PROMOTING EQUITY THROUGH MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Lessons from Communities of Opportunity Baseline Evaluation

June 2019
EVALUATION APPROACH

COO believes that a more effective and sustainable way to reverse inequities is by working across issue areas and tapping into community expertise. But how do we know we are on the right track? Where do we need to course correct? Are community priorities driving change? What policies are taking hold?

To begin to address these questions, in 2018, COO launched a rigorous, participatory evaluation to assess existing conditions and early partner efforts toward creating racial, economic and health equity.

The insights draw on initial actions taken place in 2018 so that in the years to come, we can have a better sense of:

- How much we are doing
- How well we are doing it
- How are communities better off?

Why participatory evaluation matters:
Unlike conventional evaluation approaches that can be top-down or perpetuate inequities, participatory evaluation brings stakeholders and evaluators together to collaboratively develop and implement the evaluation. In alignment with COO’s values of shared power and decision-making, a participatory approach ensures partners, governance group, and staff play an active role throughout the evaluation process.

COO partnered with a multi-disciplinary evaluation team comprised of national and local experts to work closely with community partners to conduct the baseline evaluation. Community partners worked with the evaluation team to identify the most salient evaluation questions, plan the evaluation design, select data collection methods, gather data and interpret findings.

EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS

Communities of Opportunity is a network of residents, communities, decision-makers, and funders who believe every community can be a healthy, thriving community—and that equity and racial justice are both necessary and achievable.

What started in 2014 as an initial partnership between community organizations, King County, and the Seattle Foundation has grown to more than 200 organizations working to advance equity.

Advancing change in four intersecting priority areas connects the work of all our partners:
- Quality affordable housing for all
- The right to be healthy
- Increased economic opportunity
- Strengthened connections to the community

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We are dedicated to overturning disparities and creating a vibrant, equitable King County where everyone thrives regardless of race or place.

We'd like to thank all of the partners who shared their perspectives for this evaluation and to the COO Governance Group and Evaluation Advisory Group for their guidance.

We acknowledge the passing of community leader Amina Ahmed who contributed her time and insights to this evaluation.

Over 50 partners shared their perspectives through surveys, focus groups, interviews and a community workshop.
In King County, from neighborhood to neighborhood, and across economic and racial groups, access to safe and affordable housing, health, and economic opportunity vary widely. Race, income, and zip code are major predictors of how healthy we are and even how long we live.

Displacement and evictions are forcing people to move, creating neighborhood instability. Partners described efforts to maintain community connections through faith-based groups or by preserving cultural ties such as in Africatown and Chinatown-International District.

There is much work still to be done in reversing the systemic inequities faced by people of color in the region. By focusing resources by race and place, COO is helping to change these trends and increase equity.

Race and place matter.
Population-level data collected during the baseline evaluation confirm that our region continues to experience racial, economic and health inequities.

For example, half of residents in south King County are earning less than a living wage. And, the highest risk for food insecurity—running out of food and not having money to buy more—occurs among people of color.

To overturn these inequities, COO is aligning investments where we see the greatest disparities by race and place, and is advancing equitable policies to impact the whole region.

Baseline findings that caught our attention:

**ACCESS TO JOBS WITHIN 30 MINUTES**
Compared to all King County neighborhoods, those neighborhoods with the majority of people of color had 11% fewer jobs accessible within 30 minutes of transit travel.

Higher rates of 30 MIN or longer commute for COO communities

**FAIR OR POOR HEALTH**
Overall, 16% of adults in COO place-based communities report having fair or poor health, which is higher than King County overall 13%.

The highest percentages of adults with fair to poor health were of Hispanic ethnicity (24%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (23%), African American/Black (22%). This is nearly double the countywide average.

Adults reporting fair to poor health:

- 13% King County overall
- 24% Hispanic
- 23% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 22% African American/Black

**HOUSING COST BURDENED**
How much someone pays on their housing can have an impact on their ability to afford other necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care.

South region renters are more likely than King County overall to spend more than 50% of their income on rent. **ONE IN EVERY FOUR** South region renters are severely housing cost burdened.

Adults in COO communities more likely to spend over 50% of income on rent

**GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN RENTER EVICTIONS**
In King County, roughly 40% of all households are renter occupied. Renters can be evicted from their homes for a number of reasons, including not being able to pay monthly rent due to financial difficulties. The South Region has a tract with the highest percent of renter evictions.

- 40% of King County residents are renters
BUILDING CAPACITY TO CREATE MORE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

In 2018, COO invested more than $7.4 million in three original place-based partnerships, six new place-based and cultural community partnerships, 26 organizations working on policy and systems change and initial learning community and evaluation activities.

