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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Operationalizing Equity .....	4
Accountability Structure.....	4
Equity Definition, Principles & Objectives.....	6
Equity Definition.....	6
Equity Principles.....	7
Equity Objectives.....	8
Measurable and Actionable Outcomes .....	9
Toolbox.....	10
Equity Lens .....	11
Equity Index.....	15
Best Practices Review .....	17
Glossary .....	18
Authors and Contributors.....	20

## Introduction

### Why an Equity Framework?

Transportation projects and other government actions have excluded and directly harmed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, low-income neighborhoods, people with disabilities, and other Communities of Concern across the US, including the Portland-Vancouver region<sup>1</sup>. The combination of disproportionate burdens and insufficient benefits of transportation plans and projects have contributed to unequal outcomes.

The Oregon Department of Transportation and Washington Department of Transportation are among the agencies responsible for this legacy of inequality. The IBR program commits to doing things differently by maximizing benefits and minimizing burdens for Communities of Concern. By focusing benefits on the populations and communities where there is the greatest need, the program team believes it will also be able to achieve the greatest overall benefits for the region.

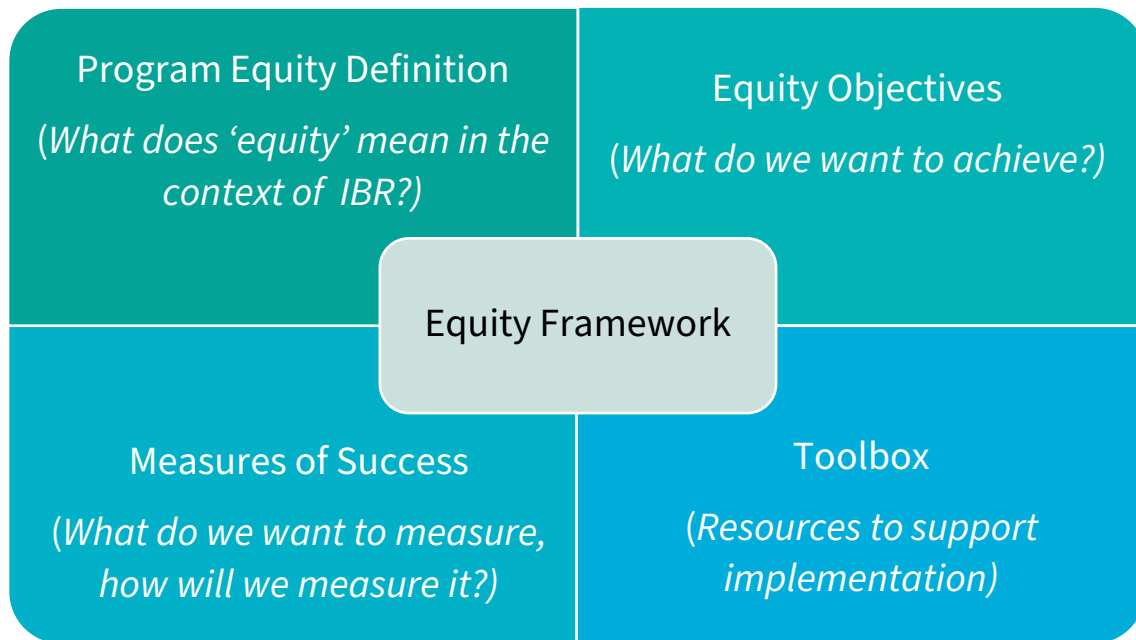
An essential first step of the IBR program's commitment to centering equity is to develop a shared understanding of what the program seeks to achieve and how it will be achieved. The IBR Equity Framework is meant to serve this purpose by outlining the program's approach and the resources it will use to advance equity. It includes the program's Equity Definition and Principles, Equity Objectives, Measures of Success, and a Toolbox to assist in putting the Framework into action.

The Framework is informed by the Equity Advisory Group (EAG), community input, program staff insight, and best practices and language from other projects, Equity Frameworks, and Toolkits in the Pacific Northwest.

