

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Meeting Date: October 27, 2021

TO: Library Board

FROM: Kurt Heinrich, Chair, CRPD Committee

SUBJECT: City of Vancouver Equity Framework

SUMMARY

This report provides information on the City of Vancouver's Equity Framework and recommends that VPL adopt and adapt the framework and that staff develop an action plan. Council has asked the VPL Board to consider adoption of the Equity Framework.

PURPOSE

This report is for decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THAT the Board provisionally approve the City of Vancouver's Equity Framework for use at VPL.
2. THAT the Board direct staff to make adjustments to the framework which increase relevance to VPL.
3. THAT the Board direct staff to conduct a goal setting exercise in the Focus Areas identified in the Equity Framework, identify actions and provide updates to the Board on an annual basis.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The Committee gave feedback on the report, and edits are included to summarize Council discussion and to provide a brief background of the Library's prior work related to equity. The Committee extensively discussed the framework and its application to VPL. They recommended that as staff modify the Equity Framework for VPL, in addition to examples to ground the

document in VPL work, that a definition of equity be included in the Framework. The Committee also discussed the emphasis on race and the relevance of other equity issues such as poverty, accessibility, gender, and Indigeneity.

POLICY

Relevant Board policies include:

- [Access to Vancouver Public Library Services without Fear Policy](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Statement](#)
- [Human Rights and Harassment Policy](#)
- [Living Wage Employer](#)
- [Respectful Workplace Policy](#)

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The Equity Framework provides a foundation to support and guide the work of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. Most of the goals in the Strategic Plan are related to improving equity in the delivery of library service, including but not limited to the following goals:

- 1.3 Provide relevant physical and digital collections in diverse formats and languages
- 2.1 Reflect and celebrate Indigenous cultures and languages
- 2.2 Develop welcoming, accessible, and sustainable facilities that meet current and future needs and expectations
- 3.1 Reduce social isolation and provide affordable access
- 3.2 Enhance understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing
- 3.3 Engage and celebrate the diverse cultures and languages of Vancouver
- 3.4 Establish the library as a forum for civic conversation and understanding
- 4.2 Foster an inclusive workplace that reflects and the diversity of our community

INDIGENOUS CONSIDERATIONS

The Equity Framework is built on the recognition that what is now known as Vancouver is located on the unceded lands of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples.

The starting point for the Equity Framework is the assertion that the ongoing colonialism faced by the Host Nations and urban Indigenous people is unique and separate from the oppression that other equity-denied groups face. The Framework centers Indigenous Rights and is meant to support the City's and VPL's ongoing work towards coming into right relations with Indigenous communities, without replacing Reconciliation efforts. If approved, the Equity Framework will support but not supplant the Library's work in this area.

BACKGROUND

On July 20, 2021, Vancouver City Council unanimously approved the Equity Framework, which provides a united approach to equity to be used by all city departments. During the discussion, councillors thanked staff for their work on the Framework and made comments or asked questions focussed on implementation and how the Framework will interact with city planning processes. City staff responded that the Framework will inform and influence city-wide planning, including the Vancouver Plan. Several councillors stated that they look forward to championing the work and they hope that the Equity Framework will guide future policy development and service delivery.

Council directed the City of Vancouver's Equity Office to conduct a benchmarking and goal setting exercise, identify actions and tracking procedures, and provide regular updates to Council. Council also referred the Equity Framework for consideration of adoption to the Vancouver Public Library Board, the Vancouver Police Board, and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. The June 22, 2021 council report is [here](#).

The Equity Framework is a step towards acknowledging and upholding the rights and dignity of all people, addressing historic and current systemic injustice, and reducing harm. It is grounded in the fact that Vancouver is located on the unceded traditional territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Peoples and is built on the history of colonialism and white supremacy, a history that has and continues to negatively impact many, but particularly Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities.

The work on the Equity Framework began in 2018 as a City staff initiative and VPL staff have been engaged since the beginning. It was developed in consultation and collaboration with community and staff voices including the City's Equity Leadership team, which includes a VPL manager and director. The City of Vancouver's Social Policy team led the project for over two years and identified the need for ongoing equity leadership within the city. When the Equity Office was subsequently established, the Equity Office assumed shared leadership with the Social Policy team for the Framework.

VPL has been committed to advancing equity for many years, building on foundational values of equality of access in public libraries. Over the years, VPL's equity work has considered many areas, such as poverty, race, ability, gender, literacy, immigration/refugee status, mental health, history of incarceration, and education. Examples of VPL's work in this area include:

- From 2004 – 2008 VPL worked in partnership with Halifax Public Libraries, Toronto Public Library, and Regina Public Library on The Working Together Project, a Government of Canada-funded initiative to develop a more inclusive approach to public library service by working collaboratively with socially-excluded communities, identifying and examining systemic barriers to library use and proposing policy and

procedural changes to address these barriers. The [Working Together: Community-Led Libraries](#) Toolkit was published at the end of the project.

- In 2008, VPL established two permanent Community Librarian positions whose primary role is to use collaborative, community engagement techniques to provide responsive services to community groups and members who may not be served by the Library. Community Librarians identify systemic barriers to library use and propose change to address these barriers. Since 2008, the Library has added three more Community Librarian positions for a total of five.
- In 2013, an internal services review of Children’s and Teen Services led to reallocation of staff resources across the city based on neighbourhoods of greatest need as identified through demographics, community feedback, and social research conducted by UBC’s Human Early Learning Partnership.
- From 2016 to 2018, VPL implemented the Trans, Gender-diverse and Two-Spirit inclusion Strategy, establishing trans inclusive or gender neutral washroom signage at all locations, training all staff about inclusion, modifying the library’s systems and policies for staff and the public, and providing guides to support accessing inclusive collections and services.
- Since the late 1990s VPL has committed to addressing the digital divide through free-to-use services and supports such as public workstations for users without home internet access or computers; free public wifi at all 21 locations; digital literacy training in basic computer skills and online privacy in group classes and one-to-one sessions; one-on-one support with specific technology including smartphones and tablets; robust digital collections along with personalized support in accessing these; and designated high-performance workstations with access to advanced software to support the creative community. The City of Vancouver has recognized VPL in its Digital Strategy as the means by which it addresses the digital divide in Vancouver.
- Truth and Reconciliation is a priority for VPL. The Library shares Indigenous voices through collections at all 21 locations and programs such as the Indigenous Storyteller in Residence. VPL is working to respond to the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action while continuing to learn, build relationships and increase understanding and knowledge and facilitate efforts toward Reconciliation in our communities.

