

# **PLANNING WITH AN EQUITY LENS: INTEGRATING EQUITY INTO PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN DENVER**



# PLANNING WITH AN EQUITY LENS: INTEGRATING EQUITY INTO PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN DENVER

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# Planning with an Equity Lens: Integrating Equity into Planning and Development in Denver

## Executive Summary

Equity is an emerging concept in the field of urban planning and development. The concept is a response to significant disparities in our society, in which negative life outcomes are disproportionately experienced by people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, disabled individuals and communities, people living in poverty, and others. These disparities exist at national, state, and municipal scales, highlighting how embedded these patterns of marginalization are in our society's institutions. Equity, generally, recognizes these disparities and seeks to ameliorate and eliminate them. The issue with implementing equity is that the complexity of the concept, as well as the varying perspectives on equity, create ambiguity regarding specific interventions that will impact equitable development in Denver. This report, *Planning with an Equity Lens: Integrating Equity into Planning and Development in Denver* seeks to solve the problem of ambiguity by establishing a clear and concise framework to support equitable urban planning and development in Denver. It presents key findings from research conducted on equity in planning and development and highlights best practices and guiding principles to inform the work of planners and government officials, to facilitate more equitable development throughout Denver.

In Denver, equity considerations are urgent and profound. Prosperity Now, a national non-profit ranking prosperity and disparities across the United States, ranked Colorado as 8<sup>th</sup> in the country for overall prosperity, among the top 10 most prosperous states, but 37<sup>th</sup> for racial disparities, in the 25% of states with the greatest racial disparities (2020). *Blueprint Denver*, notes that despite growth in the white population of Denver over the past 14 years, the population of people of color has decreased, and this demographic shift has been especially acute in neighborhoods that have been historically Black or Latino (2019b). Equity has a long history and significant body of literature devoted to it. In order to act equitably however, it is necessary to distill this literature into practical tools.

To that end, this report extensively researched equity in the context of planning and development in academic literature, professional guides and reports, case studies, and in original interviews, conducted with local stakeholders. This research process deconstructs the concept of equity to examine its assumptions and underlying values. The research themes are summarized below.



Table 1: Research Theme Summary

<i>Key Themes from Interviews</i>	<i>Key Theme from Case Studies</i>
<i>Planning Process</i> —To be most effectively addressed, equity must be understood at the most local scales possible, as different groups have different needs and histories	<i>Data-Driven Approach</i> -Effective equitable development strategies need to be systematically measured and analyzed, using the right metrics to capture the right data
<i>Political Process</i> —Elected officials have an enormous role to play in advancing equity, by creating policy and legislation that creates more equitable institutions and processes	<i>Communication</i> -Communication methods should be established between communities and government officials to provide real time feedback and information on equity
<i>Marginalization</i> —Marginalization exists in Denver, and expresses itself through neglect and through people being pushed to the periphery of the social, political, and urban affairs	<i>Empowerment</i> -Equitable development is best realized when communities and individuals are empowered with direct control or authority in the planning process
<i>Diversity &amp; Participation</i> —Diversity is needed in all levels of participation, from community members involved in a public engagement process, to the planners and government officials conducting such engagements	<i>Collaboration</i> -Strong collaboration between community organizations and the city, as well as other stakeholders, is essential for impactful equitable development
<i>Outcomes &amp; Strategies</i> —Complete street initiatives are significant measures that can be taken to advance the widely acknowledged goal of equity, a better quality of life for everyone	<i>Wealth Generation</i> - Economic development practices that invest in marginalized communities so that income and wealth disparities are not perpetuated into future generations
<i>Values</i> —Collaboration, compromise, and knowledge sharing are fundamental values that can help create more equitable places	
<i>Key Themes from Professional Guides</i>	<i>Key Themes from Academic Literature</i>
<i>Gentrification</i> - Equitable development strategies are key to mitigating the negative outcomes of gentrification, and have been used to frame anti-displacement strategies	<i>Marginalization</i> - Equity responds to the marginalization of different communities based on their identities, and is about advancing the interests and welfare of marginalized communities
<i>Planning Practice</i> - Practicing planners, developers, and other government officials need to establish plans to increase equity within the field and their organizations	<i>Redistribution</i> - Equity seeks to redistribute goods, resources, and opportunities to individuals and communities who have been and are neglected, excluded, or deprived
<i>Integrated Approach</i> - Equitable development is most effective when equity concerns are applied to all planning and development processes and projects	<i>Diversity</i> - Equity calls for the inclusion, representation, and participation of all cultures and identities within a city in urban governance and the planning process
<i>Development Context</i> - Developments are most equitable when they work to ‘fit’ within the community, building off community assets or providing community needs/benefits	<i>Sustainability</i> - Equity must be integrated with other values, such as economic empowerment and environmental sustainability, to be fully realized
	<i>History</i> -Equity is framed by the historical processes and events that contributed to the current expressions of marginalization, and can reveal the way forward



