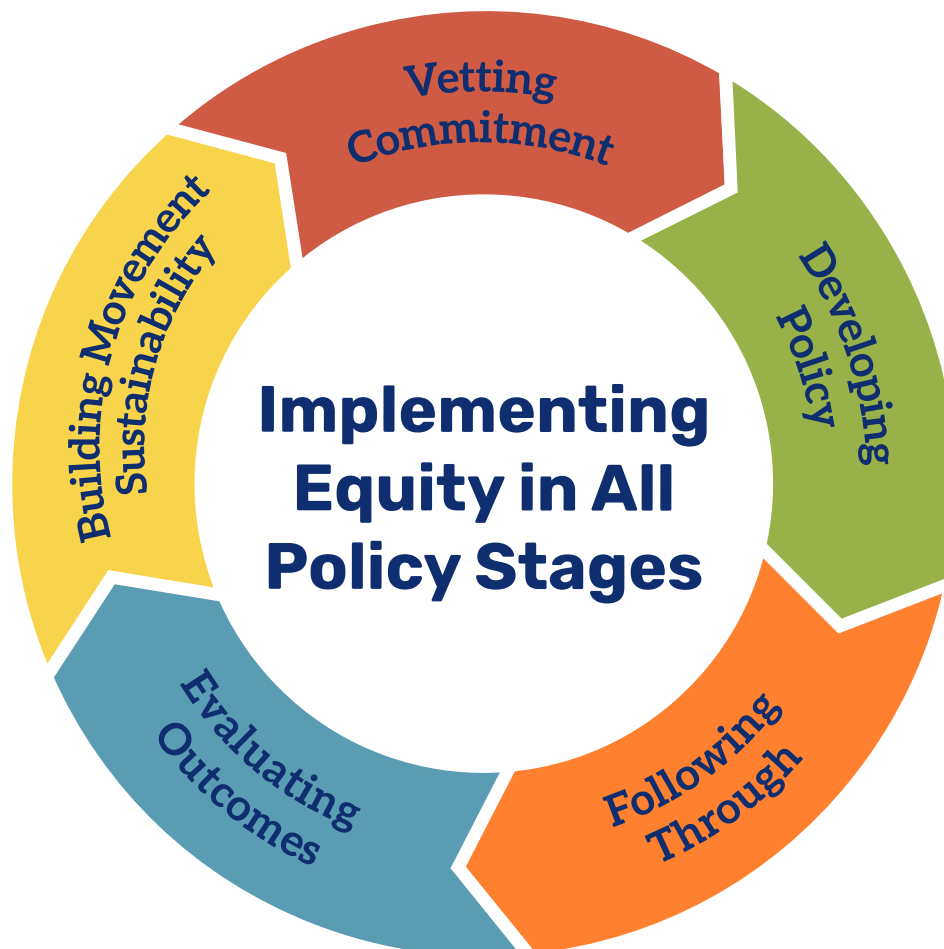


Implementing Equity in All Policy Stages

July 2023

Strong, equity-focused implementation involves strategic decisions made before a policy is proposed, crafted, or adopted. This contrasts with the more common approach of tackling implementation after the final ordinances or directives have been sent to responsible agencies, perhaps with little remaining resources or momentum for following-through. The community groups highlighted throughout this resource have worked through different stages of policymaking to advance implementation and, while delegating roles to other partners over time, have sustained a focus on reaching outcomes. The following describes five policy stages observed through local case examples and specific ways that implementation is cultivated within each.



Building Movement Sustainability

Strong implementation develops from an established base of **local organizations who are built to sustain the long-term challenge of advancing transformative equity-focused policies**. Philanthropic/institutional support (e.g., project grants, core operating funding, staffing, research, legislative outreach) helps create capacities organizations use to generate broader issue awareness, facilitate collaboration and engagement, research and advance policy proposals, conduct strategic communications, and monitor progress. Major funder initiatives or single grants have catalyzed equity movements that are able to sustain attention to implementation and accountability for years after achieving innovative policies.

Working to **elevate issues into civic priorities and fostering collaborative relationships** are other key aspects of movement building that support stronger implementation. Activity during previous policy campaigns can help bring community groups and government leaders into closer alignment on potential strategies, creating stronger intent and expectation for follow-through. In other cases, new equity movements may need a more extensive phase of neighborhood-level engagement and trust-building before a strong enough support base is developed to advance challenging policy proposals. This hard-earned alignment generates momentum that is needed to maintain key commitments and accountability from government agencies after adoption.

Government contributions to movement sustainability can include publishing data that includes equity indicators (e.g., life expectancy data used for ETOD policy in Chicago), as well as **racial equity assessments and action planning** conducted at the departmental and citywide levels. Through these processes, local governments identify past harm and commit to procedural equity, raising expectations for follow-through on equity-focused policies. They also help to build staff and executive capacities to be earlier and more sincere collaborators on crafting policy solutions, while advancing efforts to improve staff representation amongst marginalized communities.

Vetting Commitment

Policy development efforts that focus on implementation and accountability from the beginning **set an expectation**

for follow-through, which helps ensure the limited resources and energy contributed by community groups lead to tangible policy outcomes. Interviews with local practitioners and national advisors highlighted the reality that some jurisdictions do not intend to advance a policy much further than its adoption hearing and any short-term media coverage that may be generated. This may happen because government leaders don't believe they have the capacity or expertise to manage implementation, they may not understand the follow-through work needed to realize outcomes, or a lack of public interest in the policy may not compel agencies toward action and accountability.