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<sup>1</sup> This document uses the terminology "Communities of Concern" to be broad in the definition of the communities, populations and individuals who have been excluded from transportation decision-making and/or systematically discriminated against.

The Framework is intended to guide every element of the program, from planning, design, and environmental review to community engagement. It will be applied within each of the programmatic areas and at all critical decisions and actions. Responsibility for honoring and implementing the Framework will be a collective endeavor, including program leadership, staff, partners, and advisory groups.



## Operationalizing Equity

What does equity look like for this project and how will we know that we've achieved it?

## Accountability Structure

The IBR program consists of staff organized into different teams, which include Media & Public Involvement, Environmental, Transportation/Planning, Design Engineering, Structures, Transit, Financial, and Project Controls. At the top of the organizational chart is the Program Administrator. The Administrator makes key decisions with guidance and oversight from the Bi-State Legislative

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Committee and therefore carries a major responsibility in ensuring the project continues to move towards equity as a key “north star”.

The IBR program will apply the Equity Framework to key decisions over the arch of the planning process, construction, and operation through open discussions within program teams and managers. Ensuring the Framework is sufficiently embraced, understood, and applied within and across IBR teams will be essential. When gaps arise in meeting the spirit of the Framework, it will be the responsibility of program team managers to identify solutions or call out the gaps so that they can be addressed.

Since each of the IBR program teams are diverse regarding their backgrounds and the roles they are tasked with, it is reasonable to expect each team may have very different strengths, challenges, and barriers in their ability to apply the Framework. Embedded within the IBR program is an Equity Team, including the program’s Principal Equity Officer, whose role in part will be to support implementation of the Framework throughout the program.

Finally, a vital accountability mechanism as with any project is public oversight and input, which will take place with the program’s public engagement strategy but also within its established steering and advisory groups. It will be the role of these groups to request information, provide input, ask critical questions of program staff, and ultimately advocate for the effective implementation of the Framework.

- **The Equity Advisory Group (EAG)** helps ensure that the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) program remains centered on equity. The group makes recommendations to IBR program leadership regarding processes, policies and decisions that have the potential to affect historically underrepresented and underserved communities.
- **The Community Advisory Group (CAG)** is representative of the community members with balanced membership from both Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, WA. The CAG provides input and feedback to help ensure the program outcomes reflect community needs, issues and concerns.
- **The Executive Steering Group (ESG)** provides regional leadership recommendations on key program issues of importance to the community. Members of the ESG include representatives from the 10 bi-state partner agencies with a direct delivery or operational role in the integrated, multimodal transportation system around the Interstate Bridge, as well as a

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community representative from each state. The two community representatives serve as the co-chairs of the Community Advisory Group.

It is the combination of the Equity Framework, public oversight, and the roles and responsibilities of program staff at all levels, that is key to disrupting inequity in the context of the IBR program. Making sure program staff are consistently aligned with and guided by the EAG and other groups as part of this project will be essential.

## Equity Definition, Principles & Objectives

“Equity” is defined in myriad ways, depending on who is defining it and the context in which it is being defined. For the IBR program to honor its commitment to centering equity it must clearly articulate to the community what this commitment means, beginning by establishing a program-specific definition and building upon this definition to articulate principles and objectives. To this end, program staff worked with the EAG to develop an equity definition that serves as the foundation for this Framework.

### Equity Definition

The Interstate Bridge Replacement program defines equity in terms of both *process* and *outcomes*. Together, process equity and outcome equity contribute to addressing the harmful impacts of and removing long standing injustices experienced by historically marginalized and underserved communities.

**Process Equity** means that the program prioritizes access, influence, and decision-making power for historically marginalized and underserved communities throughout the program in establishing objectives, design, implementation, and evaluation of success.

**Outcome Equity** is the result of successful Process Equity and is demonstrated by tangible transportation and economic benefits for historically marginalized and underserved communities.