DISCUSSION

Public libraries, including VPL, have long championed equality and access for all and have valued and celebrated diversity in our communities. As our collective learning has evolved, it has become clear that our practices are centred on concepts of equality rather than equity. To better meet our new understanding of the impact of systems based on colonialism and white supremacy, VPL needs new tools to guide and support our work.

The Equity Framework sets a foundation for the Library's efforts to advance equity and provides a structure to align existing efforts across the organization and the City. Library staff have an established approach to aligning efforts with City departments and have recognized benefits associated with sharing information and working with City colleagues to maximize resources and impact.

For example, the Library participates in the City-wide Reconciliation Directors Working Group and our recently hired Indigenous Planner is a member of the City-wide Indigenous Planners team led by the City of Vancouver's Indigenous Relations Manager. The Indigenous Relations Manager recently supported VPL's efforts to engage with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Wauuth Nations to seek their guidance on setting priorities as we endeavour to learn and evolve our work towards Reconciliation. We anticipate that by adopting the Equity Framework we will be similarly well-positioned to continue to align efforts, resources and expertise with the staff in the City's Equity Office.

The City's framework will serve as a starting point for VPL. The Library will leverage the significant investment and expertise that has gone into the creation of the framework and will make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the Library's action plan is relevant to our work and advancing our strategic priorities.

Next Steps

If the Board provisionally approves the Equity Framework, staff will make adjustments to increase its relevance to VPL. This will include adding examples of actions identified in the 2020 – 2023 Strategic Plan that are aligned with the Focus Areas of the Equity Framework.

Policy and Planning staff will lead a goal setting exercise in the Focus Areas identified in the Equity Framework, and work with directors and managers to develop an action plan, directly linking to the Library's strategic plan and operating plan.

Staff will bring the action plan to the Board for information in mid-2022, and will provide updates on an annual basis.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

VPL has many existing staff positions with responsibility for advancing our work related to equity, such as staff in Programming & Learning who develop public programming, community librarians who work in neighbourhoods to reduce barriers to using the library, children's librarians who provide early literacy programs that reach a wide range of audiences, and staff in Policy & Planning who support this work across the organization. These positions are funded within the Library's annual operating budget.

In addition, the Board has approved one-time funding of up to \$60K from the Library's financial reserves for additional staffing and training on equity.

FINAL REMARKS

The Equity Framework provides a foundation to approach planning and operations with an equity lens. Its strength comes from the many community and staff voices that have contributed to its development. If adopted by the Board, it will position the Library to align its efforts and expertise with equity efforts across the City of Vancouver.

APPENDIX A

Getting our house in order: The City of Vancouver's Equity Framework

Our Place on Unceded Lands

The Equity Framework is built on the recognition that what is now known as Vancouver is located on the unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) who have lived here since time immemorial, who are Rights holders and stewards of these lands and waters.

The word 'unceded' means 'taken without consent' and refers to a process by which settlers from Western Europe sought to replace Indigenous laws and take Indigenous land, for the purpose of building wealth. This process, called colonialism, used force to intimidate, manipulate and physically remove Indigenous peoples from their land and extinguish their cultures. It also depended on social and political ideologies such as white supremacy – the assertion that the white race is superior to others- to mask the brutality of this attempted genocide. Colonialism and its accompanying ideologies (including racism, patriarchy, paternalism and capitalism) are entrenched in the political, bureaucratic, legal, economic and other systems that shape our modern society. In many ways, these systems reproduce and maintain injustice and inequity, and are a continuation of the violence experienced by Indigenous people.

City of Reconciliation's vision: form sustained relationships of mutual respect, incorporate perspectives, and provides services that benefit local First Nations and the Urban Indigenous community

Several political commitments and streams of work have confirmed the City of Vancouver's recognitions of Indigenous Rights. These include the City's commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice, and the Red Women Rising report recommendations. Under the umbrella of the [City of Reconciliation](#) and [Park Board's Reconciliation](#) work, these commitments are acted on through specific projects, programs and partnerships. These remain the central channels for addressing the specific types of injustice and inequities suffered, historically and presently, by Indigenous peoples.

The City of Vancouver's Equity Framework is a document that has risen out of the need to address injustices and inequities experienced by a broader cross-section of our society – including Black and other racialized people, women and gender-diverse people, and people with disabilities. The starting point for this Framework is the assertion that the ongoing colonialism faced by the Host Nations and urban Indigenous people is unique and separate from the oppression that other equity-denied groups face. At the same time, there are some common root causes for these inequities. The efforts toward Reconciliation and equity can inform one another, and solidarity between Indigenous people and equity-denied communities can be beneficial to both. Accordingly, the Equity Framework centers Indigenous Rights, with the aspiration that this Framework is supportive to the City's ongoing work towards coming into right relations with Indigenous communities, without in any way replacing Reconciliation efforts.

Why We Need This Framework

The need for an Equity Framework emerged in 2017 as City staff worked with the Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee comprised of community stakeholders including people with lived experience. Work on poverty reduction brings existing inequities in our society into plain sight as poverty rates are dramatically higher for Indigenous people, Black Canadians, and racialized new immigrants, underscoring the linkage between race and class. The Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee members expressed concern that a nuanced understanding of these issues was not shared consistently across City departments. The Committee urged the City to “get your house in order”, calling on the City to examine all parts of the organization – not only those parts explicitly dedicated to addressing social issues – to coordinate and reorient in the direction of equity¹.