Equity movements should explore these dynamics and **assess the commitment of collaborators in the government sector before advancing policy proposals**. Elected officials and department executives may reconsider their approach to implementation after consultation programs and peer learning (such as those provided through Reimagining the Civic Commons and the National Complete Streets Coalition) have highlighted strategies within their capacity. Community partners may also decide that more base building and civic interest needs to be generated for an equity issue before it can translate into stronger intent by government leaders.

Another expectation that equity movements should highlight early is for a **non-siloed approach to coordinating implementation work and monitoring progress**. Department staff may not be accustomed to communicating or sharing responsibility within a collaborative space that includes non-government participants or other departments, and they may not feel sufficient pressure to engage purposefully. Equity-focused policies are often an opportunity to demonstrate better procedural norms, though certain departments will be slower to embrace the process than others. However, gaining commitments with a few departments as early adopters/champions helps to set an important standard for collaboration, building a foundation for action and accountability in later policy stages.

Developing Policy

Strong implementation practices have **timelines, action steps, and monitoring/coordination structures embedded with detail into the text of policy proposals**. Including this language provides a reference point for accountability and the documentation of work after an adopted policy has been handed over to responsible

agencies. It also signals that there will be continuing civic interest in the outcomes (from elected decisionmakers and community members) going forward. Fortunately, there is a growing base of guidance resources and case precedents to help with the specifics of local approaches, which are explored further in Factors that Drive Implementation.

By **participating in advisory/working groups**, community partners can spot implementation gaps and endorse more meaningful practices. At times, comparisons have been made between the proposed local approach and national standards or peer jurisdictions to highlight where improvements can be made. Community partners that helped to mobilize public interest in an equity issue are also often in a position to contribute suggested text directly to policy drafts.

Interviews with local practitioners and national advisors also noted that a lack of authentic engagement within neighborhoods and with distinct user-groups (e.g., cyclists, transit riders) during policy development can lead to significant implementation challenges in later stages. Related projects (i.e., active transportation, greenspace, housing investments) have been met with local resistance if their primary beneficiaries have not vocalized their support previously or if design features do not match what had been communicated before. Community groups tend to be more aware of this potential than their government sector collaborators and can insist on **sufficiently funded and well facilitated engagement** as a procedural equity value that also leads to long-term policy success.

Following Through

Successful implementation depends on procedural values and intentional planning before a policy adoption moment, along with essential (and often neglected) activities that occur during the months and years after adoption. These activities include working groups that place department staff into more collaborative contact with community leaders and each other, with **shared responsibility for translating policy commitments into implementation actions**. Reporting structures that provide for **transparent monitoring of implementation progress** are another vital tool for decision-making, particularly when assessing performance on equity criteria. **Follow-up ordinances, directives, or planning documents** may also be needed to further embed a policy into regulations and operational norms.

Interviews with local practitioners noted that insufficient funding and staff capacity pose key challenges to implementation work that follows policy adoption. Policies that equitably direct health-promoting development (i.e., active transportation, greenspace, housing) may depend on unspecified or undedicated sources of funding. This does not mean that funding opportunities aren't available, but it does commit local agencies to **strategically assess and obtain funding as a routine part of ongoing implementation work**. Strategies can also include elected leaders and community organizations working to advance local funding solutions through voter or legislative measures.

Implementation should involve **staff capacities that match the intent of equity-focused policies**, particularly for the crucial roles of internal policy coordination, project funding and project design. Staff are needed who are grounded in the principles and methodologies of an innovative approach (e.g., Complete Streets design, Equitable TOD strategies), or it can lead to slowed planning and misapplications of a policy. Unfortunately, departments may lag in allocating staff resources after an equity-focused policy is adopted and may not prioritize staff training to integrate new approaches. Both are important monitoring points for working groups when implementation work begins.

As in earlier stages, **engagement at the neighborhood level** remains important when equity-focused policies start to be applied through local projects. Design features and assumptions about usage for projects can uncover deeply embedded challenges within and between communities that might not be identified through a larger scale policy strategy. The effort to work through these challenges provides a vital opportunity to better design projects for the surrounding context, thereby improving a policy's eventual outcomes. Local case examples in this resource highlight the strategic method of **demonstration projects to incrementally advance health supporting investments**. Besides their short-term practicality, these interim installations help to collect user feedback that alter project designs to better suite local conditions and preferences, while also popularizing equity approaches.

Evaluating Outcomes

The full list of proposed actions/projects connected to an equity-focused policy can take many years to complete. However, there is a valuable opportunity to measure the effects of policy strategies and investments in the meantime. **Collecting related data and making it publicly available helps ongoing equity efforts** in some important ways. It can show incremental progress on key indicators to further justify policy and investment decisions when skepticism could be threatening to slow work or weaken commitments. Neighborhood or user-based indicators can provide an earlier warning about unintended impacts (e.g., displacement) that call for reconsidered approaches and mitigation strategies. Furthermore, shared data can help inform future updates to policies or in crafting new equity-focused policies.

In many of the local cases explored through this resource, data focusing on the effects of policies was integrated with implementation tracking structures (such as performance measures detailed in [Complete Streets Tucson](#), [Baltimore Complete Streets](#) annual reports and [Seattle BMP](#) implementation plans). These ranged from behavioral indicators (e.g., commuting mode share, physical activity rates) to localized health/safety (e.g., collision rates, chronic illnesses) and economic conditions (e.g., combined transportation/housing costs). As with all equity methodologies, it is vital to track these evolving outcomes with a lens for race, access, and other priority criteria.