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Marginalized and underserved communities are defined as those who experience and/or have experienced discrimination and exclusion based on identity or status, such as:

- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)
- People with disabilities
- Communities with limited English proficiency (LEP)
- Persons with lower income
- Houseless individuals and families
- Immigrants and refugees
- Young people
- Older adults

## Equity Principles<sup>2</sup>

Building upon the program's equity definition is a series of principles that provide a greater layer of specificity and concreteness to support equity throughout the course of the program.

- **Acknowledge, honor, and apply lessons learned from history.** The program will ensure the analysis of project impacts, decisions around community benefits, the approach to community engagement, and other processes, actions, and decisions are placed in the context of the harm that has been affected by transportation projects on individuals, communities, and the environment. We will actively mitigate current and past harms to the greatest extent possible.
- **Be explicit about race and systemic racism.** By doing so, the program will ensure that race will not be ignored or diminished and that plans will be focused on those with the greatest needs, including other Communities of Concern.
- **Amplify the voices of Communities of Concern.** Public engagement will be conducted with awareness of culture, identities, privileges, and equity in a holistic sense, and community input will be translated into intentional, strategic, consistent, and reliable action.
- **Ensure that a diverse range of stakeholders meaningfully shape program decisions and activities.**

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<sup>2</sup> This section draws heavily from the ODOT Toll Projects' Equity Framework, developed by its Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee.

- Opportunities for input will be clearly, consistently, and regularly communicated, including when and how the public, program committees, and other stakeholders can weigh in on important decisions.
- Engagement will be accessible for community members of varying abilities, languages and cultures. Spaces will be created where the most vulnerable have a voice at the table and can engage in a meaningful way.
- **Maintain transparency and accountability** throughout program processes and decisions.
- **Identify disparities.** Integrate a disparity lens into assessments and studies for the program, daylighting benefits and burdens to Communities of Concern in relation to the general population.
- **Attend to power dynamics among stakeholders.** Elevate the needs and priorities of Communities of Concern by recognizing, understanding, and shifting existing power dynamics within the lead agencies & program teams, partner agencies, groups, and the community.
- **Maintain a learning orientation.** A focus on advancing equity, rather than just mitigating harm, is new for State Departments of Transportation. The IBR program commits to letting equity drive program activities and decisions, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) studies and community participation. Strive for continuous improvement and to create space conducive for growth and collective learning.
- **Focus benefits disproportionately on communities of concern.** Program benefits – both those within the program timeline as well as in the longer term – should attempt to ameliorate existing inequities, rather than maintaining the status quo.
- **When legally permissible, use existing laws and regulations as the floor, rather than the ceiling.** Go above and beyond the legal minimum and the traditional confines of the typical transportation infrastructure project (i.e. NEPA, Title VI, and ADA) to deliver on community needs and priorities and to make measurable strides in reducing inequities.

## Equity Objectives

Layered on top of the Equity Definition and Principles are six overarching Equity Objectives:

1. **Mobility and accessibility:** Improve mobility, accessibility, and connectivity, especially for lower income travelers, people with disabilities, and communities who experience transportation barriers.
2. **Physical design:** Integrate equity into the physical design elements of the program.



3. **Community benefits:** Find opportunities for and implement local community improvements in addition to required mitigations.
4. **Economic opportunity:** Ensure that economic opportunities generated by the program benefit minority and women owned firms, BIPOC workers, workers with disabilities, and young people.
5. **Decision-making processes:** Prioritize access, influence, and decision-making power for Communities of Concern throughout the program in establishing objectives, design, implementation, and evaluation of success.
6. **Avoid further harm:** Avoid rather than simply mitigate disproportionate impacts on communities of concern.

## Measurable and Actionable Outcomes

A vital step to setting forth a clear path towards advancing equity is to translate the Framework's foundational elements – the Definition, Principles, and Objectives – into tangible outcomes. Program staff and the EAG will work together on this endeavor, using the following step-by-step approach:

Step 1: Identify desired **Outcomes:** What are the results we want to see in the program area and the region with respect to equity?