In a similar vein, when the City asked organizations requesting grants to submit their equity policies as part of their application, some organizations asked “where is yours?” When the City, in which close to half the residents are racialized, made statements on anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism in the context of the massive awakening to racial injustice of 2020 – against the backdrop of COVID-19– community members and City staff alike asked the City to “show, don’t tell.” The local intersectional feminist movement has been asking for intersectional reviews of the City’s internal operations and budgets for many years. As a large, public and visible land owner, regulator, service provider, employer, advocate, and convener, the City has influence over many aspects of community life, and is called upon to be a leader.

Meanwhile, the societal conversation on equity has expanded and evolved rapidly. The number of equity-related motions and directives, and internal staff-led initiatives has also multiplied. This means that equity related efforts have gone from being the focus for a few staff to the many, without a shared definition or unified approach.

The Equity Framework exists to create a unified vision and shared understanding of equity across City departments, and to define the City’s orientation to this work.

The Equity Framework is the City’s response to the above. It exists to fill a basic knowledge and coordination gap in the City’s equity work, and to invigorate these efforts, so that the City can live into the leadership role expected of it. The Framework contributes to the City’s corporate culture goal of fostering a one-team mindset. It does not replace the work that departments have been doing on equity – rather it seeks to unify and amplify them.

The Equity Framework is not an action plan. It is a conceptual, grounding, foundational document, out of which a number of toolkits and action plans flow, and from which ongoing departmental strategies will be drawn going forward. The Equity Framework lays the foundation for culture change within the City of Vancouver as an organization. Accountability for the realization of its vision lies with leaders across all City departments and governing bodies. It will be most effective when everyone working on behalf of the City enacts its principles in their day-to-day work and routine decision-making. Given how quickly the conversation on equity is evolving, the Equity Framework will need reviewing and refreshing every few years.

¹ The work on poverty reduction was mandated by the Healthy City Strategy, the City’s social sustainability strategy, focused on creating conditions for well-being of all. As such, the Healthy City Strategy is the City’s first community-facing equity strategy and is a predecessor to this Framework.

The work on the creation of the Equity Framework began in 2018 with courageous conversations among staff on how racism showed up in the internal dynamics of the City and in connection with community. Staff across all ranks and all departments informed this Framework, and in many cases engaged in their own learning and unlearning, shared from lived experience, and effectively formed into communities of care and responsibility in the process. The creation of the Equity Framework was led by the City's Social Policy team. The City's new Equity Office joined as a partner and will have oversight over implementation. This work was shaped by the voices of staff affinity groups, Council advisory bodies, a dedicated cross-departmental leadership team, and an external advisory committee comprised of scholars and practitioners with a depth of experience and expertise in equity. The resulting Equity Framework reflects a vision arising out of their conversations. It attempts to strike a balance between being clear and directive, and being spacious and non-dogmatic, with the hopes of creating room for a diversity of approaches under a unified umbrella.

What do We Mean by Equity

If you were born in Vancouver today, your social identity – your race, ability, class and gender – would predict your likelihood of rising to positions of power, influence and material success in your lifetime and, similarly, your likelihood of struggling to make ends meet. It doesn't mean that Raven, an Indigenous Elder, will never get a job as a senior director, or that Tyrell, a Black single father living with a disability is destined to live in poverty². It means that the odds are against Raven and Tyrell thriving, because of the way dominant cultures and dominant structures are set up to discriminate against them.

This discrimination is produced by daily occurrences over a lifetime that have impacts across generations: growing up in a neighbourhood where parks and schools are overcrowded and under-funded, foster parents whose ambitions for you are too small, family struggling with intergenerational trauma³, kids who bully you on the playground, authorities who are harsh on you, institutions that don't meet your accessibility needs, university application processes that require extra-curricular activities your family couldn't afford, absence of social networks to access jobs, absence of a family safety net when you make a mistake, discrimination when you try to rent an apartment, denial of promotion because your belonging and cultural fit is always in question, being followed around stores or treated as suspicious on the bus, suffering from depression and the long term impacts of prejudice, acts of discrimination and violence. The cultures and structures of this society were not set up with your thriving in mind. To thrive, and even to survive, you have to work much harder than many others, and you likely have to work hard at masking significant, valuable aspects of your identity in order to fit in. This is what inequity looks like. The pursuit of equity, then, is about recognizing harms and correcting for discrimination experienced over life times and generations, while dismantling discriminatory rules, societal systems and cultures.

Striving for and moving in the direction of an equitable society has a longstanding history in Canada and BC, including, for example, abolition of slavery (1834), expanding voting rights to women (1918), to Asian Canadians (1948), and to Indigenous people (1960), elimination of the Chinese head tax (1947), access rights to public spaces for blind persons with a guide dog (1979), reinstatement of Indian Status to women who had lost it through marriage to men

² Read Raven's and Tyrell's stories in the Introduction to Intersectionality tool.

³ Intergenerational trauma is trauma that gets passed down from those who directly experience an incident to subsequent generations. In the Indigenous context, intergenerational trauma often refers to the trauma experienced by survivors of the Indian Residential School system, passed down to their children and grandchildren.

without status (1985), introduction of employment equity legislation (1986), and legalization of same-sex marriage (2003). A more equitable society is a happier, more desirable society for all⁴.

There is an important distinction made between equality and equity. Although both have an eye to fairness, equality tries to achieve this through treating everyone the same, regardless of need, opportunity and circumstances, and in so doing can in fact reproduce uneven outcomes. Equity, on the other hand, tries to achieve fairness by treating people differently based on a context of need, opportunity, circumstance and consideration of historic and structural inequities⁵. By framing the work of the City around equity, this Framework clarifies that targeted differential treatment is valid and even necessary in some circumstances, because people and communities are situated differently from each other. Targeted interventions require thoughtful consideration and design. What we need to avoid is inadvertently creating further unintended inequities through an attempt to correct for existing inequities.

We define equity as both an outcome and a process.

Equity as an outcome is the condition that would be achieved if one's identity no longer predicted how one fares.

Equity as a process is the replacement of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes or fail to eliminate them⁶.

Equity as an outcome is dependent on equity as a process. It is impossible to move in the direction of an equitable society without the process of identifying and eliminating subtle and explicit forms of discrimination. How we do this matters. Generally speaking, equitable conditions cannot be arrived at through patronizing and colonial approaches where those in power, once again, assume their own superiority and attempt to impose their will on those who have been oppressed. Instead, equity as a process is participatory and seeks to integrate the views of those impacted by a decision, particularly those who have been underrepresented and underserved. It requires listening to and co-creation across differences in identity and power. It requires redistributing power across different groups.

