



NERRC ECONOMIC RESILIENCE LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Introduction to the Access, Process, and Outcome Framework for Equity in Economic Development

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Executive Summary

Economic development is multifaceted and intricate, encompassing various interconnected aspects of employment, education, resource accessibility, business growth, infrastructure, and quality of life. Local contextual factors, historical inequities, and systemic inequality can challenge the implementation of equity policy goals or the establishment of standardized guidelines for best practices. Defining equity in the context of regional economic development requires reconciling the diverse definitions of equity, inclusion, and diversity from different sectors and bodies of literature and practice. This National Economic Research and Resilience Center (NERRC) Quarterly Research Brief synthesizes that literature and practice to propose an overarching framework for equity that can guide ongoing analysis and support decision-making at various levels.

Concepts of equity are often described and measured as having three key interconnected elements: Access, Process, and Outcome.

- **Equity of Access** refers to the ability for all community members, especially underserved populations, to benefit from opportunities or resources within a community, ranging from environmental services and protections, food, and transportation options, to employment.
- **Equity of Process** is characterized by the fair and intentional involvement and inclusion of all stakeholder groups in economic development decisions affecting their communities, including planning processes, the development of policy and regulation, and the implementation of initiatives and programs.
- **Equity of Outcomes** is characterized by increasing opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals or meet their needs through appropriate access and inclusionary processes.

The Access, Process, and Outcome (APO) framework provides a common understanding for practitioners across the diverse field of economic development. This framework elucidates the underlying drivers that can influence outcomes, either positively through intentional investment and action, or negatively through neglect, oversight, or exclusion. By employing the APO framework, users can collectively work towards achieving equitable outcomes in economic development, ensuring that all individuals and communities have fair and equal access to opportunities, that the processes are inclusive and just, and that the outcomes are equitable for all stakeholders.

In the context of economic development generally, and within the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) specifically, the theory of change focuses on building local capacities targeted to local and regional conditions and needs. EDA's mechanisms for intervention include grant investments in planning, technical assistance, infrastructure construction and access to capital and more, designed to leverage existing regional assets. Therefore, efforts to successfully advance equity will focus on how improved equity of access and process within the mechanisms for intervention, can achieve more equitable outcomes in the growth of local economic development capacity. For this brief, EDA programs and projects are used as examples to illustrate the APO framework. Improvements in access or process themselves are not equitable outcomes; they are simply the conduit for activating opportunity and potential of an individual, firm, or community.

Introduction

Long-term economic prosperity requires the engagement of all individuals and assets in a community—those communities who have high levels of inequality struggle to reach their full economic potential and fall behind in terms of economic growth and quality of life. The idea of equitable economic growth targets both equity and growth as two mutually reinforcing aims that lead to a more durable economy and a more prosperous way of life.

Economic development is complex, spanning topics of employment, education, resource accessibility, business growth, infrastructure, and quality of life. Local contextual factors can make it difficult to operationalize policy goals or develop uniform guidelines for best practice in an economic development context. Defining equity in regional economic development takes those complexities and folds in the myriad of definitions from different sectors on equity, inclusion, and diversity. This National Economic Research and Resilience Center (NERRC) Quarterly Research Brief marries a review of literature and practice to provide a common underlying framework for equity that supports ongoing economic development analysis and practice.

The Access, Process, and Outcome (APO) framework presented in this research brief provides practitioners across the diverse economic development enterprise a common understanding of the underlying drivers that can alter outcomes, both positively through thoughtful investment and action or negatively through neglect, oversight, or exclusion. This framework is further supported by illustrative examples to show how each component can be considered in economic development. Individual case studies deepen the examples and ground the framework. The APO framework does not define all possible factors contributing to contextual or historical inequity. It also does not articulate the totality of possible interventions and investments. Instead, it focuses on those within the traditional scope and remit of major economic development players, such as the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Imperative for Addressing Equity

Historically, a number of economic development approaches, policies, and interventions have exacerbated or created disparities and inequalities, highlighting the imperative of establishing equity and diversity as a critical priority.^{1,2} Without a deliberate focus on equity, economic development policies may leave certain groups behind, perpetuating disparities in income, quality of life, education, and employment opportunities. The exclusion of certain communities, inadvertent or not, reduces access to good paying jobs and overall labor force participation for specific groups, leading to a gap between full economic potential and realized economic activity. Subsequently, that gap in economic potential has lingering effects due to a lack of diversity in the workforce and resulting limitations for innovation and growth.³

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Economic development policies that exclude certain groups can also have significant social and economic costs, such as reduced economic output and productivity, increased poverty rates, higher crime rates, and increased social unrest.⁴ Promoting equity and diversity in economic development policies can lead to positive outcomes such as increased innovation, higher levels of entrepreneurship, and a more inclusive economy that benefits all members of society.⁵

Federal Equity Policy and Guidance

One common challenge facing economic development stakeholders is a lack of a commonly accepted definition of equity across government, academic, and private sector organizations.⁶ Furthermore, a lack of unified approach to equity exists across programs, mission areas, and disciplines. As the suite of equity guidance grows within the Federal Government and beyond, this lack of unification will continue to cause confusion and hamper collaboration and efficiency. Three recent executive orders (EOs) seek to address both issues.

EO 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, published on January 20, 2021, establishes a unified framework for equity policy and action across the Federal Government. The EO specifically directs Federal agencies to identify and address inequities in their programs and policies that have disproportionately affected underserved populations, including communities of color and other populations that have been adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. It establishes an interagency working group to coordinate the Federal Government's efforts to advance equity, as well as a data working group to collect and analyze data on equity issues.⁷

More recently, EO 14035, the *Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*, establishes a common equity definition for Federal agencies as "the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment." The definition is broad enough to enable agencies to operationalize equity across a variety of topic areas and policy priorities, and to interpret how concepts such as fair, just, and impartial can be most appropriately applied within the scope of the department or agency's mission.

On February 16, 2023, an extension of EO 13985 titled *Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* was built from the original EO 13985 and compliments EO 14035, reinforcing the embedded focus on equity in Federal policymaking and service delivery to build a more equitable nation. The EO acknowledges further development is still needed to reduce barriers for underserved communities, many of which have endured generations of discrimination and disinvestment, and that it is the responsibility of the Federal Government to remove these barriers. This order builds upon the previous equity-related EOs through the extension and strengthening of equity advancing requirements for agencies, and positions agencies to deliver better outcomes. It begins with the establishment of equity-focused leadership across the Federal Government to ensure the delivery of equitable outcomes through government policies, programs, and activities. Furthermore, it strives to embed equity into government-wide processes, highlighting the delivery of equitable outcomes in partnership with underserved communities and create economic opportunities in rural America and urban equitable development. Finally, it prioritizes the advancement of civil rights through equitable procurement and data practices.