Step 2: Establish clear **Performance Measures:** How we will know if we've achieved equitable outcomes?

Step 3: Lay out a set of **Strategies:** How do we plan on working towards equitable outcomes?

Step 4: Plan specific **Actions:** What do we need to do to implement our strategies, who is responsible, and when will the various activities occur?

This process will be used to inform several elements of the IBR program, including an agreement to implement community enhancements, such as ancillary development opportunities, environmental justice measures, parks/open space, active transportation, safety, cultural amenities, air quality, hiring strategies, job training, and others.

## Toolbox

In partnership with the EAG, program staff will develop and apply a suite of tools to help advance equity. How these tools are used will be key. Ongoing consultation with the EAG over the course of the program will help ensure effective application.

1. **Equity Lens:** The purpose of the Equity Lens is to provide a set of guiding questions for program staff, advisory groups, and partners to pose along the arch of the program to ensure we're following an equitable process.
2. **Equity Index:** The Equity Index is a map-based tool that combines demographic indicators based on the program's Equity Definition to identify concentrations of Communities of Concern in the program area and vicinity.
3. **Best Practices Review:** In order to build upon the extensive work and critical thinking that has been conducted nationally, including in the Pacific Northwest, this document summarizes key lessons learned that can be applied to IBR program decisions and activities. The review will seek best practices for each of the IBR Equity Objectives and other themes of interest to the program such as performance measures, Community Benefit Agreements, engagement, and contracting and workforce.

## Equity Lens

An equity lens is a tool used to inform planning and decision-making in a way that leads to more equitable outcomes. It usually includes a set of guiding questions to answer as decisions are being made and/or actions are being taken. The following are the types of high-level questions that equity lenses typically include:

- What **decision** is being made?
- **Who** is at the table?
- **How** are decisions being made?
- What **assumptions** are at the foundation of the issue?
- What **data or information** is available, and what is missing?
- How will resulting **benefits and burdens** be distributed?

The IBR Equity Lens provides a more specific set of guiding questions for program staff, advisory groups, and partners to pose along the arch of the program to ensure we are staying true to our equity principles and meeting our equity objectives.

Question	Objective category supported
What are the demographics and travel patterns of those living, working, or otherwise accessing the program area?	All
What are the limitations of available data in answering key equity questions? How might we fill information gaps?	All

Question	Objective category supported
Are the standard regulatory requirements (e.g., Title VI, Environmental Justice) enough to answer essential questions related to the equity implications of the program/action/decision? If not, what other tools/strategies can we use?	All
What can be achieved within the scope of the program/action/decision vs what will require partnerships and other strategies?	All
Evaluating success: How did we do? What could we do differently moving forward/next time?	All
Are there any equity issues or concerns raised for which the program/action/decision is unable to provide resolution?	Avoiding Further Harm
What actions have the responsible agencies taken in the past that disproportionately harmed Communities of Concern in and around the program area?	Avoiding Further Harm
Are there any potential negative impacts or unintended consequences resulting from the action/decision? Have we asked the community what the potential impacts and side-effects might be and how such impacts might be avoided or reduced?	Avoiding Further Harm
What will be done, by who, and by when? Who is responsible for oversight and determining if the program meets its goals and commitments to Communities of Concern and on what timeline?	Community Benefits
Who needs to be in the conversation? Who is missing? How are affected/impacted community members, particularly Communities of Concern, being actively engaged in the program/action/decision?	Decision-making Processes

