

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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Features

Leading by Example: Minneapolis Acts on Employment Equity



Minneapolis recently became the first city in the nation to adopt a [resolution](#) promoting racial equity in employment. The resolution declares that institutional racism "is a primary reason for unemployment

disparities" and requires the city to take action to make sure that people of color have a fair shot at government jobs, promotions, and contracts.

Council members Cam Gordon and Don Samuels authored the resolution, which passed unanimously on August 8, 2012.

"We heard from the community that the city better have its own house in order," Gordon explains. "If we can develop some tools that make a difference within the city itself, that's going to be more powerful than if we try to tell others what they should be doing."

The council has set a high bar for itself, establishing three targets:

- Reduce racial disparities in employment by 25 percent by the year 2016.
- Decrease poverty rates for residents of color by 25 percent by the year 2016.
- Increase the share of people of color hired on city-funded projects from [11 to 32 percent](#).

Growth requires inclusion

The Twin Cities region has the worst racial employment gap in

In Brief

Inequality is Bad for Growth

Articles published this week in the [New York Times](#) and [The Economist](#) highlight the growing consensus among economists that inequality is a drag on growth and prosperity.

The Economist's special report on inequality argues that "inequality has reached a stage where it can be inefficient and bad for growth" and puts forth a policy agenda that includes a focus on investing in the young and the poor, particularly investments in education that extend from preschool through retraining less-skilled workers.

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Equity Across the Pond

Inequality is a global issue—and communities that are far apart geographically are coming up with remarkably similar solutions.

In England, community leaders in the town of York established a [Fairness Commission](#) in September 2011, which has since outlined 10 principles to guide the

the nation, according to an [analysis](#) by Algernon Austin at the Economic Policy Institute. African American residents are more than three times as likely as whites to be out of work, and Native American residents are four times more likely to be jobless.

In the city of Minneapolis, 40 percent of residents are people of color, but they hold only 17 percent of the jobs. Within the city's own workforce, 23 percent of jobs are held by people of color. Officials and advocates agree such inequities are potentially disastrous for the region's future.

"If you want a region to be viable and growing, you need to draw from all sectors of society, especially those that will be dominant in decades to come," said Shawn Lewis, an urban planner and advocate who played a major role in promoting the ordinance. "If you don't, the region will decline. This is not only a moral argument, it's economic."

The city took the first steps toward adopting the resolution in 2008, when it established an Equity in Employment Task Force to explore solutions to racial disparities in employment. It hired a full-time Director of Employment Equity in January 2012.

Guided by the community

Years of advocacy and grassroots organizing to promote fair hiring and contracting in the Twin Cities preceded the council's efforts.

HIRE Minnesota, a coalition of 70 diverse organizations and 2,000 residents, began its campaign to bring the state "from worst to first" on employment equity in 2008. Responding to the coalition's advocacy, the Minnesota Department of Transportation has increased its hiring of people of color on road, bridges, and transit projects by 138 percent since 2009.

HIRE actively participated in the Minneapolis City Council process, sitting on the task force and filling council chambers with its members who spoke in support of the resolution.

Other community groups have also been involved. Metro Talking Circle, a group of volunteers working to advance economic equity for African American and Native American communities, developed recommendations for the task force. Its report laid out three goals for the city: lead by example, strengthen workforce development, and support efforts by

city council's decision making and shared 30 policy recommendations. The towns of [Islington](#), [Liverpool](#), [Newcastle](#), and [Sheffield](#) have followed York's lead, also launching Fairness Commissions.

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Getting Anchors to Buy Local

"Anchor institutions"—hospitals, universities, libraries, government agencies, and other large, locally rooted employers—spend millions of dollars on suppliers and services annually, but often only a small portion goes toward small local businesses.

A new PolicyLink report, [Buy Newark: A Guide to Promoting Economic Inclusion Through Local Purchasing](#), provides concrete recommendations and examples on how cities can implement "buy local" strategies to build more equitable local economies.

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The Voting Power of New Americans

In the tight November 2012 elections, newly minted citizens could decide the outcome, suggests [a new analysis](#) by our colleagues at the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration at the University of Southern California.