Equity in Federal Economic Development Efforts

Born from the Area Redevelopment Administration Act of 1961, and later the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, EDA was established to create and retain jobs and to help stimulate industrial and commercial growth in distressed rural and urban communities across the nation.⁸ At the broadest level, this core mission of EDA aligns with objectives and the underlying intent of EO 13985. With a historical focus on distressed communities, EDA's programs and investments explicitly seek to positively impact underserved individuals, firms, and communities.⁹

Out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Rescue Plan Act led to the creation of new programs such as the Build Back Better Regional Challenge and Good Jobs Challenge that are designed to foster regional collaboration, catalyze lasting recovery, and address challenges due to decades of disinvestment. In addition, EDA elevated equity as a principal [investment priority](#) in June 2021, helping ensure that future investments can more intentionally achieve equity and inclusion goals.¹⁰

The challenge of translating the intent of equity-based policies into meaningful programmatic design and action remains. Definitions alone do not provide guidance on how to address underlying or contextual inequities. For example, in some cases, communities that were highly dependent on natural resource extraction industries may have been historically exploited by the private sector through low-wage jobs with a lack of benefits. Consequently, they may choose not to define future economic development success in terms of outside private sector investment, a standard metric for economic achievement. Instead, these communities may be looking for ways to create new community-focused economic growth, perhaps in the creative sector or other nontraditional high-growth sectors. By moving beyond surface-level definitions of equity through the application of an analytic framework, programs and interventions can better address underlying contextual issues that might not otherwise be immediately evident.

New funding opportunities established through the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 and appropriated through the Fiscal Year 2023 omnibus appropriations bill such as the Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program (Recompete) and the Tech Hubs Program, have created pathways to address equity through new and different approaches.¹¹ For example, the legislation specifies new eligibility criteria, such as low population or the prime-age employment gap. These changes also allow for the structuring of additional metrics, outcomes, and process measures to serve as eligibility and evaluation metrics.

EDA's definition of equitable economic development:

"Economic development planning or implementation projects that advance equity across America through investments that directly benefit 1) one or more traditionally underserved populations, including but not limited to women, Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders or 2) underserved communities within geographies that have been systemically and/or systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity such as tribal lands, persistent poverty counties, and rural areas with demonstrated, historical underservice."

Equity in Economic Development: Foundational Concepts

Very simply, equity refers to the fair or just treatment of all individuals or groups.¹² Equity acknowledges that individuals inherently have different advantages and disadvantages, leading to different needs in order to attain access to the full benefits of society. While definitions of equity vary throughout literature and policy, recurrent themes include highlighting the goal of equality, fairness, and justice in decision-making, and centering on the concepts of fairness and equality. **Equity** is a more active concept, trying to understand and deliver to people what they need. In contrast, **equality** focuses on ensuring everyone gets the same resource or treatment regardless of need.¹³ Equity goes beyond equality factors (e.g., equal income, utility, welfare, rights, or liberties) to build toward outcomes for society as a whole.

Fully realizing equitable outcomes requires that equity-focused actions must be present at all steps of the decision-making processes. In particular, actions need to be targeted to help all individuals, with a primary focus of supporting underserved communities that have historically been denied such opportunities to increase agency, expand choices, and fully participate in economic life in their communities.¹⁴

Underserved Communities

“If capacities are underdeveloped, then government is the entity that can provide the programs and policies to move toward economic development.”¹⁵

Economic stability serves as the foundation for future strategic investment and growth and is required for the communities to make meaningful plans and take long-term action. Cyclical underinvestment in communities and sectors, however, has created a system of persistent poverty in many areas across the United States.¹⁶ The ensuing lack of stability in underinvested communities perpetuates a cycle of ongoing uncertainty, leading to further disinvestment. Historical infrastructure funding and development decisions have led to many low-income communities continuing to experience persistent poverty.¹⁷ For example, areas with mostly low-income residents have fewer tax dollars to fund schools resulting in fewer educational opportunities, less money to invest in critical infrastructure, and local government offices that have to provide more services to more people with less funding to do so. This pattern, in turn, can disincentivize new businesses to start or move to an area, creating lower wages and higher unemployment, and resulting in a perpetual narrative of poverty, crime, and an economy functioning under its potential.

“...the persistence of systemic disparities is costly, and eliminating them has the potential to produce large economic gains. Of course, the benefits go well beyond the inclusion of previously sidelined or underutilized resources. The opportunity to use one’s talents fully, unbridled by prejudice or other artificial barriers, is at the foundation of a dynamic economy. Individuals invest in themselves based on the returns they expect to receive. Persistent barriers and systemically lower payoffs to effort depress these incentives, potentially leading to lower human capital investment and further solidification of gaps in outcomes. In other words, more equitable outcomes matter both for the level of Gross Domestic Product and for the process of sustained economic growth. This means that changing opportunity affects both current and future economic output.”

Buckman, S. R., Choi, L. Y., Daly, M. C., & Seitelman, L. M. (2022). “The economic gains from equity.” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2021(2), 71-139.

Communities facing challenges with ongoing underinvestment frequently have higher concentrations of populations identified as underserved in the literature.¹⁸ For example, individuals or communities who were granted banking rights or labor rights more recently are still experiencing higher costs for economic opportunity or services (e.g., higher interest rates or higher cost to access services). An almost 1:1 overlap exists for the EO 13985-defined individuals “who belong to communities that often have been denied such treatment...” and those who have been denied banking or labor services throughout U.S. history.¹⁹ Similarly, those communities whose economies have been built on the basis of low-cost labor are still addressing needs for economic diversification and strategic planning.

Distributional Justice

In the literature, equity largely consists of addressing fairness in the societal distribution of burdens and benefits, across determinants and outcomes, with the goal of reducing disparities for the most disadvantaged, by, for example, race and ethnicity, income, gender identity, citizenship status, or age.²⁰ These themes appear consistently across a wide range of disciplines, including economic development, transportation, community development, climate adaptation, public health, and emergency management. The concept of fairness in access is frequently described as distributional justice, which can be thought of as *the equal access to services, resources, burdens, and benefits*.^{21,22} In economic development, specifically, building equity includes reducing barriers for underserved communities in order to expand economic opportunities and choices, increasing agency in the outcomes of their lives, and increasing the quality of life.

Meaningful Involvement/Procedural Justice

Meaningful involvement is a critical component of equity across disciplines. This means *that anyone who would be affected by decisions impacting their community and quality of life should be given a meaningful voice with opportunity to influence those decisions*.²³ Furthermore, this involvement goes beyond inclusive planning and incorporates the totality of ensuring implemented procedures meet the needs of the underserved, opening the opportunity for meaningful participation. Meaningful involvement is also reflected in the phrase “procedural justice,” which highlights an equitable and transparent decision-making process through wide community engagement.²⁴ This engagement is not only the incorporation of local knowledge and perspectives but must also be carefully designed to include vulnerable groups, further distributing the decision-making power among the stakeholders. Through this involvement, equity becomes a focal point in planning processes because the stakeholders involved in the process have meaningful representation to advocate for their interests.

