



Equity and Resilience

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Introduction

This brief seeks to expand upon the resilience resources made available on Building Regional Resilience website and to inform users of the significance of equity when designing or implementing potential resilience plans and policies. Utilizing an equity lens is the method of analyzing or diagnosing the effect that policy implementation and design has on individuals and groups who are considered under-served and marginalized; ultimately to find ways to eliminate potential barriers for these groups.¹ Without considering issues of equity, resilience plans may not be as effective, making it difficult for a community to achieve a truly resilient recovery.² Resilience should be a process that embraces positive adjustment in juxtaposition to adversity. Two important characteristics pertaining to resilience are the amount of exposure to threat or adversity and achieving a positive adaptation.³ Equity is defined as the “the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.”⁴ These concepts work together to create a stronger and longer lasting resilience strategy.

Equity ensures that each member of a community obtains what they need to survive and succeed, including the ability to attain resources, develop networks and have access to opportunity and support.⁵ Equity in conjunction with the Building Regional Resilience Tool, assesses how equity can help practitioners distinguish how goods and services might be ideally distributed across society. Equity ensures that goods and services are distributed in an equitable manner ensuring fair treatment for all residents.⁶ Equitable resilience concentrates on how resilience practices relate to adaptation, development, disaster management and in discovering key issues for connecting equity in all these practices.⁷ Community resilience is associated with increasing the local capacity to have the social support, and necessary resources to deal with potential risks while decreasing the likelihood of risks in the first place.⁸

Natural disasters can often expose existing disparities at the local level as well. Underserved and socioeconomically vulnerable areas can be more at risk due to their precarious geographical locations that are often near high risk areas. This coupled with limited resources, leads to a lack of ability to fully recover from natural disasters.⁹ Disasters exacerbated from climate change, spikes in urbanization and globalization place a great number of people at risk. To combat these threats, it is necessary to apply an approach that combines preparing for disasters with actions that will strengthen the overall community as a whole. The idea of equitable community resilience is to enhance the daily wellbeing and overall health of all neighborhoods while reducing the potential for severe impacts brought on by disasters.¹⁰



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The 4 Themes of Equitable Resilience:

It is necessary to understand what is meant by “equitable resilience” and what to look for in designing equitable resilience plans. A systematic analysis of peer-reviewed articles focusing on ecological and social resilience included a broad scope of critiques leading to a definition of equitable resilience that can be utilized in conjunction with the resilience indicator data on the Building Regional Resilience website. This more nuanced definition serves to guide interventions toward equitable outcomes at the ground-level.¹¹ Equitable resilience is understood as “...a form of human-environmental resilience that takes into account issues of social vulnerability and differentiated access to power, knowledge and resources.¹² It starts from people’s own perception of their position within their human-environmental system and accounts for their realities and their need for a change of circumstance to avoid imbalances of power into the future.”¹³

The four themes for practicing equitable resilience include: **subjectivity, inclusion, scales, and transformation.**¹⁴

1. Subjectivity refers to an individual’s lived experience that is influenced by cultural, social, and institutional frameworks. Subjectivities are based within a person’s racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and other characteristic categories. Subjectivities shape how individuals perceive what is happening around them. An individual processes new information through pre-existing psychological patterns deriving from their previous experiences that influence and mold their subjectivity. Recognizing subjectivities and identifying how social contexts shape power relations between groups of people help establish social and economic privileges. Acknowledging and recognizing these privileges is critical when trying to achieve equitable resilience.¹⁵

2. Inclusion concentrates on incorporating diverse social groups in decision-making regarding risk management. This requires recognition and consideration for people with age, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and other formal and informal variations within social groups that may sway the distribution of resources and influence ecological relationships. Excluding a group from the decision-making process can influence risk reduction and create barriers to achieving equitable resilience. Thus, inclusion and representation in decision-making is beneficial as it illuminates how various factors affect people’s autonomy, and ability to respond to risks leading to more effective equitable resilience practices.¹⁶

3. Geographical, governmental, and temporal **scales** in which different policymakers operate may contribute to exclusion during decision making as it pertains to resilience. When decisions are made at the national level regarding states and local communities, the decisions are made without incorporating the ideas of the people who it may affect the most. Leaving out the groups that are the most affected by the decision, may increase resilience on one scale (or level) but exacerbate vulnerability on another scale. For example, a decision at the state level when implemented at the local level might have unforeseen equitable issues. When working across scales, it is important to attend to multiple geographical, temporal and government scales to reduce tension between scales and avoid undesirable cross-scale effects that may increase vulnerability when issues of scale are not taken into account.¹⁷

4. Transformation occurs when adjustments are made regarding day-to-day patterns that influence the social-ecological system. Changes to these daily patterns at the local level include changes concerning resource use and the accountability and distribution of authority. To empower transformations within a community it is necessary to understand how power is held and used. This is important because some actors and processes can positively affect some individuals in a community while negatively affecting others. Long-term transformation requires being aware of equity in day-to-day decisions that transform the community over time.¹⁸

