments to develop an Action Plan to address the findings of the Assessment.

Beyond this accountability, we also believe in the credibility of our Assessment because of the cyclical process. We don't assess a department once and assume our work is done. Rather, we get back with them two years later and assess them again. This continued process allows us to reach different divisions, programs, and issue areas within departments, and to craft solutions for new barriers that emerge. Within this process, we are also looking for case studies with shorter turnaround times from which to learn and draw new inspiration. One example of this is the work we did with the local Quality of Life Commissions, representing African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic/Latino, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer communities. In the past, there was an environment of competition for limited funding. For this budget cycle, as a result of the framework utilized within our Assessment Tool, the Equity Office was tasked to bring these Commissions together and establish a new and

different process for them to advise and influence the budget. By working together, the Commissions received a 600% increase from past years in the funding allocated for their recommendations.

Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.

Austin Chronicle, the local independent weekly newspaper, did a brief overview of our first Assessment Report: <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2018-06-22/equity-under-the-lens/>

KXAN, the NBC affiliate, did a broadcast and written piece on the first report: <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/austin-plans-next-steps-after-first-equity-report-finds-gaps/1299875934>

CitiesSpeak included the Office and the Assessment Tool in an overview of other steps the City is taking to address racial inequity: <https://citiesspeak.org/2018/08/08/how-austin-texas-is-addressing-racial-equity/>

KUT, the local NPR station, profiled our work with the Tool and the Institutional Racism Task Force. This was one of the Office's earliest actions, and helped to build relationships and inform the Assessment process: <http://www.kut.org/post/equity-office-tries-make-good-year-old-report-institutional-racism>

CityLab did an interview with Chief Equity Officer Brion Oaks covering the Amazon HQ2 bids and his view on it from an equity lens: <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2017/12/on-approaching-the-amazon-hq-bid-through-an-equity-lens/547697/>

Presentation

Criteria:

- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

Example Social Media Post

Austin is called the most livable, most innovative city, and a must visit. That's just half the story. Austin is also most segregated. The Racial Equity Assessment is designed to change that. Hear its story at #TLG2019.

Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say "Well, I need to attend this session!"

The Racial Equity Assessment Tool (REAT) works to dismantle institutional racism and advance racial equity. Designed in collaboration with those directly impacted by these systems, the REAT brings the lived experience of the community into departments to bring them from the "All Neighborhoods Matter" mindset, building an understanding of how certain neighborhoods have and continue to matter over others. Hear how the Equity Office administers and implements this Tool, working to achieve racial equity.

How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable "takeaway" from the session?

Our session will be creative by presenting an interactive experience of what equity means. Too often, participants begin with their personal idea, and it derails the conversation. In having an interactive example, we will illustrate the definition of equity we use within our work.

Whether it is entertainment or discomfort, talking about race, and the racial history of the United States, doesn't lack for audience engagement. We will facilitate group activities by drawing from the many workshops we have done with City staff. The presentation hasn't been planned, but we may ask for reactions to our "Values vs. Realities" sections, or have participants look within themselves to understand how the history of the interaction between race and government in the United States informs and colors every interaction government employees have with people of color. We don't lack for takeaways, however. In doing racial equity work and presentations, we know how important it is to build understanding and belief. One of the main goals of our workshops is to launch participants into a deep consideration of what they've been doing, how they've been thinking, and how they can change their day to day work to transform their department from within.

[Anything else you would like to add?](#)