Our Equity Statements

Equity is both an outcome and a process.

Equity names and addresses systemic inequities that benefit and favour some groups and often disproportionately impact cultural communities, Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (IBPOC). Individuals and communities with intersecting identities of Indigeneity, race, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation, ability and class can be, and often are, negatively affected by favoured social systems.

Therefore, equity efforts seek ways to transform current structures, policies, and processes in order to balance power and influence, expand access, and create new ways of walking together that nourish all people by embedding intersectionality in institutional and sectoral change.

⁴ See, for example, Government Alliance for Race and Equity's "[Why working for racial equity benefits everyone](#)"

⁵ Note that in the Canadian legal discourse, treating everyone the same is referred to as *procedural equality* while treating people different to get to same outcomes (what is referred to here as equity) is called *substantive equality*.

⁶ Developed based on a definition of racial equity attributed to [Center for Assessment and Policy Development](#)

Equity amplifies and affirms the dignity and rights of all people by centering the diverse voices of Indigenous and racialized peoples and communities in creative and resilient processes, informed by Indigenous knowledge and different world views across the ways we do our work.

Our Equity Commitments

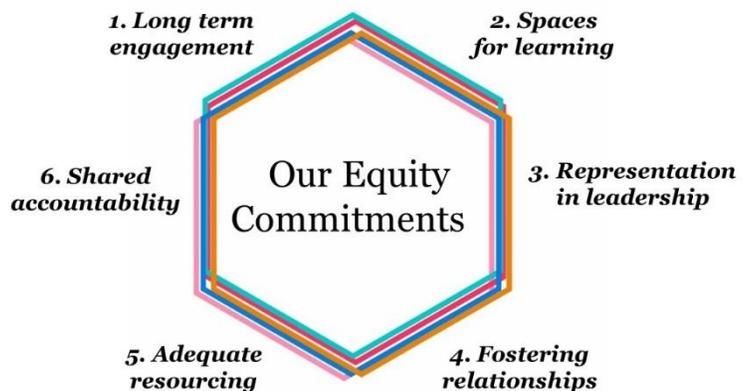
The Equity Commitments are statements about our willingness to do this work in a good way, and set up our equity efforts for success. The commitments apply to the City as an organization, and are to be upheld and enacted by leaders and elected officials. They also apply to every individual staff member within their sphere of influence and responsibility. Managers will lead their teams to include equity in departmental practices and in team and individual work plans. When embedded, the commitments may manifest as new projects and new ways of doing work *and* as relatively small changes to the work we are already doing or that we routinely do.

We commit to doing equity work long term	As both an outcome and a process, equity work is ongoing. Recognizing that the societal interest in these efforts may fluctuate, we commit to equity work as a long term project that is about making meaningful culture change. We will seek short term transformative practices during this journey while working towards systemic shifts. Doing this work includes listening, learning, and addressing systemic issues, including those that impact Indigenous, Black, and other racialized staff, using an intersectionality lens, on an ongoing basis.
We commit to creating spaces for accountable learning	The City of Vancouver will be a learning organization. We recognize that expertise in equity is a real expertise, though the learning is never complete. We recognize the knowledge held by those have lived their lives in bodies experiencing inequities and we seek and honour this knowledge, regardless of rank or professional expertise. We will foster an organizational culture that has capacity to hold difficult conversations. We expect and normalize personal discomfort when working on equity, and will help each other through it. We will create spaces and tools for reflection and learning from action. We will not be afraid to make mistakes and we will share our learning publicly as we go, before we get it right.
We commit to reflecting equity in City leadership	We acknowledge that currently the City’s leadership does not reflect the diverse communities we serve, and the relative absence of Indigenous, Black and other racialized leaders is particularly noticeable. We commit to seeking every opportunity in our hiring, retention, and succession processes, to transform this picture, and will make concerted efforts to remove barriers to involvement in local politics faced by equity-denied groups.
We commit to fostering strong relationships	Through the lens of equity, all people are people, not cogs in a machine. Equity work engages both hearts and minds, and requires us to relate to each other as humans first. We commit to valuing and fostering relationships, moving at the speed of trust while honoring the need for urgency for equity-denied staff, using power consciously, listening better to understand the impact of often good intentions, and embracing difference so that there is room for all people to contribute. Fostering strong relationships also includes resisting dominant practices of cultural assimilation and creating an atmosphere to thrive, not despite, but because of our diversity.

<p>We commit to adequately resourcing equity work</p>	<p>Work on equity cannot happen off the sides of desks and deserves to be valued. We commit to ensuring that both central and departmental equity functions are adequately resourced at the City. We also commit to reimagining how the City resources communities and community partners who are carrying out important work on behalf of equity-denied groups across our neighbourhoods.</p>
<p>We commit to shared accountability</p>	<p>Addressing systemic inequities is everyone’s responsibility and different actors at the City will have access to different levers to move the dial. We commit to recognizing equity as part of all staff, departmental, and institutional-wide work plans, with performance reviews and measures in place to evaluate our progress on an ongoing basis. We will develop equity metrics and share our results publicly so that communities and sectoral partners can continue to hold the City accountable and partner with us towards shared goals.</p>

“We consent to learn in public. We will make mistakes. We will sit with those mistakes, be transparent about them, and use them both to learn and to teach.”

-Vancouver Park Board Reconciliation Vision-



Three Imperatives for Doing Equity Work

The City of Vancouver has nine long-term strategic goals, the third of which is “an increased focus on diversity, equity, social issues and opportunities”⁷. This is also one of four City Council priorities. As such, there is a mandate to “alleviate barriers to our citizen’s well-being such as mental health challenges, addictions, social isolation, poverty and racism”.

At the same time, equity work is not only something that staff do in support of community and by directive from leadership. Doing equity work is personal and can be confronting as it highlights power and privilege. Different people and different teams may have different motivators for undertaking work on equity. It is not essential that everyone comes to this work with the exact same motivation. It is, however, essential that there is some understanding for *why* we are undertaking equity work, to sustain the momentum and impact.