Partners reported key elements for success in working toward greater racial, economic and health equity in our region:

• Relationships with other organizations and community members
• Adequate funding to do their work
• Skill sets of partners’ current staff members and new staff hires
• Transparency and trust among partners
• Obtaining support from community leaders
• Lifting up community voices
• Being faithful to organizational values

A central tenet of COO is that community organizations and institutions work together to achieve common outcomes. Partners identified benefits of working in coalitions:

• Ability for partners to implement their local priorities while aligning with county strategies
• Mobilizing community members quickly
• Helping to cultivate allies for future endeavors even if the current issue of focus was not the priority for others in the coalition
• Facilitating reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships for coalition members

COO partners reported:

1. OVER 4,000 PEOPLE INCREASED SKILLS through 81 capacity building events, job training and seminars.

“We’re hiring youth from our community to teach them..., train them on how to run focus groups and build their skills. Success for us is if we successively engage youth who are most impacted.”

2. 264 COMMUNITY MEMBERS held leadership positions within their communities and our region, including 85 youth.

“Four of our leaders have joined the King County Open Space Equity Cabinet and are giving feedback as to how to better utilize public spaces to increase access and use by diverse community members.”

3. 275 RELATIONSHIPS between organizations were newly developed or strengthened due to COO support.

“Our [leadership circles] are setting up the structures and relationships that allow them to become enduring structures for local strategic decision making, accountability and power building. We are creating enduring grassroots activist circles of diverse races, faiths & income levels... we are no longer isolated in our work.”

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CoO partners are working at the intersections of housing, economic opportunity, health and community connections.

“"We organized a youth focus group. Youth participants gave input on issues they care about directly to city leaders. Making local government accessible to youth and giving youth the skills to effectively speak their truth is central to what we see as central to our work.”

Examples of cross-cutting policy and systems change work and early success.

Rainier Valley partners secured land for Othello Square. The site will include affordable housing, a health clinic, a youth-oriented tech innovation center and will support 350 living-wage jobs.

Friends of Little Saigon and partners drove recommendations on public safety into action and influenced the process of how funds are spent on Equitable Development projects to reflect community needs and culture.

Partner in Employment established a new partnership with a construction company owner who will recruit from a pool of immigrant and refugee job-seekers with living-wages and benefits.

YWCA Greenbridge Learning Center increased the capacity of small businesses and residents by connecting them to small business loan programs and technical assistance.

Federal Way Youth Action Team gave input to Federal Way City Council members on the issues they care about.

Civil Survival passed the New Hope Act, a statewide policy that will help formerly incarcerated people regain their civil rights, more easily obtain housing and employment, and reintegrate into their community.

Tenants Union helped pass a policy that doubles the amount of time landlords must provide to tenants about a rent increase.

FEEST trained White Center high school students on food justice and spearheaded the Healthy Food Roundtable to address barriers to make healthy food accessible in White Center. Because of their efforts, Highline Public Schools has committed to providing culturally relevant food items each week.

Washington Bus Education Fund organized to ensure the Seattle Promise program, which provides support for tuition-free college, a more equitable plan for qualified students.

All in for Washington expanded the public narrative on tax reform by publishing 14 op-eds from leaders of color on the upside-down tax code.

Seattle Indian Health Board engaged groups including the American Indian Health Council to influence the Washington Healthcare Improvement Act.

Open Doors for Multicultural Families worked to pass a policy that mandates legislators, diverse families, educators, interpreters and community advocates to work together to solve educational access inequities for children with disabilities and their multi-lingual families.

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INFORMING THE WAY FORWARD

COO partners brought to light the barriers many communities and cultural groups continue to face to advance access to opportunity.

- Partners noted that the communities they serve have been denied rental opportunities for safe, affordable housing because of racial, income, and disability discrimination.
- Residents are hesitant to seek out housing assistance, report bad landlords, or request repairs because of fear (of eviction, retaliation, ICE) or they do not understand their rights as tenants.
- COO partners also noted sources of stress that contribute to feelings of instability, such as crime and violence in the community, economic hardships, vulnerabilities to becoming homeless, political climate, and immigration policies.

Recommendations include:

1. SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY
   To participate in coalitions while also responding to immediate resident needs. One example shared by participants in the evaluation was, participants described challenges of helping residents navigate the healthcare and housing systems, including complexities with Medicaid for people who have special health care needs.

2. EXPAND POLICY TOOLS AND RESOURCES
   Partners need continued opportunities to share best policy approaches to address complex issues, such as displacement.

   “Anti-displacement work is inherently challenging. The policy tools and resources that local governments and nonprofits have to counter real estate market forces that lead to gentrification are limited at best.”

3. SUPPORT TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS
   A central barrier to partners’ work is inadequate funding to support building relationships and to support the complex process involved with doing their work.

4. ACKNOWLEDGE DIFFERENCES IN RESOURCES
   Organizations come to COO with different levels of capacity, resources and relationships. Therefore, it’s important to acknowledge these differences in values, privilege and approaches to the work.

5. SUPPORT LONG-TERM INVESTMENT
   COO expects to see a number of outcomes from its initial investments: Over time, the cumulative effect of these activities will advance equity. This requires long-term commitment.

   “Building authentic community engagement and capacity is long-term work and requires institutional change as well as training and supports for community leaders. It is a big and long-term job.”

Partners reported that investing in sustained advocacy and relationship building leads to thriving communities.