Equitable Community Resilience Evaluation Toolkit

Whether you are just in the initial pre-planning stages of a resilience planning effort, have already kicked off a new effort, or are refreshing your approach to resilience, consider the following opportunities and principles to equitably engage and lift the voices and experiences of socially vulnerable populations. Building an inclusive and representative team, fostering trust and social cohesion, removing barriers to participation, and evaluating opportunities to expand participation are critical to addressing the needs of the community in the resilience planning process.

Build a Representative Team

Opportunities for Equity

- **Build an Inclusive and Representative Planning Team**– It is important that all community members have a voice in resilience planning to manage climate impacts in ways that reflect a community's distinct needs, vision, priorities, and challenges. Resilience planning is enhanced by operationalizing diversity and inclusion on a core planning team (the foremost decision-making body), a local community advisory committee and through extensive community engagement. People from diverse backgrounds, those with social vulnerabilities, and local community members should be represented on the core planning team. There should also be additional opportunities through advisory committees, focus groups, and other engagement efforts to solicit additional feedback from the community. Consider the following as you seek out local community knowledge to guide the planning effort.
  - **Representation** matters in planning with a community and with socially vulnerable populations. Forming a diverse team that is representative of the community gives voice and power to a community's most vulnerable residents. Also, if socially vulnerable people and other diverse residents see themselves and their community represented in the project leadership, then they might be more apt to identify with and feel more attachment to the project effort and outcomes.
  - **Identify key community champions and leaders**. Champions and leaders who directly work with socially vulnerable populations can speak to the needs and experiences of the

Principles of Equity

Continually evaluate your planning process for the following principles. Consider how your team integrates these principles into the planning exercises, their preparation, information-sharing and engagement with socially vulnerable populations. See the Equity webpage for more information.

- **Empowerment and Inclusion**
- **Early and Ongoing Community Engagement**
- **Co-Development (of process and solutions)**
- **Whole Systems Thinking**
- **Continuous Evaluation**

Try to Avoid

- **Asking a community for their labor or expertise without going through any trusted, community contacts (i.e. if you don't have connections with them then don't go right in and ask for their labor or expertise)**

populations they are selected to represent. These might be school officials, faith-based leaders, community activists, and local business leaders. If possible, this list could include individuals who experience social vulnerabilities themselves.

- ❑ Consider creating a **community advisory committee** to guide the planning/project's alignment to the community's needs and priorities. The purpose or role of the committee could be to provide local perspective and guidance, potential community challenges to resilience or adaptation solutions, and advice on how to align solutions with other community plans or funding sources. Members of this committee can include some of the community champions and leaders described above or other community stakeholders listed in the next bullet.
- ❑ When **inviting stakeholders** to be part of the team, be cognizant of existing relationships your organization may already have with the community and their perceptions. For instance, government entities may not be highly regarded or trusted in communities or by socially vulnerable populations that have been historically underserved. That is why it is especially important to identify trusted agents so that they may bridge the gap and help planners or government entities connect with socially vulnerable populations in a culturally respectful manner.

People you should reach out to for core team or steering committee participation:

- community-based groups and organizations (CBOs)
- community businesses, employers and business leaders
- resident leaders (at any level – neighborhood, block, town, etc.)
- standing community advisory boards or similar committees within the community
- faith-based communities
- cultural and ethnic affinity groups
- resident and tenant advocacy groups

- ❑ **Scope the project with community partners** – Equity is best ensured when it is planned for as early in the planning process as possible. As soon as planning partners are ready to involve the community in the planning effort, they should reach out. Ideally, community representatives, planning practitioners, government entities, CBOs and other planning partners should co-develop a project or plan's scope of work, grant application or request for proposals (RFP) with equity and social vulnerability in mind. This might mean appropriating a significant portion of the project budget to community engagement, compensation, or stipulations to make engagements more comfortable for socially vulnerable populations. If writing an RFP for a resilience planning project, one could require that grant applications include participation by CBOs that serve or represent socially vulnerable populations like NJDEP's Resilient NJ regional resilience planning project. But scoping can be iterative, so just make sure to involve community and socially vulnerable populations' representatives as early as feasible in early planning actions.