At the City of Vancouver, three sets of equity imperatives co-exist.

⁷ See City of Vancouver’s Corporate Plan, 2020. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/corporate-plan.pdf>

1. *The Justice Imperative*

As social creatures, most of us have an intuitive preference for integrity and fairness⁸. We want to do the right thing, are distressed when we observe oppression and injustice, and even more so when we realize we have been participating in it. It feels inherently wrong, for example, to realize that the safety some of us take for granted walking down a Vancouver street in day light, is entirely unavailable to some of our fellow Vancouverites, simply because of how they look. The personal and organizational motivation to be ethical, to be accountable for past evils and to make things right, is at the heart of the transformative potential of this moment, and constitutes a primary impetus for the City of Vancouver's work on equity.

The justice imperative is notably activated when we study history. It is important to understand, for example, the history of racialization and its ongoing impacts. In the 17th Century, Western Europeans began to arrive in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia, looking to build wealth. Europeans used pseudo-science to identify physical features among the local people, constructing images of "the other". They attached meaning to skin colour, shape of the nose and size of the forehead, to claim that the people on these lands were unintelligent, slow, mischievous, inflexible, foolish, greedy or wild. Thus, "race" was socially constructed. White Europeans were declared "the most beautiful race of men" and *superior* to all others⁹. Some groups – for example the Irish, Italians, Greeks, and, notably, Jewish people- were at various times excluded from the category of whiteness as was useful to those in power.

White supremacy paved the way for dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands, enslavement of African peoples, racial segregation, and denial of personhood and political power. Over time, race continued to gain social currency, with a growing ability to distribute unequal power and privilege, translating into uneven outcomes for various racial groups¹⁰.

Supremacist thinking – the notion that one's value is a function of one's appearance or behaviour - has also historically shaped the reality of numerous "others". For example, people with disabilities have been consistently oppressed by ableist thinking that dominates our society. Ableism is prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that bodies and minds that function - walk, see, hear, think, feel, present and express - in what society constructs and portrays as "typical" and "able", are superior. Thus, "ability" is socially constructed¹¹. Disabled persons are defined by their impairment and the need for fixing. Central to this ideology is the capitalist notion that one's value is dependent on one's ability to work and produce, or reproduce. Up until the 20th century, persons with disabilities were commonly put away or disposed of: confined to their homes, asylums or prisons, where many were severely neglected and abused¹². Legislators and regulators actively enabled these practices, and at the same time built and supported societal systems – education, employment, leisure, public transportation, housing, family and social life – to the needs of typical bodies and minds, so that even as attitudes towards persons with disabilities change, our environments remain inaccessible and exclusionary.

⁸ Lieberman, M. D. (2013). *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. Crown Publishers/Random House

⁹ Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

¹⁰ Castagna, M & Dei, G. J.S. (2000). An historical overview of the application of the race concept in social practice.

¹¹ Note that in presenting race and ability as social constructs, this Framework subscribes to the social model of identity construction (as opposed to medical or biological models). Social models make clear that systems that create social constructs, not the individuals who are boxed in by them, are to blame for exclusion.

¹² For a history of disability rights and justice see <https://www.djno.ca/history-of-disability-justice-right>

Supremacist ideologies were not rare or accidental. Rather they were foundational to the building of Canada and its cities. They generated tangible benefit for those whose ways of being were positioned as the cultural norm and whose wealth and political power they were determined to protect and expand. They were the basis of voting rights, immigration laws, labour laws, policing, education systems, land use plans, zoning, design, the arts, language, access to employment opportunities, codes of professional conduct and so much more. Supremacist ideologies are so omnipresent, and so powerful in imposing the bar we each need to meet to be considered desirable and valuable, that they impact us all. We do not have to have a disability to experience ableism, or be a person of colour to be subject to white supremacy. We are *all* set up to thrive for untenable ideals set by supremacist ideologies.

Though much has been done to undo the more explicit features of supremacist ways of thinking, much remains to be undone as they are woven into the cultural and economic fabric of Canadian cities. An appreciation for the magnitude of the harm that has been done can be a strong ethical motivator for the transformations we need to generate.

From a justice perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by measuring, for example: indicators of community health and wellbeing (see [Healthy City Dashboard](#)), strength of relationship with Host Nations and urban Indigenous communities, number of City policies and programs significantly modified to remove barriers for equity-denied¹³ communities, representation of equity-denied groups in workforce, elected and leadership positions, and their self-reported sense of belonging and wellbeing at work.

2. The Compliance Imperative

As an employer, the City of Vancouver is bound by legislation which prohibits discrimination in employment and requires the creation of a culture of safety. The British Columbia Human Rights Code prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, and criminal conviction unrelated to employment (known as *protected grounds*). WorkSafeBC legislation also applies, requiring the City to provide both physically and psychologically safe workplaces for employees. This includes protection against bullying and harassment, including where such behaviour is linked to racism, sexism and other forms of identity-based aggression.

As a local government organization, the City is also required by law to provide members of the public with access to its services and facilities in a non-discriminatory way. The Human Rights Code prohibits the City from denying or otherwise discriminating against any person in the provision of services or facilities on the basis of any protected ground.

As such, equitable treatment of the City's thousands of employees, and hundreds of thousands of residents, is a legal obligation. When individuals comply with expectations of treating each other respectfully and equitably, they prevent harm to colleagues and residents. Compliance with these legal requirements is a basic, widely applicable motivator for equity efforts.

¹³ The Federal Employment Equity Act introduced the term *equity-seeking groups* to refer to the four designated groups facing discrimination (women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities). The term *equity-denied groups*, used throughout this document, is an alternative to that term, which more explicitly recognizes the refusal to include certain groups (not strictly limited to the four designated by the Federal government). Since equity benefits all people, everyone should be *seeking* equity, though only some have been *denied* equity.

From a compliance perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by tracking, for example, strength and accessibility of internal policies and procedures, and trust in the City as an employer.