Question	Objective category supported
What did Communities of Concern tell us about their concerns, needs, and priorities? Does the program/action/decision address these concerns, needs, and priorities?	Decision-making Processes
Do any communities need capacity building to be able to meaningfully participate in the planning process?	Decision-making Processes
What can we do to avoid traditional actions/tactics that result in unequal input/voice?	Decision-making Processes
Is information being distributed to inform the public and Communities of Concern of how to influence decision-making at each step in the process?	Decision-making Processes
Who are the right messengers to communicate/reach the Communities of Concern in the program area? Do those conducting outreach have strong cultural awareness? Are they connected to the Communities of Concern being engaged?	Decision-making Processes
How will we continue to partner and deepen relationships and trust with Communities of Concern over the long-term?	Decision-making Processes
What are the existing/historical economic disparities in the program area and greater region? Why do such disparities exist?	Economic Opportunity
How are key community destinations and critical services that are regularly used by Communities of Concern being considered?	Mobility & Accessibility; Physical Design

Question	Objective category supported
To what extent are design elements “human-centered” (i.e. responding to the needs of individual users)?	Mobility & Accessibility; Physical Design
How do the existing conditions and historical context inform design options?	Physical Design

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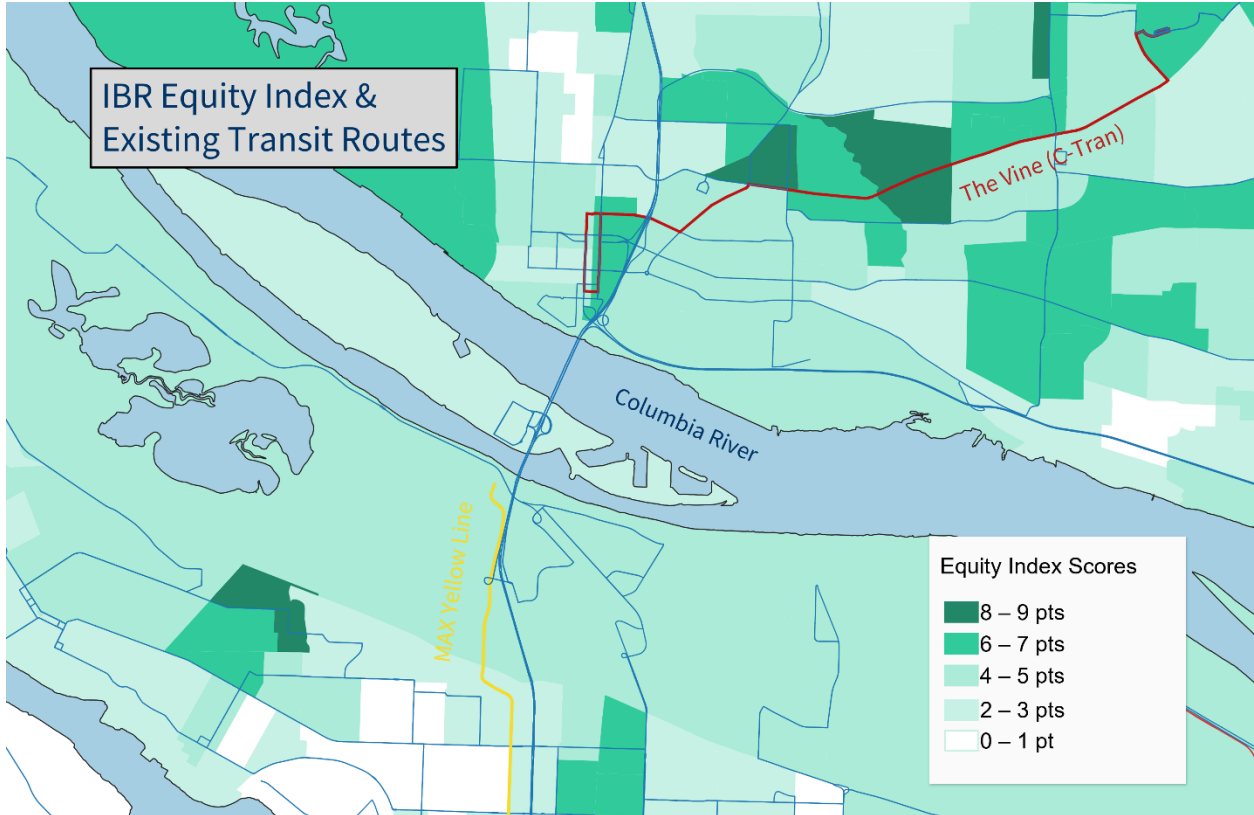
## Equity Index