Contextual Equity

Contextual equity pertains to *understanding the pre-existing conditions that limit or facilitate access to decision-making procedures, resources, and benefits*.²⁵ When evaluating equitable outcomes, starting with an understanding of the systemic social, economic, and political factors that led to disparate outcomes is essential for making equitable economic development decisions.²⁶ More broadly, the context of equity in economic development is the social, governance, economic, and cultural context, both past and present, that influence an individual’s ability to gain recognition, participate in decision-making, and advocate for fair distribution.²⁷

Context, in many cases, relates to the community dynamics and the associated authority and power structures. For example, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and income, are consistently tied to

inequitable outcomes across communities. These outcomes range from new park sites and more frequent investment in higher income areas with existing amenities, to elementary school children with longer bus rides having lower test scores.²⁸

Contextual equity feeds directly into another component of equity in literature, the distribution of outcomes. The concept of equity is rooted in the notion that the benefits and burdens should be widely acceptable and distributed fairly across different facets of society.²⁹ The understanding of the broader situational context, or social landscape of a community, is often the basis for investments into equity improvements. The existing conditions in a community, or barriers, which prevent individuals within a community from accessing benefits, participating in the investment decisions, and having a voice in policy decision-making, are critical in developing equitable outcomes.

Contextual equity simultaneously considers how past structures result in inequitable outcomes and the understanding that the distribution of impacts from future decisions and policy will be different among all actors in a community. Ultimately, how decision makers characterize different populations shapes their ability to consider the interests of those populations in the decision-making process.³⁰

Framework for Operationalizing Equity in Economic Development

Common components of equity identified in the literature include access to services and benefits, decision-making inclusivity, and fair distributions of outcomes. These themes characterize equitable assistance to all individuals, with a primary focus on supporting underserved communities that have historically been denied such opportunities to increase agency and expand choices.

The APO framework detailed below builds off these common themes and existing equity frameworks in other disciplines.^{31,32} It presents a method for understanding how specific programs and investments can be designed or targeted to better achieve desired equity outcomes as part of the larger theory of change in economic development.

Situational Context

A local community's social and economic context is dynamic and multifaceted, inclusive of historical policies, trends, and patterns—some of which lead to inequities—and present conditions. This intricate background may be representative of large-scale, systemic forces, but each community manifests this complex context differently. However, one must also note that identification of historical inequities does not immediately suggest current and future needs. Situational Context is grounded in the contextual equity literature, recognizing how past experiences and social structures result in inequitable outcomes. Accordingly, the use of the framework, and the implementation of equity initiatives more broadly, must start first with an understanding the local social landscape.

Access

Equity of *Access* is the concept of ensuring everyone who can benefit from resources, services, and opportunities is both aware of their existence and able to take advantage of them. It involves recognizing and addressing systemic barriers that prevent certain groups from accessing programs and assets and taking steps to ensure that everyone has the support and resources they need to succeed. This concept encompasses equal access to public services, rights, resources, and benefits as well as equal protection from environmental and economic harms. Distributional justice is one of the core components of the *Access* element of equity, seeking a better life for all.

Access, while a familiar term, often has impacts much further reaching than inability to participate in a process. Inequitable distributions of access along socio-demographic and socio-economic parameters are often associated with long-term negative health, educational, and economic outcomes due to the disproportionate share of burdens placed on their communities.

Issues of access can compound both negatively and positively. In the case of accessibility to public urban green space, a traditionally inequitably distributed public amenity, lower rates of access to green space for underserved populations results in negative health impacts due to increased temperatures, which places pressure on local health clinics, and increases time away from work and school.³³ In a positive context, urban citizens with greater job access tend to experience more

Equity of **Access** refers to the ability for all community members, especially underserved populations, to benefit from opportunities or resources within a community, ranging from environmental services and protections, food and transportation options, to employment.

commuting choices and lower commuting costs along with more opportunities for employment and income.³⁴ These positive outcomes can negatively impact other communities. For example, urban transportation options frequently concentrate in areas of higher income, leading to increases in property values that price-out underserved communities due to property taxes and cost-of-living increases in those areas. With the possibility of both positive and negative compounding results, one must consider that local and situational context can amplify externalities, meaning that results are often unequally distributed based on historical access.

Access is vital in economic development to prioritize the fair distribution of resources and benefits a community provides.

Process

By prioritizing equity during early phases of program development, stakeholders can identify and address barriers to access and inclusion up front, develop targeted interventions to support underrepresented groups, and ensure that all participants benefit from the program's resources and services. Ensuring meaningful involvement affirms that anyone who would be affected by decisions impacting their communities and quality of life should be given a meaningful voice with opportunities to influence those decisions. Examples of applicable decision-making processes include planning, land-use and zoning, program design, and the allocation of resources through budgeting processes, grant programs, or other mechanisms.

Equity of **Process** is characterized by the fair and intentional involvement and inclusion of all stakeholder groups in rule-making and decisions, including planning processes, the development of policy and regulation, and the implementation of initiatives and programs.

Although Equity of *Process* is primarily concerned with “who is at the table” when programs, plans, resources, and other assistance are created, allocated, or executed, it should also include consideration of other factors that might intentionally or incidentally inhibit equitable outcomes. For example, a public engagement process that takes place during the workday may limit the ability of citizens who do not have vacation time to participate. Likewise, grant processes that impose a heavy bureaucratic burden, either through the application requirements or metric reporting, can exclude participation from communities that lack the institutional capacity to meet those obligations successfully.

The *Process* equity component of the APO framework draws heavily from the concepts of meaningful participation and procedural justice.

Outcome

Equity of *Outcomes* refers to scenarios in which no group bears a disproportionate share of the burdens or benefits. It is the result of the steps taken to improve equity of access and process and to address systemic and historical inequities.

It also refers to both “consideration of the broad social, governance, economic, and cultural contexts, past and present (e.g., power dynamics, gender, education, ethnicity, age)”³⁵ that define underlying community conditions and

Equity of **Outcomes** is characterized by increasing opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals or meet their needs through appropriate access and inclusionary processes.

dynamics, as well as the future result of equitable access and process participation.

When discussing equitable outcomes, concepts of equity can be easily confused with the similar (but distinct) concepts of equality and parity. For example, equal distribution of aid during disaster recovery on the surface could be construed as 'equitable' but would fail to consider the differentiated needs of groups or individuals, much of which may be due to historical disinvestment or exclusion. Existing inequalities, which are one type of outcome, can also be seen as the result of previous, and often systemic, process exclusions or denial of access to necessary services and resources.

