

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Transportation Delivery— Looking for Common Understanding

NADTC’s Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Initiative began in 2020 and collected information to identify transportation needs of older adults, younger adults with disabilities from historically marginalized and underserved communities and their caregivers; identify promising practices and education; and provide guidance and support for communities and providers. This Equity Brief centers on learnings derived from the DEI Initiative to encourage and facilitate common understanding of what is meant by DEI and the important role it plays in achieving transportation equity.



Credit: NADTC

Introduction

Transportation is the glue that ensures people of all ages and abilities can fully participate in life. Given this fact, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) launched its Transportation Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative in 2020 to highlight the importance of ensuring transportation accessibility for all older adults and people with disabilities, with a focus on those who live in historically underserved and marginalized communities. The President’s Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity issues the challenge: “Equal opportunity is the bedrock of American democracy, and our diversity is one of our country’s greatest strengths. But for too many, the American Dream remains out of reach. Entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies, and in our public and private institutions, have often denied that equal opportunity to individuals and communities.”¹

¹ Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, Jan. 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

The information gathered through NADTC’s 2021 National Survey of Diverse Older Adults, Younger Adults with Disabilities and Caregivers and 2022 focus groups and stakeholder meetings has shown that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other respondents differ in their access to, and use of, community transportation services. In discussions with transportation stakeholders—individuals who provide, plan, develop, oversee or advocate for transportation—we learned that there is confusion about what diversity, equity and inclusion mean. Transportation providers who note that they “serve everyone” may not always recognize the need to ensure that all who might benefit from this vital community service are indeed able to access it. A related issue, as expressed by one stakeholder, is the perception that the community “lacks diversity,” when in fact, diversity is a far-reaching concept that encompasses differences in race, ethnicity, age, gender, disability and sexual orientation, any one of which may lead to transportation inequities. To help develop a common understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion among transportation stakeholders and riders alike, this equity brief offers definitions of these terms and explores how these important concepts apply to transportation.

Diversity

As defined in Racial Equity Tools, diversity “includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another.”² In a broad sense, diversity includes race, ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It can also involve different ideas, perspectives, and values.

Diversity is likely to look different in different communities. Some communities have created transportation programs that are accessible and responsive to all its neighborhoods and residents. Other communities, including those that have a history of segregation, disinvestment and marginalization, may offer good transportation for some neighborhoods but not serve all neighborhoods and not consider the mobility needs of all residents. Within the field of transportation, a more *precise* way to think of diversity is to focus on **marginalized and underserved** communities. Such communities are included in the term “disadvantaged communities,” the focus of the Department of Transportation’s Justice 40 initiative. Disadvantaged communities are those in which residents have to spend more, and take longer, to get where they need to go.³ Diverse older adults and people with disabilities, especially those who live in disadvantaged communities, need adequate transportation to access medical care, groceries and stay connected to family and friends.

² Racial Equity Tools, <http://racialequitytools.org/glossary>

³ Justice40 Fact Sheet, https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-11/Justice40_Fact_Sheet_v1.2pptx.pdf

Equity

Equity means “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment. Underserved communities include Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.”⁴