- ❑ **Build and foster trust and social cohesion** – A little trust between project partners can go a long way. Some community residents, especially those with social vulnerabilities, might be distrusting of outside organizations, developers or government representatives for a number of reasons. This could be due to a history of disenfranchisement, gaslighting, or previous experience with outside entities not listening or responding appropriately to residents' needs. That is why any planners, contractors and outside organizations must take the first steps to build trust with community representatives to enable a more collaborative and equitable planning process. You have to show trust before you can receive it, so it is especially important for planning partners to listen to and validate local, community knowledge and needs. Trust and social cohesion among partners are

built over time. Ideally, project leaders (e.g. government reps) should have established relationships with a community before partnering on a planning project/process, but since this is not always possible, concerted efforts should be made to engage trusted community leaders, representatives and service providers as early as possible in the planning process to build trusting relationships over time. Leadership and engagement experts at the University of Minnesota Eriks Dunens and Dawn Newman suggest the following to help build trusting relationships with community representatives:

- ❑ **Exhibit humility and vulnerability**
- ❑ **Ask questions with genuine curiosity**
- ❑ **Take time to be a welcoming presence (e.g. through hosting dinners, walking tours and meetings in the community)**
- ❑ **Gather input intentionally from all groups**

- ❑ **Consider compensating** community leaders, CBOs and, when appropriate, other community volunteers that dedicate significant time, knowledge or consultative services to the planning process. As they are experts in their communities, it is important your team demonstrate that you value their local expertise and their time that they bring to your project through compensation or reimbursement. Compensation could be through monetary stipends, childcare, transportation, food or other comforts that might encourage community participation in engagements. It is also important to note that many steering committee members will likely be paid for their participation.

- ❑ **Evaluate** – In the early planning stages, the planning leadership should evaluate how it is removing barriers to and expanding opportunities for community representation on the core planning team, inviting community and socially vulnerable stakeholders to the core planning team and consider how the team will approach evaluation throughout the planning process.

  - ❑ To foster **inclusivity**, your team needs to go beyond thinking about demographics and *who* is invited to the table, and consider *how* it is inviting people (e.g. Are you being culturally respectful? Are you using people first language when inviting folks with disabilities? Are you inviting through trusted agents?) *Feeling* included and respected in the planning activities is a significant first step towards removing barriers and enhancing participation for socially vulnerable populations in planning.

  - ❑ To **track equity** throughout the planning process, think about what other mechanisms the planning team might utilize, in addition to this toolkit, to ensure equity and other outcomes are on track. This could include bringing in an outside evaluator or creating a self-evaluation tool to evaluate equity in engagement and help course correct any outcomes that might not be on track. See the District of Columbia's Department Of Energy and Environment's Guide to Community Engagement for lessons learned on bringing in an outside evaluator to evaluate their first Equity Advisory Group. Find the external evaluation of the Equity Advisory Group here.

Some Questions to Keep Equity on Track

Keep the following questions in mind as you build a team to address climate impacts.

Building a Team

- ❑ How will community members (including those with social vulnerabilities) help decide who serves on the core planning team?
    - ❑ How will you gather community input on what a *representative* team looks like to them?
- ❑ Are there any standing community advisory boards or similar committees within the community that could be part of, or guide the core team towards equitable outcomes?
- ❑ What community-based groups, community businesses, and organizations that serve or represent socially vulnerable populations should be on the core planning team and/or engaged throughout the entirety of the planning process?
- ❑ Are there any special community leaders, champions or other prominent community advocates that should be consulted throughout the planning process?
- ❑ What might a *demographically representative* planning team look like?
    - ❑ What are the demographics of the community (e.g. predominant races, ages, languages spoken, disability/ability levels, immigrant status, religious affiliation, property owners and renters, income level etc.)? Try to provide percentages or other quantitative information here when possible.
- ❑ How will you respectfully invite stakeholders to join the team?
    - ❑ Will you consider community culture and/or existing distrust of authoritative figures/government entities?
    - ❑ Will you invite trusted agents/community representatives first? Will you reach out to socially vulnerable people through the trusted agents, or directly?

Building trust and social cohesion

- ❑ How do you plan to continually build trust and social cohesion throughout the planning process? What engagements or other opportunities in the community could the core team attend/host to build more community connections and trust?
- ❑ What community networks and standing events (e.g. farmers markets, street fairs, cultural or religious festivals, beach cleanups etc.) could be tapped into for initial outreach and relationship/trust building?
- ❑ What questions are you curious to ask the community and socially vulnerable populations?
- ❑ How can the planning/project leadership be a welcoming presence to socially vulnerable populations and other community representatives that are invited to join the team?

- ❑ Some examples include: hosting dinners, walking tours and meetings in the community, having informal interviews/conversations (virtually or in person), conducting listening sessions at trusted community facilities etc.

- ❑ How will you gather input intentionally from socially vulnerable populations and other groups?

- ❑ How will the leadership entities engage with socially vulnerable populations to identify any past harms the government or other entities may have done to the community?
    - What community research can the team do to help identify potential past harms that have sowed distrust in the community?
    - Will government staff acknowledge past harms, hurts and distrust by governmental officials before beginning collaborative processes to facilitate any healing that might be necessary for the community?

- ❑ How will the core planning team "come back" to the community and make efforts in maintaining trust and established relationships?

- ❑ How will the team make sure that community residents who engage in the planning process have access to information that can help them participate in the process? (e.g. existing community plans, climate change projections for region, how to engage in participatory planning)