Relationship Between Framework Elements

In the APO framework, the equity of access and process are active elements where policies and programs can be designed and implemented to achieve more equitable outcomes. The degree to which greater equity can be attained is the extent to which a program or investment improves equity of access and process in relation to the resources within its control. To be successful, these active elements must be directly responsive to the local situational context to address the appropriate underlying systemic inequities.

The access and process elements may also relate to one another, depending on the context, to build better equity outcomes. For example, as more voices are part of the decision-making process, access to resources may also improve and become more equitably distributed. Similarly, improved access to resources may make participation in planning processes, as an example, possible for more members of the community.

However, improvements in access or process themselves are not equitable outcomes. They are simply the conduit for activating opportunity and potential of an individual, firm, or community. While greater equity in access or process is a worthy objective, until underserved citizens can maximize benefits from opportunities in a meaningful way, equity of outcomes are difficult to detect and measure. The scale of the equity intervention in access and process will need to be sufficient to account for the situational context to enable equitable outcomes.

As more equitable outcomes are realized, a virtuous cycle develops, the situational context becomes more equitable than previously, and efforts to build future equity of access and process will result in even stronger equity outcomes.

THE ACCESS, PROCESS, AND OUTCOME FRAMEWORK

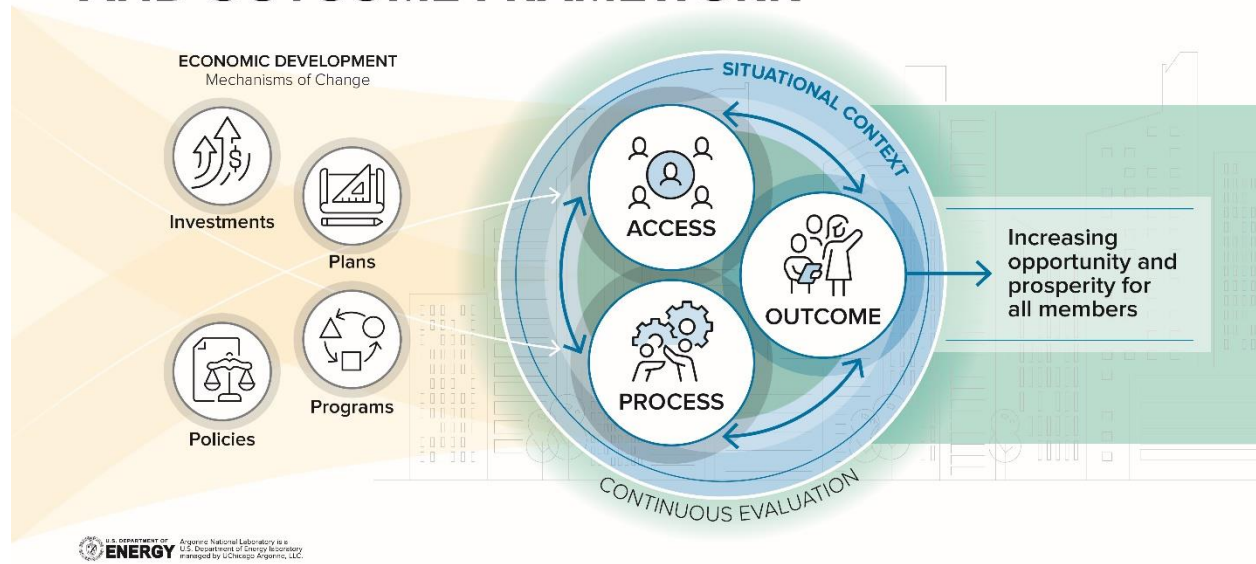


Figure 1: In this framework, access, process, and outcome are shown as interrelated elements because they are often interconnected and contribute to achieving the desired goal. "Access" refers to the ability to obtain or use resources needed to achieve the outcome, while "process" refers to the steps or methods used to reach the outcome. The "situational context" provides a background for the current situation and the desired outcome. The work of building equitable and inclusive local economies is never finished and therefore there is a need for continuous evaluation.

Using the APO Framework in Policy and Practice

The recognition of historical and persistent underservice and exclusion based on race, geography, or other factors is an important step in any attempt to build equity and fairness in policy and programs. However, operationalizing intent requires situating equity within an existing theory of change and subsequent alignment with a coherent set of the mechanisms of intervention. An organization's theory of change is used to articulate the desired outcomes through programs or intervention as well as the steps needed to reach those outcomes. It helps to clarify the underlying assumptions and logic that guide an organization's decision-making process and actions. Explicitly tying equity considerations and goals to the theory of change is important because it sharpens and clarifies the realistic scale and scope of change that can occur through intentional programming. For the purposes of this brief, Argonne analysts use EDA-specific examples to demonstrate the connection between the APO framework and programs and policies. However, these concepts are more broadly applicable. Community-based case studies are presented in Appendix A.

In the context of economic development generally, and within EDA specifically, the theory of change focuses on building local capacity that is targeted to local and regional conditions and needs. EDA's mechanisms for intervention include grant investments in planning, technical and financial assistance, infrastructure construction, and access to capital designed to leverage existing regional assets.³⁶ EDA has structured these interventions along programmatic and activity pathways, collectively seeking to achieve a set of desired outcomes, known collectively as realized outcomes, as articulated in the organization's Logic Model.³⁷

Examples of Realized Outcomes for EDA programs include the following:

- Establishment growth/survival
- Job growth
- Earnings/wage growth
- Revenue/sales growth
- Opportunities/equity
- Increased share of cluster activity

In short, as local capacity increases, more realized outcomes are achieved.

Consequently, efforts to successfully advance equity will focus on how improved equity of access and process within the mechanisms for intervention (e.g., EDA's programs and grants) can achieve more equity of outcomes in the growth of local economic development capacity. Failing to intentionally tie programs and activities to the theory of change may result in well-intentioned metrics, such as those indicating greater minority participation or an increase in program spending in underserved communities, but could still be unsuccessful in delivering meaningful, equitable change.

Since its inception, many of EDA's initiatives and investments have been designed to advance equity, both through increasing access to resources in underserved communities and by promoting inclusive planning processes. Recently, equity has been elevated to the organization's top investment priority, resulting in the launch of several new initiatives aimed at increasing access to resources and training and

a significant update to guidance for the inclusion of equity considerations in the development of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS).

Increasing Access to Technical Assistance

In October 2022, EDA, in partnership with the New Growth Innovation Network, launched the Equity Impact Investment initiative (EII). The \$5.5 million initiative specifically seeks to build the capacity of organizations serving underserved communities by “focusing on development and delivery of training and toolkits that disseminate knowledge of economic development best practices.” In total, 60 economic development organizations (EDOs) and 60 community-based development organizations (CDOs) that serve historically underserved communities will receive targeted technical assistance focused on economic development and community-based development, respectively. The initiative also includes a series of 24 geographically diverse, in-person workshops that will offer technical assistance and forge fundraising coalitions and interorganizational connectivity between economic development organizations and community-based organizations.