The Equity Index is a map-based tool used to identify concentrations of Communities of Concern in the program area and vicinity, based on the program Equity Definition. It uses data from the most recent American Community Survey data release (2015-2019), awarding points to geographic areas (block groups or census tracts) where there is an above-average percentage of the population identified as one of these communities, in comparison to the region as a whole. For example, 25% of the region's households are low-income according to the ACS, so if greater than 25% of households in a block group were low-income, it was awarded a point.

Each demographic indicator and associated point values are listed in the table below. Note that 2 points are awarded to areas that have an above-average BIPOC population, whereas each of the rest of the indicators are worth 1 point. This is meant to weight BIPOC communities more heavily to incorporate a race-forward approach.

The map on the next page shows an output of the Index, illustrating how it can help identify priority focus areas in terms of equity.

Indicator	Point value (if above regional average)
BIPOC population (all races/ethnicities besides white non-Hispanic)	2
Low-income households (at/below 200% federal poverty level)	1
LEP households	1
Foreign born population	1
Population living with a disability	1
Older adults (over 65)	1
Young people (under 25)	1
Zero-vehicle households	1





## Best Practices Review

To be completed

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## Glossary<sup>3</sup>

Many terms are used to indicate communities and populations affected by planning and land use decisions. Planning documents frequently refer to communities that have historically been excluded by land-use and transportation projects and decision-making as “historically marginalized communities”, “historically underserved communities”, “vulnerable populations”, “Environmental Justice populations”, or “communities of concern”.

This document uses the terminology “Communities of Concern” to be broad in the definition of the communities, populations and individuals who have been excluded from transportation decision-making and/or systematically discriminated against. Communities of Concern are defined as:

- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color): people who identify as Black, Native American and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Central and South American Indigenous, Asian, Latin American, Hispanic, and/or one or more non-white races or marginalized ethnic groups.
- People living with disabilities: people who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, people who have a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.
- Communities with Limited English Proficiency (LEP): groups with individuals who indicate that they speak English less than “very well” on the census.
- Persons with lower income: individuals or households with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Houseless individuals and families: individuals and families lacking or in need of a house or home.
- Immigrants and refugees: people born outside of the United States; people who have left their country of origin due to persecution or fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.
- Young people: individuals 24 years old or younger.

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<sup>3</sup> This section borrows heavily from the I-205 & I-5 ODOT Tolling Project Equity Framework, [https://www.oregon.gov/odot/tolling/Documents/Toll\\_Projects\\_Equity\\_Framework\\_with\\_AppendixA.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/odot/tolling/Documents/Toll_Projects_Equity_Framework_with_AppendixA.pdf)

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- Older Adults: individuals 65 years old or older.

Other terms used in this document include:

- **Displacement** occurs when people and businesses, often residences or businesses of people of color, are forced from their homes and commercial areas due to rising rents, property taxes, or government policy that directly relocates people or businesses or favors replacing current community members, homes or businesses with others, particularly white-owned or occupied residences and businesses.
- **Economic Disadvantage** refers to individuals and communities with significantly less wealth and financial resources and whose economic health and wellbeing has been impaired due to systemic barriers (such as limited access to opportunities, through discrimination in education, or health care, hiring and promotions, lack of banking and credit or other factors) as compared to other people or communities in the same region.
- **Race** is a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups. (Based on Portland Metro definition)
- **Segregation** is when facilities, services, and opportunities such as housing, medical care, education, employment, and transportation in the United States are divided along racial, economic, ethnic, or religious lines. (Adapted from Portland Metro definition)
- **Systemic Racism** is a system of interrelated policies, practices, and procedures that work to advantage and position white people and communities over people of color. It can result in discrimination in criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other issues.

## **Authors and Contributors**

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