

# A Utility Starts its Equity Journey

## Hillsboro Water Equity Projects



# City Council's Guiding Principle

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**We exemplify and instill diversity, equity, and inclusion** as essential parts of internal and external policy-making and the delivery of City services.

# What does this mean to Water?

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## Hillsboro Water began work on its first Strategic Plan.

1. Strategic Plan Goals, Objectives, Initiatives
  2. Staffing Review
  3. CIP DEI Workshops
  4. Equity Lens Pilot Study
- The Strategic Plan process started with an expectation for other projects not included in the initial scope of work.

# Strategic Plan Observations

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## Keep things flexible.

- Strategic Plan contract signed in December 2019, then COVID. Quick pivot from in-person to Zoom and virtual whiteboards. An unexpected advantage for overnight staff was ability to participate with whiteboards open for several days.
- Initial idea for one strategic plan document became unwieldy. Pilot Study moved to a standalone document and staffing review became a memo to the Director. CIP workshops move to Citywide CIP initiative.
- We took budget savings from CIP workshops and upped the Pilot study and added a scope for the consultant to help with paid internships.

# About the Equity Lens Toolkit

## The Equity AID summarizes the Equity Lens.

### Equity AID

This aid is a condensed version of the Equity Lens. This aid is for use during everyday decisions and tasks, to invoke a mindset of equity in work by all employees.

**A**

#### Assumptions

What assumptions am I making about race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, tribal affiliation, etc?

**I**

#### Impacts

What are the possible impacts?  
(intended and unintended)

**D**

#### Disparities

How are the impacts different from my intent?  
How will this decision increase or decrease disparities related to racial equity?

# Applying the Equity Lens

## Equity Lens.

1. Define Goal
2. Consider Stakeholders and Data
3. Examine Bias and Assumptions
4. Consider Impacts
5. Disparities
6. Develop Accountability

### Equity Lens

Title of policy, initiative, program, issue: \_\_\_\_\_  
Department: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Step 1: Define Goal

Define the project, policy, program, initiative, issue, etc.

What is your intent or what do you hope to achieve?

#### Step 2: Consider Stakeholders and Data

Who does this involve or impact? How do you know?

How will you involve those who will be impacted by this decision in the process? Have you consulted previously completed plans or documents? (Hillsboro 2035, Comprehensive Plan, etc.)

#### Step 3: Examine Bias and Assumptions

What assumptions are you making in regards to:

Race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, tribal affiliation, etc?

Our community?

Our organization?

My department?

Myself?

#### Step 4: Consider Impacts

What are the possible intended and unintended impacts of this decision?

Who benefits from the proposed changes? Who is burdened/harmed?

#### Step 5: Disparities

How will this decision increase or decrease disparities related to racial equity?

**Note:** There is no neutral decision when it comes to racial equity. If you are not actively removing barriers and increasing racial equity, you are furthering an inequitable system.

#### Step 6: Develop Accountability

Do you have a plan for addressing unintended consequences if they arise?

What is unresolved? What information, data, people, partnerships, etc. are you missing from making a holistic decision?

What is your plan for evaluation after implementation of this decision?

# Applying the Equity Lens

Consider  
Stakeholders  
and Data



Explore City Interactions

- **Stakeholders:** Which departments are responsible? Which departments are affected and how? Who should be involved in applying the Equity Lens?
- **Standards:** How is Level of Service (LOS) defined? What are the minimum standards?
- **Geographic bounds:** What area of the city is affected by the program or class?
- **Decision-making:** How are decisions made daily, in the short-term and in long-term planning?

# Applying the Equity Lens

Consider  
Stakeholders  
and Data



Explore Community's Lived Experience

## Questions to ask:

- **Stakeholders:** Who uses or is affected by the change, program or class? Who is vulnerable to failure or poor LOS? Who should be involved in exploring community interactions and in applying the Equity Lens?
- **Experience:** How does the community define LOS? What burdens do failure or poor LOS create?
- **Geographic bounds:** Where do vulnerable stakeholders live and work?

# Applying the Equity Lens

Consider  
Impacts



Consider both burden and benefits.

## Questions to ask:

- How do management, low LOS, or failure of the program or infrastructure class **impact** community members?
- What **resources** must community members be able to access to avoid or minimize experiencing burdens?
- Do the highest and lowest LOS result in different **burdens** for customers' lived experience?
- Is there an opportunity to create **benefits** for vulnerable community members through this infrastructure class?

# Applying the Equity Lens



## Questions to ask:

- **Geographic.** Does an overlay map show areas of lower LOS corresponding to areas where vulnerable users live or work?
- **Distributed.** Does the program or infrastructure result in greater impacts for vulnerable users as a group?

# Applying the Equity Lens

**Develop  
Accountability**



## **Define Disparity**

- What are the disparate impacts? What factors and actions contribute to these? Who is affected by disparity?

## **Be Action Oriented**

- What will be changed? What are the expected results?
- Who will direct the work? Who will do the work? Who will have input?

## **Document Accountability**

- How are outcomes measured? What will be done if results don't match expectations?
- How are outcomes communicated?

# What makes a good Pilot Project?

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**Clear  
Boundaries**

**Easy to  
Understand**

**Probable  
Disparities**

**Discretion in  
Decision  
Making**

**Analysis does  
not require  
public process**

# Data for Decision-making

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## DEI needs data.

- Census tract data. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index (SVI).
- Longitudinal data was spotty due to software changes and the passage of time.
- Hydrant pilot took time to recast inspection and maintenance data for the study. Conversely, a DEI study is not an audit, not a reconciliation of the spreadsheet.

# First Steps – One step at a time

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## DEI is big and takes many steps.

- Deliberate decision to stay focused and complete our reports.
- Equity Pilot Study is only the beginning of a potentially larger body of evidence to support DEI efforts.
- Adding demographic data to GIS mapping and engineering studies was a first step, not an end.
- Accepting historical data gaps and unreconciled reports keeps the focus on what we can do.
- We included DEI initiatives in the Strategic Plan and the standalone reports.

# Summary

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- Keep flexible when initiating DEI studies
- Pick a few and stay on track
- You don't know what you don't know
- Strategic Plan is a great time to focus on equity
- It's not an audit
- Don't let the perfect get in the way of the good