The intent of the EII is to provide capacity, knowledge, and technical assistance to organizations that serve underrepresented populations and create strong partnerships and coalitions. The program targets organizations that serve communities with low capacity in several areas, notably human capital and institutional networks and partnerships, with the expectation that the appropriate capacities will grow through the successful implementation of the technical assistance and coalition-building. In this case, EDA’s theory of change is closely coupled to the equity component and the mechanism for intervention.

Even at this high level, the APO framework can identify some of the equity considerations associated with the program. For example:

- **Access:** By developing a technical assistance delivery program through the training of EDOs and CDOs aimed at augmenting the capacity of historically underserved communities, the EII provides expertise, knowledge, and skills to communities that would not otherwise have access to them.
- **Process:** The organizations directly supporting these low-capacity communities help bring their issues and needs to the forefront.
- **Outcome:** While it is too early to know whether an equity outcome has been achieved, the program design links the needs of local communities to a mechanism for intervention to the theory of change and, finally, to a desired equity outcome.

Integrating Equity Considerations in CEDS Planning

The creation of a regional CEDS is a cornerstone of EDA’s efforts to build successful, enduring, and inclusive economic development. CEDS serve to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. A recent update to the CEDS Content Guidelines from EDA has prioritized equity by deepening the rationale for broad community participation and providing concrete steps for making the process more inclusive. Integrating equity and inclusive economic development into the CEDS strengthens the quality of the process, the integrity of the document, and the usability of the document, with the goal of ultimately making regions more economically competitive.³⁸

EDA's CEDS Content Guidelines and best practices point to the need for Economic Development Districts and other regional planning organizations to be intentional about asking who has been involved in the development of the CEDS in the past and whose voices may be excluded from the process.³⁹

Furthermore, the new guidance suggests adding accessible language to a CEDS that lays out how the process can establish ongoing relationships, increase opportunities for engagement with community groups, diversify the voices at the table, and reflect the groups most impacted by implemented strategies. When done well, the process enhances transparency, calls for collaboration, clearly states a region's priorities, and creates the necessary space for equitable outcomes.

Prioritizing equity considerations in the CEDS planning process helps ensure that a greater diversity of voices and concerns are included in future plans, ultimately leading to local capacity that is more responsive in a wide array of communities across the country. In turn, applications for EDA funding received from future grantees will be more responsive to the equity concerns of the entire community.

The APO framework illustrates how EDA's effort to promote equity through more inclusive CEDS planning can have a magnifying effect in communities nationwide.

- **Access:** Updated CEDS guidance explicitly encourages increasing the accessibility of the planning process by holding committee meetings online and in person in a variety of physical areas across a region during a variety of times and dates.
- **Process:** Designing a process from the outset that includes voices that are typically not heard, such as youth, and ensuring that language is not a barrier to participation by making meetings and materials available in languages of prominence in the community, makes the outcomes more equitable.
- **Outcome:** A CEDS document that is developed through a more equitable process, where all members of the community have a meaningful opportunity to provide input, leads to a strategic plan with a stronger investment in the needs of the underserved. Consequently, the capacity of the local community will grow, whether through new infrastructure tailored to address local need or through targeted workforce development opportunities, as possible examples.

Measuring Improved Local Economic Development Capacity Outcomes

Quantifying equity itself is a challenging endeavor. In many cases, organizations choose to measure equity of process and access improvement metrics, such as participation from underserved community members or increased resource allocation, because those are easily quantifiable and there is a clear relationship to equity objectives. However, as noted earlier, while laudable, these measures must then be connected to outcome metrics to represent advancement of equity goals.

The EDA Logic Model provides a useful illustration of how and when different metrics and measures can be structured to form a coherent evaluative rubric for equity investments.

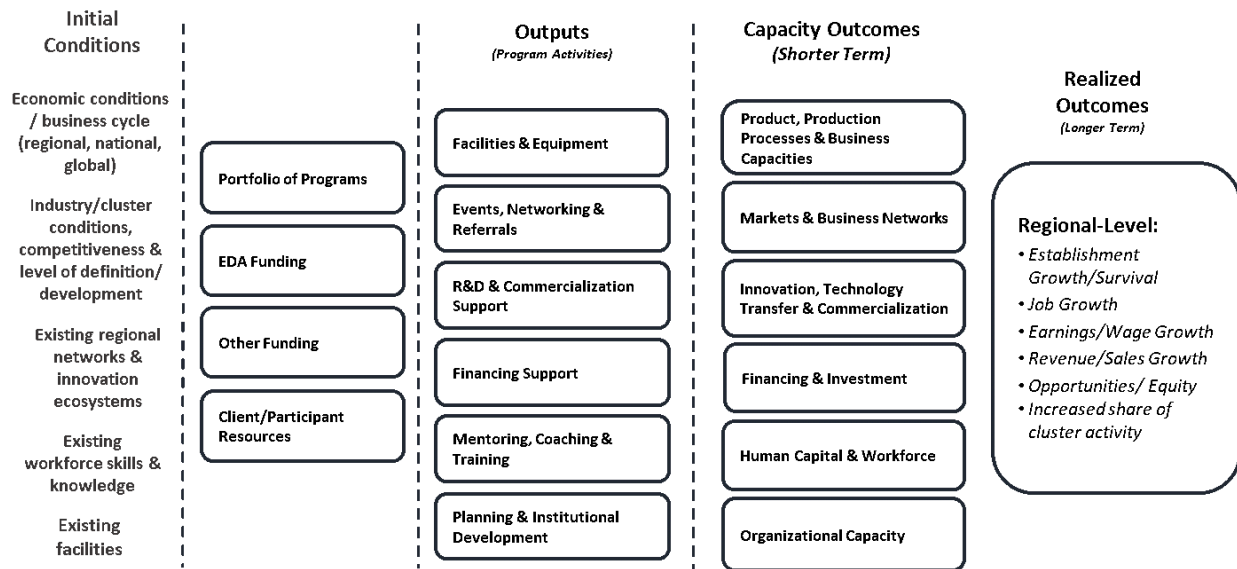


Figure 2: EDA's Logic Model (2023) "the logical progression of a grant program, from inputs to activities to immediate outcomes and long-term outcomes. Within each component of the logic model, different categories of inputs, outputs, and outcomes might occur depending on the program's focus" (eda.gov).

Initial Conditions

The Logic Model's Initial Conditions component correlates well to the Situational Context foundation of the APO framework. While important limitations with data can make it challenging to completely, accurately, and equitably convey the depth and nuance of the lived experience of underserved members of a community, a thoughtful use of data can provide important insights and indicators of local need. The Initial Conditions measures may also serve as a partial baseline for understanding change over time within local capacity.

Some potential equity-based **situational context** indicators could include the following:

- [Persistent poverty](#) measures,
- Educational attainment rates,
- Composition of the local tax base, and
- Availability of banks, healthy foods, hospitals, and schools.