3. The Effectiveness Imperative

There is an ever-growing body of research¹⁴ showing that equity in the workplace - along with its closely associated concepts, diversity and inclusion - amplifies excellence and makes organizations more effective. It has been shown, for example, that organizations making genuine efforts to advance equity are more successful in retaining talent and have lower levels of employee turnover. They experience reduced instances of interpersonal aggression and an increase in engagement and trust. Teams that are diverse are more likely to include different viewpoints or thinking styles, and, in the presence of psychological safety, these teams solve problems faster and come up with more creative solutions.

For younger job seekers, workforce diversity and clear commitment to anti-racism are likely to be requirements, not just preferences.

Similarly, equitable and inclusive engagement with diverse voices in community is key in delivering effective municipal services and legislation. It is well understood that nuanced conversations with local residents improves City decision making, by illuminating opportunities and risks, identifying innovative solutions, and simplifying implementation by building support for projects. As Vancouver grows increasingly more diverse, the City's effectiveness, and the strength of our local democracy, depends on low-barrier and relevant engagement with all residents.

Besides being the right thing to do, prioritizing equity efforts may also be one of the most strategic directions an organization can take. In the short term, grappling with the tensions and practical dilemmas that arise when we go about dismantling oppressive systems and including diverse voices may be experienced by some as a diversion from the tasks at hand. However, from a long-term perspective, creating the conditions to unlock every person's potential leads to a better performing City that is more accountable and responsive to the communities it is here to serve. Equity does not only benefit marginalized groups. Rather, everyone gains when we have a more fair and effective system.

From an effectiveness perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by assessing, for example: participation and trust in government reported by marginalized groups, level of interest from equity-denied groups to work at the City, success in promotion and retention, prevalence of outside-the-box solutions, and overall corporate performance.

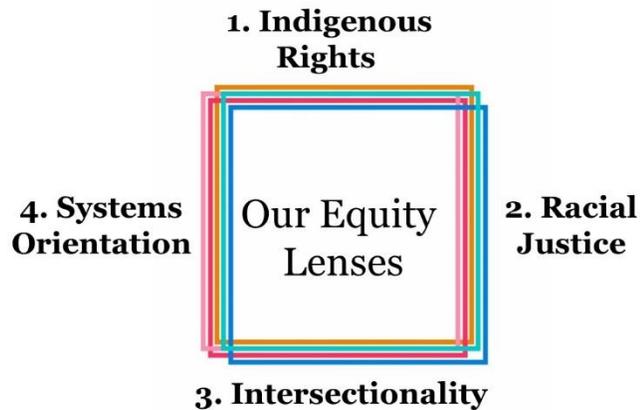
Our Vision and Approach

The City of Vancouver's stated mission is to "create a great city of communities that cares about our people, our environment, and our opportunities to live, work, and prosper." The notion of *care* is thus central to the identity of the City. Care is a central driver for a majority of those engaged in public service and local politics, and positions *people* at the centre of the City's efforts and concerns. Accordingly, an ethics of care provide the foundation for the City's work on equity.

¹⁴ Summarized here [Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter: Quick Take | Catalyst](#)

We envision a city where those who are most marginalized are not excluded from care and opportunity for flourishing, rather, they are systemically prioritized for it.

Implicit within this vision is an approach to the design and implementation of our initiatives. This approach can be described as the application of four distinct and related lenses: Indigenous Rights, racial justice, intersectionality, and systems orientation. Every City decision, project or program moves us in the direction of equity when these four lenses are used to frame the problem or opportunity, analyze the situation, decide who to involve, and make decisions on design, implementation and evaluation. Together these lenses provide the special ingredients that define the flavour of our equity efforts under this Equity Framework.



1. Indigenous Rights

The City of Vancouver, like all governments, has a responsibility to uphold and protect Indigenous Rights and take effective measures, in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, to redress and improve economic, social and environmental conditions of Indigenous communities. In order to achieve this goal, equity work must be centered on upholding, recognizing, and protecting inherent and constitutionally protected Indigenous Rights. This responsibility must be enacted with resolve and a commitment to respectfully engage with the three Host Nations and urban Indigenous communities in ways that foster sustained and strong relationships. In order to move in the direction of equity, the City of Vancouver needs to fulfil its promise as a City of Reconciliation as a priority.

Reconciliation is often defined as a process of establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which requires awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behaviour¹⁵. For the City of Vancouver, Reconciliation is about the work of repair we do with Indigenous communities. On the path to Reconciliation we also need decolonization, which is an inward looking process - it is about the City's work with itself. Decolonization is the process of surfacing the colonial assumptions, narratives and beliefs that individuals hold *and* that are embedded in the City's ways of operating, and beginning to dismantle

The City of Vancouver acknowledges the colonial system on which it was built and commits to addressing past, current and future harms.

¹⁵ Based on definition of Reconciliation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

and reshape these structures. As such, decolonization can be done on every project that the City is involved with, in day-to-day practices, and in lifting the voices of Indigenous staff and community members. While these transformations do not equal Reconciliation, they pave the path to repair and make it more possible for the City to come into right relations with Indigenous communities.

Reconciliation efforts and decolonization efforts are both central to advancing Indigenous Rights and they are therefore central to advancing equity. They represent important opportunities for fostering solidarity and community building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Vancouver. As stated in the opening section, solidarity is key but the distinctness of Indigenous sovereignty must be upheld.

Examples of an Indigenous Rights lens in action:

- *Partnership with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations' development corporations on infrastructure planning, and development of specific sites*
- *Allocation of secure, long term spaces for gathering, healing and support programs for urban Indigenous Communities, and for Indigenous City staff, with support from the Host Nations*
- *Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice and identifying roles the City can specifically play to advance specific Calls*

2. Racial Justice

As a key process of colonization, racism creates unequal power in which those who are not white have unequal access to opportunities for economic, political and social mobility. While racism is compounded by other forms of discrimination (classism, ableism, sexism, trans antagonism, homophobia, etc.), naming it and taking deliberate steps to tackle it is integral to our equity work. We are unlikely to be able to advance the interests of women and gender minorities, people with disabilities, queer communities and others, without specifically considering the intersections of these identities with Indigeneity and race.

