

Introduction

The current pandemic has highlighted that some of the key challenges we are facing as society are complex and intersect with existing issues related to equity, inclusion, and fairness such as poverty, accessibility and racism. Not everybody experiences the impacts of these crises in the same way or has the same means of coping with the negative consequences. Climate change has not only quickly grown to a global emergency but also become a significant social justice issue. Now, as many local municipalities and organizations are stepping up to take action on climate change, there is a danger that existing inequities are further exacerbated and opportunities for reducing inequalities are being missed. Subsidies for solar panels, for example, often benefit those who own homes and can afford the installation of solar panels while the increases in electricity bills to pay for the subsidies tend to disproportionately burden low income groups. The result is a net redistribution of wealth from lower income classes to upper classes. If, instead, the subsidies would have been used to install solar panels on low income housing, then the residents of those houses would benefit from a lowered electricity bill while Green House Gases (GHG) are being reduced. On the surface, subsidies for installing solar panels on private homes certainly seem to be something very positive. It is only when considerations of social justice are added that some of the potentially negative consequences for equity-deserving groups surface. With this guide we hope to help organizations surface these consideration early on in the process as it is much easier to deal with them then instead of later on in the process. The following questions are intended as a starting point. The purpose of these questions is to provide you and your colleagues a tool for self-reflection and not to make you feel inadequate or guilty about not having considered these things before (if that is the case). If you find that you have not considered a lot of these things related to issues of equity, sovereignty, and accessibility, you may want to consider seeking out additional resources (e.g., see the resources listed on our website). A key to working with equity-seeking groups is to be humble, self-reflective, and open to learning.

Key Reflective Questions

1. To what degree are you aware of the Indigenous people who hold the original treaty rights to the local land you live on and that your organization is located on? What do you know about:
 - a. The history of the land, the treaties regarding the land, the way those treaties were broken and the land taken away from the Indigenous people?
 - b. The current quests for sovereignty and land claims of Indigenous people in your area?
 - c. The culture and knowledge of the Indigenous people on this land?
 - d. The strength and assets Indigenous people could contribute to your local climate action?

Do you have people who are Indigenous working in your organization and/or serving on your boards and advisory committees?

2. To what degree have you considered the accessibility for all of your planned climate actions? Have you consulted accessibility guides and mandates and sought out the advice of self-advocates or organizations who work with people with disabilities to explore together how it may be inaccessible or could support accessibility? Have you considered the strength and assets people with disabilities could bring to your climate action planning? Do you have people who have disabilities working in your organization and/or serving on your boards and advisory committees?

3. How aware are you about different equity-deserving (i.e., marginalized) groups in your local community and how they may be negatively or positively affected by your climate actions? How knowledgeable are you about these groups and the equity they are seeking and deserve? Have you thought about how these groups may be negatively impacted by your climate actions? Have you thought about how you could align your climate actions with those equity goals? Have you considered what strengths and assets they could contribute in your planning and implementation of climate actions? Do you have people from different equity-deserving groups working in your organization and/or serving on your boards and advisory committees?
4. Language and the words we choose matter quite a bit when engaging with equity-deserving groups. They can either be empowering or hurtful. They can also indicate understanding or ignorance. How aware are you about the preferred terms people from equity- and sovereignty-seeking groups prefer when you refer to their group as a general category of people or to issues that are important to them? For example, were you aware that “minority” is not a good term to use because it signals to equity-seeking groups that somehow they are considered minor? Do you know what the acronym BIPOC stands for (it is “Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour”)? Also, using people first language (e.g., people experiencing homelessness instead of homeless people) is a way of communicating that we don’t want to blame the victims for factors that are often contextual and structural.
5. Have you made a general public commitment to address equity and accessibility within your organization and in regard to the impact of your organization’s services and products? What about a statement specifically in your corporate or organizational sustainability or climate action plan (if applicable)? To what degree are you serious about following through with such a commitment and avoid tokenism (which can really backfire and be misperceived)?
6. If you are considering to engage equity-deserving groups in your climate action planning, have you considered why they would be motivated to engage with you on this? Have you thought about what barriers may exist to their engagement? Barriers can be structural (e.g., your office is not accessible by public transportation or you scheduled the meeting during a time that is not feasible for specific groups) or relational (e.g., there is some problematic history of organizations like yours working with equity-seeking group and there is a lack of trust). Do you compensate equity-seeking groups for their time when you seek their input and advice? Do you have experience facilitating meetings with people with diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and perspectives? If not, have you considered asking somebody who does have that experience? Have you allocated sufficient time for the engagement process?
7. Have you thought about your own position of power and privilege in society? For example, if you a White person, have you thought about your whiteness and how that may affect your thoughts and actions as well as your ability to do and influence things? Have you thought about how different identities or group membership may intersect in regard to the power you and others may hold and how privilege is distributed (e.g., a Black woman’s status compared to that of a Black man)? Members of privileged groups often don’t have to think about these things and, thus, may design or plan things in a way that disproportionately benefit their own group or may cause unintended consequences for other groups

Glossary

Climate action: For the purpose of this guide we refer to climate actions broadly as any action that organizations take to address either the causes (e.g., actions to reduce GHGs) or the negative impacts of climate change (e.g., protection against heatwaves) and related environmental issues (e.g., loss of biodiversity).

Equity/Social Justice: Social justice refers to questions of fairness in distribution and participation in society. *Distributive justice* relates to the fair and equitable distribution of resources, benefits, rights, privileges, responsibilities, and burdens. This is relevant both in regard to existing historical injustices as well as new ones that could be created through specific climate actions. *Procedural justice* relates to the ability to equitably participate in political, social, environmental, and organizational decision-making. Both of these are related to another dimension of justice: *recognition*. This dimension of justice refers to recognizing people's membership and rights in our organizations and communities, and their unique identities, perspectives, and strengths. The "Black Live Matters" movements, for example, is fighting for the recognition that the lives of the Black members of our communities should matter just as much as those of other members of society.

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments to enable people who experience *disabilities to participate in an activity to the fullest degree possible*.

Equity-deserving/seeking groups: Equity-deserving groups refer to members of society who experience barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to historical disadvantages and discrimination and are often underrepresented in key decision-making positions. These are groups that deserve recognition, a reduction in burdens, and a fairer access to the societal benefits. Those groups that are actively seeking social justice and reparation are referred to as equity-seeking groups (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.). The following are examples of relevant equity-deserving and seeking groups in the Canadian context: low-income, racialized groups, immigrants, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, 2SLGBTQIA+ (see below), women, youth, seniors, refugees, and workers affected by green transitions.

Sovereignty-seeking: Indigenous peoples are considered sovereignty-seeking, acknowledging that these groups are working towards their inherent right to self-determination, autonomy, governance and land.

Footnote: 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual while + stands for other ways individuals express their gender and sexuality outside heteronormativity and the gender binary.