Capacity Outcomes

Intended Capacity Outcomes are directly responsive to community needs and any capacity gaps identified in an analysis of Initial Conditions. These intended Capacity Outcomes form the foundation for understanding later whether equity objectives have been achieved. In short, they will indicate whether the capacity of a local community to successfully undertake economic development efforts has improved as a result of specific interventions. Note that the interventions themselves have not yet been identified, only the local needs of the community and now the equity goals.

Some potential equity-based local capacity **outcome** indicators could include the following:

- Percent high school education and above,
- Percent high school education and above movement (i.e., outmigration),
- Gini Index,
- Percent home ownership,
- 35%+ of household income to rent,
- 35%+ of household income to mortgage,
- Percent households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and
- Per capita income.

Programs and Funding Resources

An inventory of EDA's portfolio of programs and funding resources can be assessed to determine whether existing organizational programming efforts are sufficient to meet the needs and goals identified or whether new initiatives with tailored equity objectives should be created. For example, the recent launch of the Indigenous Communities program was a "critical step towards closing opportunity gaps and fostering economic mobility and resilience in indigenous communities across the country as they rebuild from the pandemic."⁴⁰ The creation of a new targeted initiative can make the identification of output metrics easier but may miss the opportunity to deepen the equity component of the entire portfolio of programs.

Examples of potential program-level equity indicators could include the following:

- **Access**
 - Federal dollars spent for equity-oriented projects
 - Number of programs targeting outreach for underserved communities
- **Process**
 - Number of underserved communities targeted for outreach
 - Ability to reach EDA staff for assistance during the grant development or administration process
 - Hours spent on grant administration

Outputs (Program Activities)

Programmatic activities and outputs are often the easiest to quantify, in part because they are required reporting elements of all grantees. Setting aside concerns related to self-reported data, these metrics can provide specific insight into whether equity of access and process is actually being realized. These metrics quantify how each grantee is succeeding in their individual efforts and consequently any success metrics should be measured only against the specific objectives of the grant. However, when taken together, program output metrics can provide aggregate counts towards equity goals.

Program outputs are measured by a series of grantee self-reported instruments, the ED-916, 917, 918 surveys. The ED-916 is a semi-annual questionnaire required of all non-infrastructure grantees awarded on or after June 1, 2020. The ED-917 and ED-918 questionnaires are both reported on an annual basis record the same outcome question categories. The difference is that the ED-917 is given to grantees that service clients while the ED-918 is given to grantees that do not service clients directly.

Some potential equity related output measures from the EDA ED-916 Grantee Reporting Form could include the following:

- **Access**
 - Time spent accessing hard-to-reach communities (e.g., non-English speaking, low/no infrastructure [including broadband, paved roads, electricity, water, etc.])
 - Number of firms or individuals brought into funding network
- **Process**
 - Number of individuals or organizations involved in program
 - Diversity of individuals or organizations involved in program

Capacity and Realized Outcomes

Finally, changes in local economic development capacity are derived, in part, by comparing capacity indicators prior to the intervention with those afterward. Over the longer term, as local capacity rises, the objective is an increase in Realized Outcomes. EDA's examples of Realized Outcomes already give some clear guidance on the type of measures of interest (such as establishment growth/survival) and by focusing those metrics on the underserved communities of interest, it is possible to begin to understand whether equity objectives are being advanced.

Some potential equity related measures related to each Realized **Outcome** category could include the following:

- Establishment growth/survival,
- Job growth in relationship to change in employment by population,
- Earnings and wage growth in relationship to change in wages by population,
- Revenue and sales growth,
- Opportunities for underserved populations in relationship to change in broadband access for underserved communities, and
- Increased share of cluster activity.

Data Limitations

Using existing federal data to determine whether equity is being achieved in communities has several shortcomings.⁴¹ Nationally reported data often lacks granularity and specificity at the local level and may not capture the nuances and variations that exist within individual communities. This can result in a lack of accurate and detailed information on local disparities and inequities, making it difficult to assess whether equity is truly being achieved at the community level.⁴²

Secondly, federal data may not adequately capture the diversity of local communities.⁴³ Communities can vary greatly in terms of demographics, socio-economic status, cultural factors, and other unique characteristics. However, federal data may not always capture these local nuances, as it tends to rely on standardized measures and indicators that may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of local communities. This can lead to incomplete or misleading assessments of equity, as important factors that impact local communities may be overlooked or misrepresented in federal data.

Lastly, data may not be up-to-date or timely enough to accurately reflect the current state of equity in local communities. Data collection and reporting at the federal level can be a lengthy process, and lags may exist in the availability of data, which can limit the ability to make real-time assessments of equity. Furthermore, federal data may not always capture emerging issues or changing dynamics in local communities,⁴⁴ as they may not be updated frequently enough to capture evolving trends or shifts in equity dynamics.

Future Directions

The work involved in performing and measuring equitable economic development requires continued focus, research, and action. The common framework presented in this report is one step among many to highlight concrete and actionable methods that advance conversations around equitable economic development. Through the APO framework, economic development professionals, planners, emergency management teams, and all individuals across the economic development landscape have pathways to understanding and measuring the underlying drivers of inclusion. While the APO framework does not define all factors contributing to equity, it lays a tangible foundation for conversations, analysis, and implementation.

The development of this APO framework represents a starting point for NERRC's equity research. Future directions will include in-depth analysis of methods and approaches for measuring equity of process, access, and outcome; identifying and analyzing root causes of economic distress; and better understanding the linkages and interdependencies between equity and economic resilience. These future efforts will be designed and intended to help inform planning, policy, investment prioritization, and program evaluation.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APO	Access, Process, and Outcome
CDO	community-based development organization
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies
EDA	U.S. Economic Development Administration
EO	Executive Order
EII	Equity Impact Investment initiative
EDO	economic development organization
NERRC	National Economic Research and Resilience Center
PAGE	Philadelphia Anchors for Growth and Equity

Appendix A: Community Case Study Examples

Case studies illustrate real-world examples of difficult concepts and frameworks for making sense of them. Below are six examples of communities from across the country that have achieved more equitable outcomes, either by improving access to resources and services or through extensive process improvements. Each case study highlights how they address different elements of the Access, Process, and Outcome framework. The case studies are presented in no particular order.