Over the past decade, leadership tables at large organizations have become more diverse, but only in the sense that they now include white women and LGBTQ+ people, in what Canadian scholar Malinda Smith has called “diversification of whiteness”. Black and other racialized people, who make up about 50% of the population of Vancouver, and roughly 40% of the City’s employees, have not gained substantially from equity efforts, and the conversation on race has remained somewhat off limits until recently. As such, a racial justice approach is needed to close existing gaps and provide access to opportunities for all Vancouverites.

In the past, diversity and inclusion efforts in Canada have typically not named race specifically, and in doing so have failed to address inequities for racialized communities.

As a City that has defined itself by its cultural diversity and welcoming people from all over the world, racism is a difficult topic to raise as it runs counter to this collective identity. We need to name racism as a key barrier to this collective identity and commit to normalize these conversations as part our equity efforts. A racial justice approach is part of our institutional

direction that states our agreement to sit with discomfort and work through the complexities that come with these conversations.

Examples of a racial justice lens in action:

- *Designation of geographic areas in the City that are of significance to racialized or ethno cultural communities as a step towards redress*
- *Targets for representation of persons of colour in leadership roles, and a succession planning process that gives explicit consideration to race and racial dynamics*
- *Funding awarded to projects that bring together multiple racialized and multi-racial communities working together in solidarity towards shared goals*

3. Intersectionality

Rooted in Indigenous and Black women's activism and further theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black legal scholar, the term *intersectionality* was developed to explain how race intersects with gender to produce barriers for Black women¹⁶. Crenshaw used the metaphor of a traffic intersection to explain the concept: While traffic collisions can happen anywhere on a road, they are more prevalent at intersections. Furthermore, the exact cause of accident is more difficult to determine at an intersection, compared with elsewhere on a road, because traffic flows from four directions into an intersection. Similarly, when Black women face discrimination, it is hard to say whether racism or sexism was at play. It is likely that we are looking at a combination of two forms of discrimination at the intersection of race and gender.

Today, the term intersectionality is used more broadly to examine how multiple forms of systemic discrimination, including classism, homophobia, trans antagonism, ageism and ableism create compounding negative impacts for groups situated within these intersections. An intersectional approach helps to identify where there are multiple forms of marginalization and where these combine. This combination of identities means that people can be negatively impacted differently and more intensely by policies or programs that don't consider identities in a more holistic way. Intersectionality provides a lens through which these issues can be addressed as a whole rather than individually.

Examples of an intersectional lens in action:

- *Data collection forms that don't default to "male and female" identity boxes, but instead ask about gender outside the binary, race, and any other demographic information pertinent to purpose of collection*
- *A model for Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that allows for the creation of groups along intersections of identity such as QTPOC (queer and trans people of colour), and WOC in STEM (women of colour in science, technology, engineering, math).*
- *Accessible, below-market housing that is built specifically to the needs of Indigenous woman-led families*
- *Focused consultations with the most vulnerable of working people, including owners of small ethnic corner stores, older migrant workers, and trans sex workers to inform future economic planning*

4. Systems orientation

Historically, the efforts to reverse inequities have focused on interventions that are individual in nature: to help a child with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) keep up in school,

¹⁶ See Introduction to Intersectionality and Intersectionality Toolkit

assign them a support worker. To have more women in leadership, identify promising women, mentor and accelerate them through the ranks. To address racism in the workplace, create a strong anti-discrimination policy so that incidents can be reported, investigated and addressed. To move people out of homelessness, build shelters.

These efforts are incredibly important and necessary. And over time we have come to appreciate that they are not adequate on their own, because inequities are not just a problem of a few people falling through the cracks of the system, they are created by the systems themselves – sometimes unintentionally, often by design.

Bayard Love and Deena Hayes-Greene have used the metaphor of groundwater to explain this phenomena¹⁷: If we came to a lake and saw a dead fish floating on the water, we would ask what happened to this fish? But if we came to a lake with hundreds of dead fish, we would ask what is wrong with the lake water? And if we observed that there were hundreds of dead fish across the lakes in the region, we would have to ask what's going on with the groundwater that connects all the lakes? We would understand that to "fix fish" or clean up one lake at a time simply won't work, because we would be putting fixed fish back into toxic water or filtering a lake that is quickly re-contaminated by the toxic groundwater. A systemic approach to inequity treats it as a groundwater problem: when we see that equity-denied groups are struggling across our institutions - in the education system, at work, in the judicial system etc. – we look at structural and cultural factors at play across the system and concentrate some of our interventions at that level.

“Racial equity recognizes that the systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-Indigenous racism have a larger impact than individual acts of racism based on consciously held beliefs of racial superiority and the way whiteness is positioned as the cultural norm”

– Culture|Shift –

A systemic intervention usually involves uncovering the underlying assumptions, values and norms on which systems are built, recognizing that they are in fact not neutral, and then shifting or broadening them to influence the dynamics that produce the inequitable outcomes. For example, to help the child with ADHD, perhaps we re-think the assumption that children should be able to sit in chairs for long hours every day, and we instead build in more flexibility and permission to move in the classroom for all children. To help women and racialized people succeed in the workplace, perhaps we re-think the cultural norms and practices of the workplace, including the hours we work, where we socialize, how our meetings are facilitated, what data is valued, how productivity is defined, whose art we display on our walls, whose days of significance we recognize, and what range of emotions we allow. This is by no means a trivial task. The implications of these shifts need close examination and new arrangements may well be needed to make it work – but these shifts have a transformative potential that goes far beyond “fixing” the child, the woman, or the person of colour, or helping them fit into a system that was designed in somebody else’s image.

Systemic interventions often have an element of structural change – e.g. laws, policies, operative procedures, funding mechanism etc. – and they have an element of culture change– e.g. how people relate to each other, how power is shared, how much uncertainty is tolerated.