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Equity and the Building Regional Resilience Tool:

The indexes in the Building Regional Resilience Tool are organized based on resilience indicators in four categories — social, economic, infrastructure and environmental— for every county in the United States. In each category the index matrix was used to categorized counties based on a set of county-level indicators gathered through publicly accessible data sources.¹⁹ **Although the indicators provide a glimpse of what can help make a community more resilient, it is not the whole story. This brief explains how underlying issues of equity can affect the indicators and thus ultimately the strength of a community’s resilience.** To build a more equitable and resilient community, it is necessary for practitioners “...to engage with critiques of resilience and acknowledge the potential for sustaining and reinforcing existing relations of power and resource access.”²⁰ The tool gives practitioners the ability to recognize problem areas. This brief seeks to aid end-users to establish gaps or holes in the problem areas (indicators) that can lead to unintended and inequitable end results. By employing an “equity lens” and utilizing the information in this brief, users can better combat unintended consequences of arbitrary inference of the indicators.

Examining subjectivities, and equity implications of inclusion and scale and the potential of transformation is critical when engaging with criticisms of resilience.²¹ A major criticism is how multifaceted or broad the issue of resilience can be which makes it hard to achieve. The reason that achieving true resilience is difficult to accomplish is because it can be nearly impossible to account for every indicator that may influence a community’s ability to become resilient.

Resilience is complex, as it may be defined differently based on various perspectives of individuals, families, organizations, societies, and cultures.²² What indicators are most important and for whom can vary depending on a community’s economic, environmental, infrastructure and social needs. Therefore, an equity lens is important to consider when prioritizing the various needs across communities. The results from the tool highlight the most at-risk communities allowing practitioners to identify where changes/actions need to take place. Using an equity lens, practitioners can acknowledge how policies affect those in various communities differently and use this knowledge in attempts to create more equitable policies, ultimately leading to more resilient communities. Table 1 below shows how one can apply an equity lens when looking at the various resilience and vulnerability indicators across the four categories of resilience on the Building Regional Resilience website.



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Table 1:

Resilience/ Vulnerability Indicators	How to Apply an Equity Lens
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise economic prosperity, mitigate poverty by providing maximum and equal access to high-quality employment, improved community services and increase access to affordable housing, public transportation and expand opportunities to more individuals.²³ • Ensure that all groups have equal access to government resources and receive proportional representation in the labor market.²⁴ • Facilitate the reduction of ethnic and racial inequalities in terms of employment, income, wealth, and access to affordable credit.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the differential distribution of environmental hazards by social factors to reduce exposures among vulnerable groups, and thereby effectively and equitably protect the health of the entire population as some in low socioeconomic statuses (SES) are exposed to more environmental hazards than others.²⁵ • Guarantee public health and safety regarding safe drinking water, healthy air quality and working conditions.²⁶ • Acknowledge the idea that all persons should bear an adequate share of the burden of environmental contamination and wellbeing and have equitable access to environmental facilities.²⁷
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that decisions regarding infrastructure are transparent and include a system that allows for everyone to contribute to the decision-making process effectively.²⁸ • Acknowledge methods for revenue collection used to fund and support growth of infrastructure. It should be defined and implemented in ways that are equitable and avoid negatively impacting citizens with incomes below the median average income.²⁹ • Ensure the resources and opportunities generated by infrastructure are accessible and open to everyone. Decisions on where to invest should reduce current disparities within and between communities.³⁰
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify historical, political, social, and economic influences that fundamentally impact access, opportunity, and outcomes for various groups of people.³¹ • Focus on multiculturalism and diversity because social equity is more than just race and gender, it also concentrates on ethnicity, sexual preference, certain mental and physical conditions, language, and variations in economic circumstances.³² • Concentrate on people's access to society's collective resources focusing on the environmental, legal, economic, and developmental rights and ensure that members have opportunities for equal access.³³

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Examples of Applying an Equity Lens in Community Resilience

Economic Equity:

Business Technical Assistance Program (B-TAP), in the City of Minneapolis

Through the Business Technical Assistance Program (B-TAP), the City of Minneapolis is investing in its small business owners. The city established B-TAP as a response to racial, gender, and income disparities throughout business ownership in Minneapolis. B-TAP enables economic development through methods of innovation, stabilization, and expansion of small enterprises. B-TAP finances and organizes one-on-one consultation, community training, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs. B-TAP has represented over 1,300 business owners from diverse backgrounds since 2014, over 80 % of consumers are people of color, women, or individuals with low incomes. To receive services, clients call the B-TAP office to obtain a referral to access services or review a list of service providers to determine which providers can adequately meet their needs and contact the company directly. The list outlines the language ability of the provider, services provided, and population emphasis to make the list more navigable. B-TAP is funded by federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) along with local funds allocated from the City of Minneapolis. To promote long-term success for small business owners, B-TAP focuses on closing equity gaps and building wealth in communities that have a history of being left out of some economic development efforts. The City of Minneapolis B-TAP program is a strong model for municipalities looking to assist small enterprises, by building on the existing skills, interests, and assets of the community.³⁴