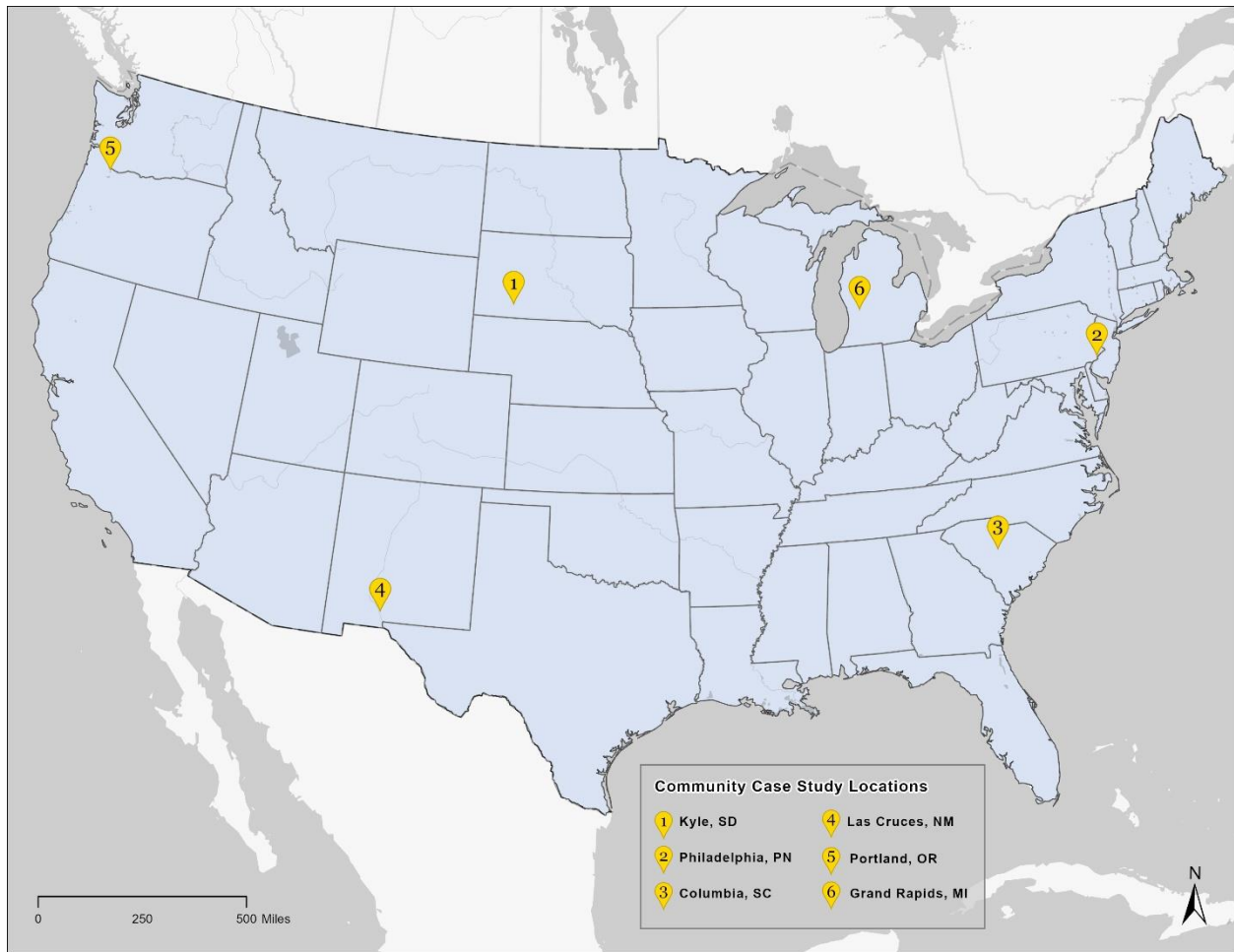


Figure A-3: Locations of community case studies.

Case Study 1: [Rolling Rez Mobile Arts Unit](#), Kyle, S.D.

Rolling Rez Arts is a state-of-the-art mobile arts space, business training center, and mobile bank on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. In 2016, Rolling Rez Arts began delivering art, business, retail, and banking services that were previously inaccessible to many of the artists and culture bearers who live and work on the reservation. The arts space on wheels was years in the making and is the result of a group of people—from First Peoples Fund, Artspace, Lakota Funds, and Lakota Federal Credit Union staff to nonprofit partners to foundations supporters—coming together to infuse new energy into the creative economy.

- **Access:** Bringing arts business services to the people on the Pine Ridge Reservation rather than assuming they had the transportation or knowhow to sell their products outside of reservation land creates the opportunity for individuals who had been excluded to participate and to bring the arts of Pine Ridge to larger markets.
- **Process:** Listening to the local economy, in this case locally made art, and amplifying that voice, rather than trying to alter it, can ensure the voices that have been doing important work for years can continue to participate in the economy and bring a grounding to transformative and innovative ideas.
- **Outcome:** In just over two years, nearly 80 Lakota art and culture classes such as beadwork, film, and ledger-drawing were taught, impacting more than 800 artists living in all districts across the vast reservation. In 2013 the per-capita median income of the Pine Ridge Reservation was \$28,701, and in 2021 was estimated at \$34,526, over 20% increase over eight years.

Case Study 2: [Philadelphia Anchors for Growth and Equity](#), Philadelphia, PA

Philadelphia Anchors for Growth and Equity (PAGE) is a partnership between the Philadelphia Economy League, the City of Philadelphia, and more than a dozen Philadelphia-area institutions. PAGE works to increase local purchasing by large institutional buyers to grow Philadelphia businesses, strengthen the local economy, create jobs, and build wealth. By analyzing the purchase data of anchor institutions, PAGE identifies supply-chain opportunities, reduces barriers by working with institutional procurement professionals, increases capacity by providing tailored consulting services, and collaborates with partners to provide access to growth capital.

- **Access:** PAGE provides small businesses with pathways to find customers in the area with a larger need for services (e.g., hospitals and universities) without requiring them to navigate bureaucratic processes of these institutions alone.
- **Process:** PAGE has been dedicated to staffing their organization with people who understand the issues of small, minority-owned businesses. PAGE's executive director previously owned a business in Philadelphia assisting anchor institutions with their messaging and communications. This foundation for understanding and empathy amplifies the voices of those who face the largest barriers to anchor institutional procurement.

- **Outcome:** In 2022 PAGE supported more than 70 businesses in Philadelphia, unlocking more than \$37 million in contract revenue. They have been the catalyst for understanding anchor economies and inspiring projects like the Philadelphia Federal Bank's Anchor Economy Dashboard.⁴⁵ The outcomes of their work, more broadly, will be in their relationship building for minority-owned small businesses to anchor institutions, creating pathways for procurement and long term a more resilient economy for the city of Philadelphia and in turn generations of new business owners empowered to engage with larger business.

Case Study 3: [Una Voz](#), Columbia, S.C.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Richland Library, like many community resources, to close its doors making its resources no longer available to the public. This closure had a significant impact on the Spanish-speaking community in Columbia. Without a Spanish local news station and with the library and local schools being closed, many residents were unable to access information about programs and resources. Una Voz, a project out of the library, was created to bring resources and information to local residents, focused primarily on the Hispanic/LatinX community. Richland Library is now providing online and in-person services to improve equitable access to career and community development services. These services include translation support for Spanish-speaking job seekers, resources for non-English-speaking residents with children, and to feature local entrepreneurs, the library generated its first bilingual cookbook, *Que Rico*. Library staff, in collaboration with members of the community, continue to build upon these resources to develop a more robust library of resources.