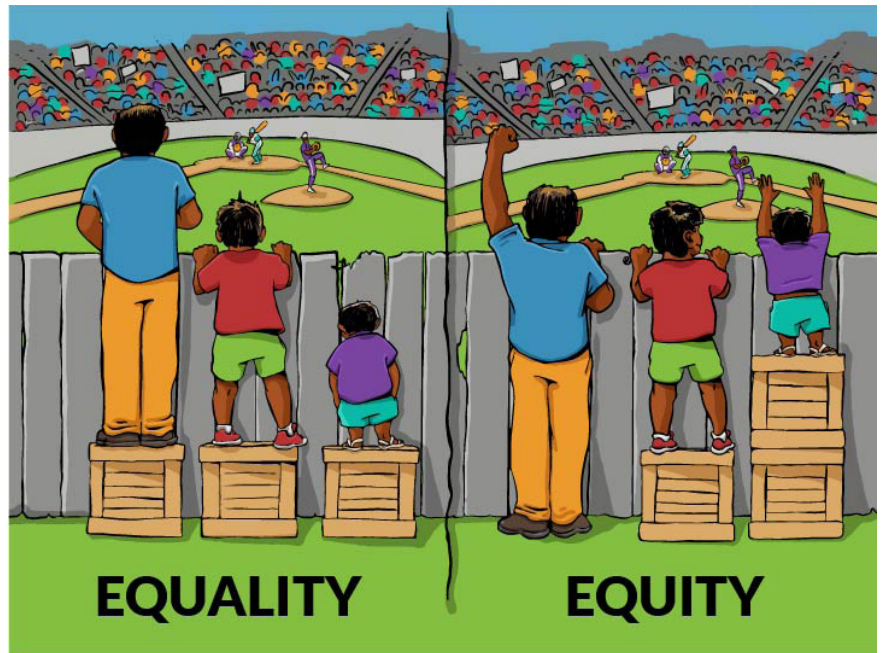


Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1⁵ below shows how equity and equality offer different levels of access for spectators at a ballgame, but the example could also be applied to transportation. As illustrated in the picture on the left, equality assumes that everyone, no matter their circumstances, benefits from the same level of support. But equity recognizes that individual needs may differ; thus, the picture on the right shows everyone getting the support they need to actually see the game.

Transportation equity ensures access to transportation services in a systematically fair and just way for all individuals who need a ride. This may require communities to adjust policies and practices that create barriers. As the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) points out, equitable transportation systems are those that “connect users to their destination in a manner that is aligned to the community and attuned to the needs of local users, including ability, income, and social context.”⁶ To meet the specific needs of older adults and people with disabilities from historically marginalized and underserved communities, transportation systems may have to implement new programs or services that will ensure equity in delivery to these populations.

4 Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, Jan. 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

5 Interaction Institute for Social Change, artist: Angus Maguire.

6 <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2022-11/2023-2026-CCAM-Strategic-Plan.pdf>, p. 64

Inclusion

Inclusion is based on the idea that “all people, regardless of age or disability [or any other characteristic] should be able to live independently and participate fully in their communities. Every person should have the right to make choices and to control the decisions in and about their lives.”⁷ Applied to transportation, inclusion seeks to ensure that all riders and potential transportation users are respected, have opportunities to be engaged, and understand that their contributions are valued.⁸

Inclusive transportation offers transportation decisionmakers, providers and advocates, as well as riders and potential transportation users, not just a seat at the table, but a meaningful role in program development from planning through implementation. The Pathway to Inclusion, developed

by Transit Planning for All, a project of the U.S. Administration for Community Living, identifies six levels of inclusion that can be used by communities to gauge their progress in becoming more open in planning and developing transportation that is responsive to users’ needs and preferences.⁹

To ensure full participation, individual riders and members of underserved communities may need language interpretation, transportation to and from meetings, and fully accessible meeting places. Holding meetings in locations and at times convenient to the target population, such as meeting at a local community center or in the evening or on weekends, is a welcoming approach that can help to overcome distrust.



Credit: Productive Alternatives, Fergus Falls, MN

⁷ <https://www.acl.gov/about-community-living>

⁸ Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks: Standards for Organizations Around the World, <https://centreforglobalinclusion.org/>

⁹ The Pathway to Inclusion, <https://transitplanning4all.org/pathway-to-inclusion/>

To achieve transportation equity, those who need and use transportation in underserved and marginalized communities need to be engaged. Their experiences can offer key insights, but achieving inclusion means not just asking for input but empowering users to influence decisions and take on leadership roles to help design transportation systems that are fully accessible and acceptable in their neighborhoods. Targeted outreach and supports, such as holding meetings in neighborhood centers or providing rides to meetings, are necessary to enable the participation of diverse older adults and people with disabilities in transportation planning.

