Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange

Equity Statement of Purpose

This is a living document that is regularly updated by members of the Exchange.

Original version prepared by Bina M Patel, Saathi Impact Consulting, LLC

Last updated: January 21, 2021
Contents

Overview Page 2
What do we mean by equity? Page 3
Why is this work important for us? Page 4
How did we get here? Page 5
What is our vision for our work within the Exchange? Page 6
How will we approach advancing equity in green infrastructure? Page 7
What can green infrastructure contribute to building equity? Page 8
What are the key points for communicating with the public about equity in green infrastructure? Page 9
Overview

This document presents The Exchange’s organizational position on equity within the green infrastructure sector and articulates shared intention around the following questions:

- What do we mean by equity?
- Why is this work important for us?
- How did we get here?
- What is our vision for our work within the Exchange?
- How will we approach advancing equity in green infrastructure? In what ways will we demonstrate our commitment to equity through prioritized implementation?
- What are the benefits of green infrastructure that can contribute to building equity?
- What are key points for communicating with the public about equity in green infrastructure?

The SOP is:
- The Exchange’s voice on equity: a narrative that articulates what equity means to the Exchange and why it matters to its mission
- Aligned to the vision and strategy of the Exchange
- A tool for maintaining clarity and shared language about equity in green infrastructure
- A “journal” of the team’s deep and expansive thinking on equity; Evergreen, iterative, and requiring ongoing attention and updating
- A resource for Exchange members to tap into to help bolster their equity initiatives
- A space from which to pull language/perspectives as needed for public communications
- Meant to inspire and push for bolder equity action

It is not:
- A public-ready marketing or communications document
- The entire equity conversation
What Do We Mean by Equity?

An equity lens compels us to understand better who benefits from green infrastructure and who is marginalized from these benefits, and that one’s race, wealth, zip code, or other forms of systemically and historically oppressed identities does not define the standards of water, open space, or other green infrastructure benefits.

By equity we ultimately mean that one’s race, economic status, zip code, or other forms of personal and community identities does not define one’s privilege or oppression.

Equity refers more specifically to:

- Spatial: where are communities under- or disinvested in (current and historical) and the intersectional identities? Where are communities experiencing multiple forms of systemic vulnerability and environmental injustice (housing, poverty, access to transportation, food, pollution and environmental burdens, etc.)

- Identity: the multitude of ways individuals hold racial, gender, ability, age, economic status, and other identities.
  
  - What are the trends around access to green infrastructure and GI investment for communities, given the identities they hold? Do we see trends in the region/area? Are communities who are traditionally given marginalized identities (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colors, People with Disabilities, Age, LGBTQIA2+, etc.) included and provided access to direct projects directly affecting their communities? Are communities that suffer vulnerabilities dues to multiple forms of systemic marginalization centered and included?

- Process: Who has access to government leaders? Who is consistently engaged or not? What are the different kinds of barriers that limit engagement (access to information, engagement platforms, language accessibility, time and child care, etc..)?

- Power: Who has influence and control over resources? Does this align with who is most marginalized from the benefits? Is power over resources, problem-definition, and solution-making shared? Who is the expert – and can we expand this to be more inclusive? Who has the power to determine the strategic agenda?
Equity Statement

of Purpose

Why is equity important to us?

We acknowledge the real history and current conditions within the public works sector. While advancing important and effective outcomes for environmental and community needs, these efforts do not consistently or sustainably benefit all communities. The built environment is not immune from having perpetuated inequities. There is a long history of uneven public works investments, reflecting systemic patterns of exclusion, racism, and marginalization.

Equity is purposeful to the Exchange’s mission to support leaders who direct and influence public resources into (or away from) communities most affected by a lack of adequate green infrastructure, environmental degradation, and water pollution to better meet the needs of all local communities.

Benefits that accrue to some and not to others does not substantively move our work forward – it represents change at the margins, not systemic and transformative change in the green infrastructure sector.