- **Access:** In setting up the Una Voz project, the library used Facebook and WhatsApp to reach hard-to-reach populations. Both applications include features to translate between languages, can be accessed using cell phones so that broadband service is not required, and are frequently used by the public. Using communication channels that were already widely accepted brought new individuals to the library homepage and allowed a greater number of people to seek out services.
- **Process:** Creating Spanish-language publications invites non-English-speaking residents or residents with low literacy levels to events, gives them a seat at the table, and creates long-lasting relationships that strengthen community. These publications also show community members (parents, business owners, etc.) who may speak another language (neither English or Spanish) or have a low literacy level that their voice matters in the community, and that they have as much of a right to access materials as anyone else.
- **Outcome:** *Que Rico* is the first of many bilingual community publications that the Richland Library produced. These publications add to the situational context that informs future policy and planning decisions. The dedicated work of the library staff increased the number of volunteers, increased use of library services, and hopes to expand the resources developed throughout the state and potentially the country.

Case Study 4: [Borderplex](#), Las Cruces N.M.

The Borderplex is a collaboration between the cities of Las Cruces N.M., El Paso, Texas, Juarez, Mexico and their county governments (Dona Ana, El Paso, Chihuahua, respectively) to shift the narrative of the southern border and increase economic opportunity. Alone, each of these partners holds a small border population that struggles to attract larger corporations or create talent pipelines. Together, however, the region is home to more than 2.5 million people with more than 125,000 students enrolled in post-secondary institutions, making it a competitive market both for companies and individuals. The Borderplex is taking a holistic approach to business development, engaging with community colleges, local labor unions, and small businesses to support the sustainability of economic health long-term.

- **Access:** By building on the narrative that trade has existed in this region for hundreds of years and transforming it to a modern context, the Borderplex invites both trades-men and -women and international corporations to the same table.
- **Process:** The Borderplex started as a collaborative between the three local government stakeholders, rather than being formed through corporate conversations on the development of cross border trade. The collaborative brought to light the need to include the bilingual voices of young workers going through the educational system, rural workers who live between the three cities, and border officials to come up with new strategies to incentivizing U.S.-Mexico business relationships.
- **Outcome:** The Borderplex looks to publish its second labor market report later this year, amplifying its marketing to businesses globally. It anticipates that these relationships will not only increase high-wage trades opportunities to the region, but also create shorter supply-chain lines to protect against future global market shocks.

Case Study 5: [Home Share Oregon](#), Portland, OR

More than 360,000 Oregonians have filed for pandemic unemployment assistance since March 2020.⁴⁶ Seniors, communities of color, and students are among the hardest hit and are experiencing the fastest-growing rates of homelessness. Additionally, unemployment mixed with inflated costs of living and rising housing prices, has put many homeowners at an increased housing burden, creating a cash poor house rich environment that leave many in a perilous situation to keep their homes. While building new affordable housing units is expensive and time-consuming, Home Share Oregon, a nonprofit agency focused on housing issues, took the opportunity to connect those with space to rent and those seeking a home.

- **Access:** Housing exists throughout the State of Oregon with almost 1.5 million homes with a spare bedroom, but access to the location of that housing and how to rent it, and, more importantly, the cultural narrative to home sharing, does not. Providing a single place for those looking for housing and those providing housing, to go—with wraparound services to keep people on both sides safe—provides access to a previously opaque system.

- **Process:** Losing shelter can affect anyone. By amplifying the voices of people seeking shelter and those in danger of losing their home due to rising mortgages, Home Share Oregon is able to unify voices towards new solutions for housing.
- **Outcome:** About 1,370 homeowners have already been connected to those looking to identify housing through the Home Share Oregon process. In providing housing and relieving the burden of cost for housing to existing homeowners, Home Share Oregon has created a space of new awareness to the housing market in Portland. In addition to the immediate benefit of housing those without shelter, the city of Portland can use housing dollars to go further, providing new ways of providing shelter to unhoused people in Portland.

Case Study 6: [Michigan RISEUp program](#), Grand Rapids, MI

The RISEUp program at Mercy Health in Michigan provides wraparound services, including career coaching and educational opportunities, to advance colleagues within the healthcare system. The program seeks to backfill vacant roles by recruiting from communities who may not initially have the skillset required. These hiring practices have increased the diversity of entry-level employees from 18% to 38% of new hires. The program also provides services to ensure employees are not forced out of their jobs by difficult life circumstances such as homelessness or the lack of stable childcare. Based on the success of the program, Mercy Health's parent company has launched a national workforce development council to address these issues nationwide.

- **Access:** Providing career development at work brings workers the opportunity to advance while working.
- **Process:** The voices of those under the most burden should be those informing labor practices. Creating spaces where employees can move up without sacrificing their home or family lives creates a healthier community overall.
- **Outcome:** The hiring practices increased the diversity of entry-level employees from 18% to 38% of new hires.

Appendix B: Technical Methodology

To understand the depth of coverage of equity discussion in literature, analysts conducted a search of the Argonne Research Library using a list of keywords to compile a list of sources for review. The keywords focused on equity in economic development and closely aligned fields of study and practice. The search terms and criteria are outlined in the table below.

Primary Search Terms	Secondary Search Terms	
"**Equit* + Emergency Manage*"	Methodology Index Indicator Metric Framework Social Vulnerability Racial Zon* Codes Underserved Marginalized Structural Procedural Distributional Access Policy Program Disaster Resilien* Recovery	Disciplines: Hous*, Health, Social Services, Energy, Transportation, Natural resources, environmental management, <i>Food</i> Hazards: hurricane, flood, chemical, wildfire, earthquake, heat, winter, storm surge; tsunami, tornado, chemical, radiologic*, nuclear

The search resulted in 1,646 results which were then coded by discipline to filter out unrelated literature. For example, “equity” in the financial literature often referred to a financial stake in a company or asset rather than in the social context of interest. Once the initial filtering process concluded, the list of papers was further reduced using a rating scale based on the abstract’s relevancy to the desired discussion. This scale was set on a code of 1 to 3, with 1 representing the most related and 3 being the least related. The list of the best fit documents made up about 200 articles that were then further coded based on the article content. The articles were reviewed and listed by the following categories:

- Type of research (quantitative/qualitative)
- Discipline
- Case study (yes/no)
- Definition of equity used
- Measures of equity and inequity
- Benefits of equity in economic development

The applied categorization combined with the element extraction of the literature research synthesized the overall documents for the review. This specific focus on the type of research and highlighting the specific definitions and measures of equity in economic development allowed for direct comparison of the components to more easily identify similarities and differences.

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