¹⁷ <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/groundwaterapproach>

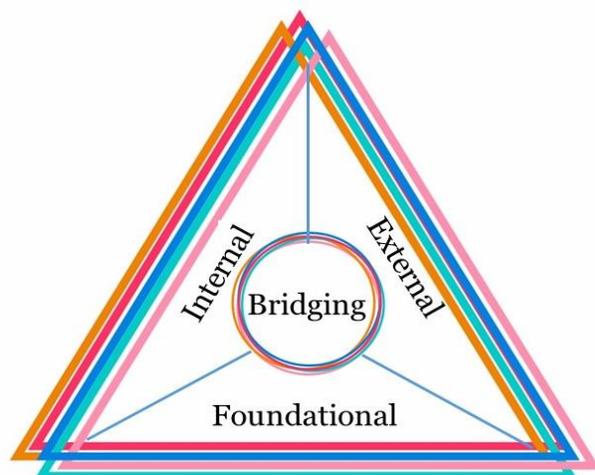
When we consider systemic interventions to address inequities, the process can feel frightening because it can bring into question everything we thought we knew and could rely on including the foundations of our thinking formed by family, religion, and academic or professional disciplines. For those who have thrived within the current systems, the questioning might feel threatening, as is always the case with processes of change. It is important to acknowledge and work through this individual resistance in order to enable systemic change.

Examples of a systemic lens in action:

- *Conducting a colonial audit to diagnose the colonial processes, systems, mechanisms, policies, ideology, and discourse that is institutionalized within City operations*
- *Integrate an equity lens into the City's budget process to identify strategic opportunities for shifting investment in the direction of equity*
- *Introducing onboarding processes that ask all new employees, as a matter of course, about their accessibility needs, so that it is not up to the persons with disabilities to breach the subject with their supervisor*
- *Rethinking the concept of "professional conduct" in a work context to be more inclusive of different cultural norms of expression such as how people dress and to what degree emotions are acceptable*

Priority Areas

As the City's Equity Commitments make clear, embedding equity in our work is needed in all parts of the organization, though it is clear that some departments will have a more central leading role on various aspects of the work. Inspired by the [Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmark tool](#), we are grouping the work that needs to be done into four groups of activities described below: Foundational, Internal, External and Bridging.



Our Priority Areas

The Equity Framework does not prescribe detailed action that need to be taken within each of these categories, but the implementation of the Equity Framework involves identifying and tracking progress of ongoing and new actions within each category. Some actions – particularly those in the External group – are policy directions that require motions to move forward. Others – particularly in the Foundational, Internal and Bridging groups – are about organizational culture, or administrative and operational procedures, and actions in these areas will be determined and directed by staff. It is the responsibility of each department at the City to align their strategic plans, annual work plans, and day-to-day decisions with the directions provided by the Equity Framework.. The City's Equity Office will act

as a resource to support this work, and as an oversight body to ensure accountability.

Foundational: vision, leadership, governance

The foundational group of activities is about designing the infrastructure for advancing equity, and ensuring that it remains coordinated and connected as different parts of the organization advance this work. It involves developing a rationale for doing equity work, and providing an overall vision and commitments, aligned to other City goals. That is the work of this Framework – to be refreshed regularly - and may be supplemented at the departmental level to reflect the specific language and culture of the department.

The foundational group of activities also includes growing leadership that is increasingly fluent around Indigenous Rights, racial justice, intersectional, and systemic equity challenges and opportunities, and sustaining an accountability structure that distributes the responsibility for this work among members of the City Leadership Team. Activities also include convening an ongoing interdepartmental Equity Council, a network of Employee Resource Groups, and ongoing conversations with the unions. This work will be led out of the City Manager's Office by the City's Equity Officer to ensure appropriate authority, visibility and ability to coordinate across the City.

Internal: human resources functions

The second group of activities have to do with growing a workforce that represents the communities we serve, and providing City employees with opportunities to thrive. As a major employer in Vancouver, the City has a significant impact on equity through its internal operations.

Internal activities include advancing equity approaches in the recruitment process, ensuring that equity is integrated into professional development; performance management, advancement, and retention; working with unions to ensure that job design and classification are evaluated for bias and that compensation is equitable, and that flexibility and benefits are available to City staff whenever possible. This group of activities will be led by the City's Human Resources department in collaboration with all other departments.

Bridging: learning, communications, finance

The activities in this group provide linkages between the foundational, internal and external work at the City. It would be difficult for the work in the other categories to advance without effective work in the Bridging Group.

Activities in this group include educating the City on equity. This includes working with managers across departments to socialize their teams on the definitions and approaches put forward by this Framework and embedding them into day-to-day practices ranging from how meetings are held to whom we go to for advice. Training and ongoing internal communications are a key component in this group of activities. It also includes the creation of an overarching tracking system that explicitly names objectives and committed actions in each of the areas named above and reflects progress on these actions over time. Finally, this group connects the City's equity work with finance, legal, sustainability and other key departments at the City. Responsibility for this group of activities will sit with the City Manager's Office and will include partnerships across the organization.

External: community-facing functions

The final group of activities concerns the ways that equity should be integrated into the City's work with communities. This is a large category reflecting the work of the City in so many different areas ranging from parks and recreation, to fire and rescue services, arts and culture, zoning bylaws and building permits, design of streets and waste collection – all of which could be examined over the next few years with an intersectional, decolonial, racial justice, and systemic equity lens. This group also includes civic engagement and public consultation, how the City works with residents, in partnership with the Host Nations, and other levels of government. Finally it includes all areas of planning and service provision that focus on addressing the needs of equity-denied groups, brought together under the umbrella of the Healthy City Strategy. Success in all these efforts requires capacity building for staff and decision-makers to apply the lenses described in this Framework.

The latter set of activities – those focused directly on the needs of equity-denied groups in community – will continue to be led by Arts, Culture, and Community Services. All other community-facing departments at the City, meanwhile, will be involved in activities within this category as it pertains to their own areas of work.

Towards Collective Impact

The completion of this Equity Framework marks a moment when the City of Vancouver makes a significant commitment to move in the direction of equity as one organization. The potential impacts that different arms of the City can have when acting in alignment with each other can be far bigger than the sum of those efforts in isolation from each other. As the vision and concepts from this Framework infuse the City's culture, they will influence mindsets, interactions and practices in the course of every employee's daily work. The transformative shifts that our communities are asking for require that we act collectively inside the City, and with partners in community. This Framework is an act of hope in that direction.