Lastly, it is an ethical imperative as stewards of the public good and their resources that we proactively shift systems that are not equitably serving all residents in our local communities. It is imperative to deliver on the government promise to serve everyone in the community. The benefits of clean water, open green spaces, flooding mitigation, climate change protections, etc.. should not be amassed by a selected few, particularly by race and/or wealth.
How did we get here?

In our day-to-day work we regularly observe and bear witness to the harm caused to communities that have suffered continued under- and disinvestment. The data is clear: there are racial and economic disparities in access to clean water, stormwater management, open green spaces, and investments in community green infrastructure.

As stewards of public resources, we’ve learned through field work (locally and abroad) about the need to build a people-centered approach to green infrastructure investments, and how to be more inclusive of community voice and needs. Several of the Exchange’s members have taken the lead on embedding equity practices in their efforts, demonstrating that it is both possible and critical to better public service.

Over years of work, the time has come to be more explicit and proactive in advancing equity within the context of green infrastructure and public works.
What is our vision for this work within the Exchange?

Our vision for our equity work is to show up with courage, consistency, and voice in pursuit of the following:

- Stand firm and courageously to advance equity as an essential practice for excellent green infrastructure work
- Change the narrative that this work is separate or for someone else so that equity becomes an embedded, normalized, and consistent practice within our work and the work of our members
- Distribute the benefits of green infrastructure equitably by proactively developing equitable policies and programs that can begin to remedy the past harms caused by our work being remiss in attending to equity. In particular, this means being honest and transparent in green infrastructure benefits, aligning to community priorities, and giving power to communities to define solutions and benefits.
- Expose and stop the perpetuation of inequitable investments in communities
- Relentlessly create space for the voices of communities often forgotten, silenced, excluded, and harmed by the status quo; Share and open up our platform to center these voices as expert leaders
How will we approach advancing equity?

As an emergent, consistent, embedded practice, the Exchange and its members seek to advance equity in all aspects of its work. We expect our commitments and actions to respond to the local environment and community needs, evolve as our learning and work progresses, and be steadfast in our allyship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consistent Action</th>
<th>Communications</th>
<th>Ongoing Learning</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Speaking up consistently: using our platform to promote equity as a value and</td>
<td>• Elevating the voices of communities that have been given a marginalized</td>
<td>• Continue to learn about equity and make sure we apply our learning to our</td>
<td>• Use data in our policy and programming work in a more rigorous manner,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal in GI and acknowledging when projects, tools, or policies do not reflect the</td>
<td>identity, including by race, ability, age, economic status, etc. This mean we</td>
<td>day-to-day and long-term efforts by regularly assigning committed time and</td>
<td>including disaggregating data by demographics including race, working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equity value</td>
<td>will more consistently present stories and experiences of marginalized</td>
<td>resources to our work (agendas, budgets, etc.).</td>
<td>with community members most affected on collecting better data, considering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Amplify our voice as a convener of our members to engage with decision-makers</td>
<td>communities in our network communications, learning opportunities, and</td>
<td>• Serving as forum for learning among members by creating intentional space for</td>
<td>how data is weighted and considered, understanding public investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on better funding practices to advance equity (timelines, decision-making models,</td>
<td>storytelling</td>
<td>peer conversation</td>
<td>history, and elevating qualitative data like lived experience alongside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community engagement practices, community-directed project planning, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consistently highlight progress by members on equity, and equity-rooted</td>
<td>quantitative data to develop a more robust understanding of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Proactively expand our table: invite new colleagues to attend Exchange events</td>
<td></td>
<td>practices from non-members to further inform our thinking</td>
<td>experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and help foster cross-organizational learning and collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Continuing our work to resource equity learning opportunities for oursleves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work collaboratively with members to start the journey where they are, but ensure</td>
<td></td>
<td>and members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they keep moving forward.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Embed equity practices in all aspects of policy, program, and project development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>