Check out their interactive maps to understand the voting

business to hire, retain, and promote more people of color.

Moving toward implementation

As a first step toward implementation, the city is developing an equity and assessment toolkit that it will use to guide its budget, policy, and program decisions. The tool developed by King County, Washington (see article below) is one model they are looking at.

The resolution also acknowledged the need for action at the regional level, and officially joined the city with the Ramsey County Blue Ribbon Commission's regionwide ["Everybody In"](#) effort to reduce racial employment disparities throughout the Twin Cities metro.

HIRE plans to hold the city accountable. "We will be in the room, reading the reports, raising questions if there are any," says organizer Avi Viswanathan. He is hopeful that the city's commitment to leading by example will not only be successful, but will have a ripple effect that reaches private employers as well.

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A Grand Experiment: King County, Washington, Pioneers Fair and Just Governance

Pioneering a new approach to governing, King County, Washington, is using the principles of "fair and just" to guide every aspect of its work.

Two years ago, the county passed a first-of-its-kind ordinance to embed equity throughout its activities, from community engagement and planning to budgeting, staffing, and day-to-day operations. It defines equity as a system of fairness in which "all people have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential."

The law is transforming every department and agency across the board. This past year, the Office of Economic and Financial Analysis added race and income measures to its economic outlook reports, and Metro Transit set transit service levels higher on corridors home to low-income communities and communities of color. In addition, the human resources department removed the felony conviction question

importance of recently naturalized citizens in your state or area.

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from all county job applications.

Measuring equity by race and zip code

The 14th largest county in the country, King County is home to 1.9 million people, two-thirds of whom live outside the city of Seattle. In 1980, 13 percent of its residents were people of color. Today, 35 percent of residents are people of color, and they speak 100 different languages.

As in many communities around the country, these seismic demographic shifts have occurred amid entrenched, deepening inequities. The county's first [Equity and Social Justice report](#), released in August, documented how access to opportunities such as family wage jobs, affordable housing, and high-quality education differ across the county's racial and ethnic communities and neighborhoods.

The effort goes back to 2006, when a team of county leaders and staff began exploring ways to improve health by addressing racial inequities countywide. The idea of an equity mandate took shape.

The Equity and Social Justice initiative officially launched in 2008, and the "fair and just" principle was incorporated into the county's strategic plan the following year. In 2010, the Metropolitan King County Council unanimously adopted Ordinance 16948, cementing the principle into law.

Changing the business of governing

King County is taking a number of steps to integrate equity throughout its departments and activities.

Formally considering equity impacts in decision making is one approach. The county created an [Equity Impact Review Tool](#) to help staff answer three questions: What is the impact on equity? Who is affected? How can we do better?

In 2011, the tool was applied to the county's \$5 million budget. Every agency used it to assess the racial and economic impacts of their proposed 2012 program budgets. Their assessments led to real shifts in spending priorities. The parks department decided to maintain a youth sports program in White Center, a diverse, low-income unincorporated community. And the sheriff's department decided to reopen two storefronts in White Center and Skyway, another underserved community.

Increasing community engagement and awareness is another central tenet of the equity mandate. Many agencies have translated their materials into new languages and conducted outreach to diverse communities. The elections department, for example, partnered with grassroots groups, trained organizations and businesses, and targeted voter education to politically marginalized communities, including former inmates.

"We're not just staying in the office," said Jacqueline Blackwell, program manager of Voter Services in King County. "We're getting out into communities to let them know we care, we're here for them, and they can participate in the process."

The approach has energized community advocates. "It gives us hope when we're working to address issues of inequity," said Sili Savusa, executive director of the White Center Community Development Agency. "More importantly it helps to unite people across neighborhoods and communities and helps to bring community voice into decision making within our institutions."

Building a just economy

King County officials regard equity as a social justice imperative and also the engine of future prosperity. "It has everything to do with economic development," said Ngozi Oleru, co-chair of the county's Equity and Social Justice Inter-Branch Team. "What we're trying to do in government is create an environment where all people can thrive and participate in a strong economy that is good for everyone."

Imagine what could happen if the nation's other 3,006 counties followed King County's lead.

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America's Tomorrow highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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