The result of this research process is the equity lens. A diagram illustrating the lens is on the next page. This lens breaks down the concept of equity into four dimensions, values and assumptions that make up the concept. For each dimension, a set of possible metrics and qualitative questions has been created, which are intended to help government officials measure and analyze equity in an area. Each dimension also includes recommended actions that would advance equity. These represent best practices identified in planning literature, as well as actions that are broader in scope than planning and development but necessary to consider for equity.

Equity means advancing the interests of marginalized communities. To do that effectively, a comprehensive approach must be adopted that advances equity throughout all the activities a city undertakes. Equitable development is most effective when matched with equity in the criminal justice system, equity in housing, equity in income and wealth, and much more. Finally, equity's greatest potential is not in the sophistication of the concept or in the justness of its calls, but rather in the transformative impacts it can have on our society. Action is required to evolve equity from a value into an impact in our communities.



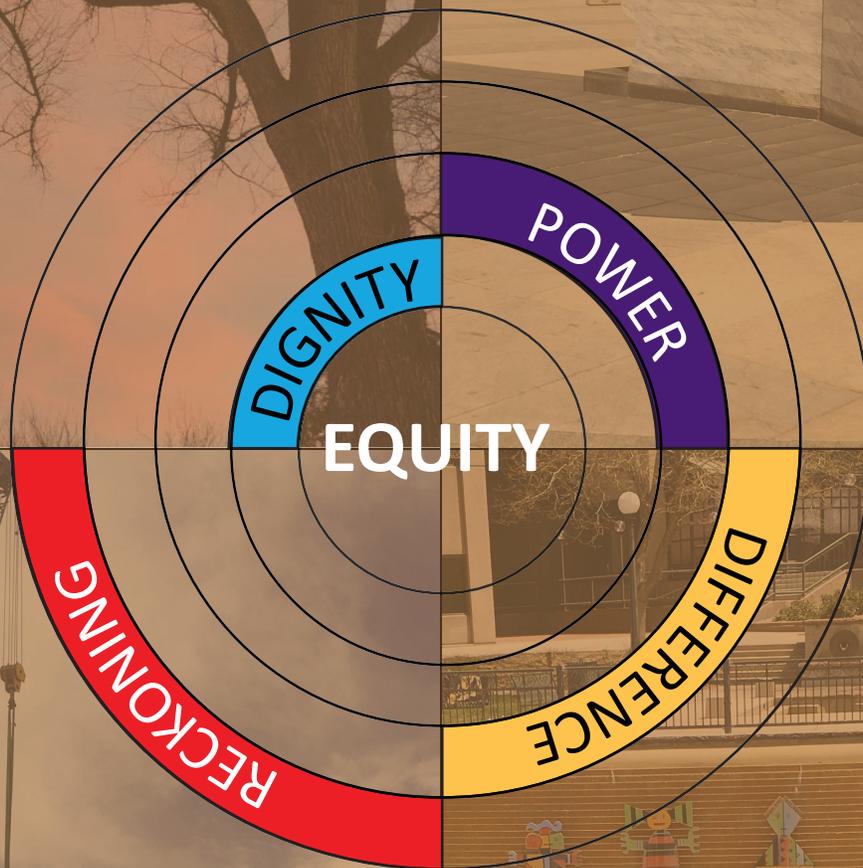
# An Equity Lens: Four Dimensions of Equity

**Dignity** examines the complex ways that equity in the built environment is inextricably connected to equity in other sectors

- Complete Neighborhoods & Streets
- Hazards Inventory & Mitigation

**Power** analyzes the tools and capacities that allow marginalized communities to drive equitable development themselves

- Participatory Budgeting & Revenue Sharing
- Community Benefits Agreements



**Reckoning** addresses the history of how the marginalization we see in our society developed

- Heritage Preservation
- Reconciliation Processes

**Difference** respects, values, and celebrates all the identities and communities in our city

- Targeted Outreach
- Asset Based Community Development