Conclusion

The definitions discussed in this brief are meant to serve as guidance to help communities begin to break down barriers and promote mobility options that are accessible to all. While this brief has focused attention on transportation providers' responsibility to better serve marginalized and underserved populations, there are implications if an organization does not address DEI internally as well. Achieving equity in transportation requires examining operations both internally and externally. This process invites a strong commitment to diversity, which will likely involve examining internal employment practices such as recruiting, hiring, and promoting staff and drivers, including volunteers, to ensure a diverse workforce. It may involve examining relationships with contractors or those with whom transportation providers do business as well as diversity among the organization's leaders, including board members. A diverse, equitable and inclusive organization serves everyone in a community with a commitment to meeting the needs of those traditionally underserved; ensures that staff, partners and providers reflect the population being served; and provides opportunities for community members to engage in developing programs and promoting the work of the organization.

Equity will be achieved when all voices—riders, transit professionals, community organizations and policy makers—participate in transportation planning and implementation. It requires engagement with populations that are underserved, under-represented or marginalized and recognition that underserved and marginalized older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers face unique challenges. This effort requires acknowledgement of past history that has ignored the needs of certain neighborhoods or populations. Awareness of implicit biases and openness to changing one's perspective are also needed. A DEI initiative can help transportation users, providers and stakeholders identify service gaps and imbalances and lead to system improvements. Ultimately, this will create communities that enable diverse older adults and people with disabilities to live with optimal health, well-being and independence.

October 2023

References

About Community Living, U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), <https://www.acl.gov/about-community-living>

CCAM Strategic Plan, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2022-11/2023-2026-CCAM-Strategic-Plan.pdf>, p. 64

Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, Jan. 20, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>

Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks: Standards for Organizations Around the World, <https://centreforglobalinclusion.org/>

Interaction Institute for Social Change, artist: Angus Maguire.

Justice40 Fact Sheet, https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-11/Justice40_Fact_Sheet_v1.2pptx.pdf

The Pathway to Inclusion, <https://transitplanning4all.org/pathway-to-inclusion/>

Racial Equity Tools, <http://racialequitytools.org/glossary>



Call toll-free: 866.983.3222
Email: contact@nadtc.org
Web: www.nadtc.org

Find us on Facebook, Twitter,
YouTube & LinkedIn!



Who We Are

Established in 2015, the NADTC is a federally funded technical assistance center administered by Easterseals and USAging based in Washington, DC.

The **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center** is funded through a cooperative agreement of Easterseals, USAging, and the U.S Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

USAging is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults and people with disabilities live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities. USAging and our members work to improve the quality of life and health of older adults and people with disabilities, including supporting people with chronic illness, people living with dementia, family caregivers and others who want to age well at home and in the community. Together, we are ensuring that all people can age well. Our members are the local leaders that develop, coordinate and deliver a wide range of home and community-based services, including information and referral/assistance, case management, home-delivered and congregate meals, in-home services, caregiver supports, transportation, evidence-based health and wellness programs, long-term care ombudsman programs and more. www.usaging.org

Easterseals is leading the way to full equity, inclusion, and access through life-changing disability and community services. For more than 100 years, we have worked tirelessly with our partners to enhance quality of life and expand local access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. And we won't rest until every one of us is valued, respected, and accepted. Through our national network of affiliates, Easterseals provides essential services and on-the-ground supports to more than 1.5 million people each year — from early childhood programs for the critical first five years, to autism services, to medical rehabilitation and employment programs, to veterans' services, and more. Our public education, policy, and advocacy initiatives positively shape perceptions and address the urgent and evolving needs of the one in four Americans living with disabilities today. Together, we're empowering people with disabilities, families and communities to be full and equal participants in society. www.easterseals.com