Environmental Equity:

The Equity & Environment Initiative (EEI) of Seattle

Washington DC started to see an unexpected economic boom in the early 2000s, leading to substantial new public and private investments in the downtown area. In the eastern and southeastern sections of the city, low-income communities, were not priority areas for investments that emerged from the economic boom. This economic division has contributed to the creation of the Washing Interfaith Network (WIN), a local community-based organization associated with the Foundation for Industrial Areas. This organization was formed to build a city-wide strategy to direct revenue to disinvested communities to advance growth and infrastructure there. More than \$100 million was gained by the initiative to support communities suffering from historical disinvestment and infrastructure deficits, leading to the Community Investment Fund (NIF). NIF was funded through a 15 percent contribution from personal property tax, and had unanimous support from the city council and the mayor when it was established in 2004. The central framework for WIN's distribution of funds was to collaborate with other members of the group and the city council members to ensure that the money went to the areas that most needed it. To accomplish this, WIN established seven target communities where they had a large base of members and where investment was clearly required. Every neighborhood had to create their own investment plan as part of the fund, which outlines the goals for each community. WIN, according to interviewees, helped bring hundreds of people from each neighborhood to public meetings. The investment plans that accumulated from the projects varied widely in accordance the needs of residents. Projects included streetlights, repairs and preservation of public space, changes to the streetscape on commercial corridors, libraries, job training, programs, cost-effective accommodation, and more. Overall, WIN achieved equitable success through the formation of a non-regressive revenue plan that allocated more funds to areas that historically remained disinvested. Furthermore, the organization also incorporated residents in decision making.³⁵

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Social Equity: Baltimore

The population in the city of Baltimore is 63% Black and consists of predominantly Black neighborhoods with higher unemployment rates, more children living in poverty, less access to goods and services, and lower educational attainment than the city's more predominantly White neighborhoods. The city struggles with wealth and health gaps between low-income Black neighborhoods and more affluent White neighborhoods. Most of the population in the city that suffers from poverty lives in communities just east and west of downtown that have little opportunity. However, due to the city's long history of segregation and inequality, they are now focusing on establishing more social equity. The city has decided to utilize an equity lens when evaluating or creating community projects. The city mandated a staff training on structural racism so its members can understand practices, attitudes and other behaviors that produce adverse outcomes for people of color over time. Also, the city resealed a Food Environment Map that address the inequality of food access across various neighborhoods in the area. The goal of the project was to examine and understand how policy regarding food access can impact low-income community members and people of color disproportionately. Program developers are not just focusing on racial equity but extending and incorporating individuals in the community who are women, immigrants, LGBTQ residents, low-income, the elderly, people with disabilities and those who have limited English proficiency.³⁶

Infrastructure Equity:

Washington DC: Neighborhood Investment Fund

The city of Seattle launched an Equity and Environmental Initiative (EEI). The EEI program was developed to create new opportunities and solutions for those who are disproportionately affected by environmental injustices. EEI is based through a partnership of the city, community and several other private foundations who seek to ensure race and social justice in environmental work. Seattle is accredited for being an environmental leader; however, the city still faces similar challenges to those of the wider U.S. A primary challenge is that upper-class communities typically have the privilege to develop and participate in decision-making regarding environmental policies, indicating that the decision-making process lacks representation from lower-income communities. Those who do not benefit by participating in the discussion regarding these policies are the groups of people who face severe health, social and economic impacts. EEI was developed to accomplish three primary objectives. These objectives include, ensuring that all people and communities benefit from Seattle's environmental progress; to engage the communities who are most impacted by environmental injustice in designing strategies and tracking progress; and to make sure that people with low incomes, people of color, immigrants, refugees and people with limited-English proficiency individuals have the ability to become leaders in conventional environmental movements. The Community Partners Steering Committee (CPSC) helps guide the work of the EEI in developing environmental justice standards for the initiative. CPSC also constructs approaches to ensure comprehensive decision making in the community. To improve the guidance of the EEI project, a new employment opportunity opened in the Office of Sustainability & Environment to hire an individual who will manage the initiative and help immerse the work of EEI throughout the community. EEI has received the support of several local funders to support the initiative. Funding initiatives were also examined at the city council meeting where council budget judgments were made to secure funding for the project.³⁷

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Conclusion

Examining issues of resilience can provide useful information. Although, it can sometimes miss deeper underlying issues that can ultimately affect a community's ability to achieve resilience. Therefore, using an equity lens can provide further insight into the challenges that various communities face when seeking to become more resilient. Thinking about subjectivity, inclusion, transformation, and scale can assist practitioners in recognizing the underlying issues of equity that could impede a community's ability to become more resilient. By acknowledging the underlying issues of equity and how it applies to resilience indicators, practitioners will be able to create more successful long-term resilience solutions for their communities.

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