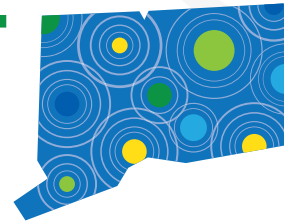# Sustainable CT
Local Actions. Statewide Impact.

ACTION 9.1 OPTIMIZE FOR EQUITY

Equity Toolkit

Apply the Equity Toolkit to
1 other Sustainable CT action
for Bronze Certification

Apply the Equity Toolkit to
3 other Sustainable CT actions
for Silver Certification

Getting Started

This Equity Toolkit lays out a process that your Sustainability Team should use to engage your community as you plan and implement Sustainable CT actions.

To be eligible for Sustainable CT certification, your municipality is required to apply this Equity Toolkit to at least one Sustainable CT action for bronze certification and to at least three actions for silver certification. The Toolkit may be applied to any action other than Action 9.1 Optimize for Equity.

Begin the Equity Toolkit process before you start to work on the Sustainable CT action to which the Equity Toolkit will be applied. Follow the process outlined to identify and apply the Toolkit to a Sustainable CT action. (For a complete list of actions see page 15.) When you have finished, you will submit a short narrative describing how you utilized this Equity Toolkit.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

If you would like support in completing this action, Sustainable CT staff can connect you with equity coaches. Sustainable CT also provides trainings throughout the year to help communities better understand this issue.

To connect with an equity coach or to learn more about our resources, contact Sustainable CT at **info@sustainablect.org**

Equitable communities recognize the intrinsic value of each member and the need to connect with everyone, regardless of a person's race, gender, age, or sexual identity.

Why Does Equity Matter?

Sustainable CT believes that our communities can thrive and truly be sustainable only when social equity is achieved; that people's race, gender, zip code, etc. does not dictate their life outcome.

To build communities that embrace equity, Sustainable CT cities and towns will create a table where diverse relationships are welcomed and valued, where decisions are made collectively, and where success is measured by the variety of perspectives and experiences represented.

Sustainable CT recognizes the many values of diversity to strengthen civic engagement, local economies, arts and culture, community resilience, and more. Sustainable CT encourages cities and towns to include more diverse voices in their decision making processes, and to identify barriers to access for underrepresented residents in order to determine and respond to community priorities.

EQUITY MEANS...

We know our neighbors.

We value diversity.

All members of our community have the ability to co-create the vision for our town and shape decisions.

We connect with people who are different from us.

We strive for genuine collaboration.

Decision makers in our community reflect those impacted by the decisions.

What's at Stake?

Creating more inclusive and equitable communities means changing systems that have resulted in disparities.

POVERTY

In Connecticut, 26% of the Latino population and 20% of the Black population live below the poverty level, compared to 6% of Whites. High rates of poverty impact everyone: child poverty alone costs an estimated $500 billion a year to the US economy and stifles the potential of millions of families.

HOUSING BURDEN

Fifty-one percent of the people renting housing in the US pay more than 30% of their income on rent (expressed as "housing burden"), squeezing household budgets and leaving few resources to pay for other expenses or make long-term investments. **In Connecticut, Latinos experience the highest housing burden at 62%, followed by 60% of Blacks,** and 48% of Whites. 34% of Connecticut families with children live with a high housing burden.

INCOME AND THE WAGE GAP

Women in Connecticut are paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to men (for full-time, year-round jobs), amounting to an annual wage gap of $10,864. Non-white Connecticut women are paid much less: Black women are paid 58 cents, Latinas are paid 47 cents, and Asian women are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men.

DISCONNECTED YOUTH

Among 16-24 year olds in Connecticut, **21% of Black males and 17% of Black females are not working or in school. The same is true for 18% of Latino males and 17% of Latina females,** but less than 9% of White males and 6% of White females. Not accessing education and job experience early in life can have long-lasting impacts, including lower earnings, higher public expenditures, lower tax revenues, and lost human potential.

EXPOSURE TO POLLUTION

Connecticut's Black and Latino populations have the highest air pollution exposure indices (55 and 54 out of 100, respectively). Connecticut's White population has the lowest exposure index (36). Exposure to pollution and toxins undermines the safety, health, and well-being of residents, putting them at higher risk for chronic diseases and premature death and limiting their opportunities to thrive.

INCARCERATION RATES

Nationwide, Blacks are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is 5.1 times the imprisonment of Whites. **In Connecticut, the disparity is far greater: the Black incarceration rate is 9.4 times that of Whites;** the Latino incarceration rate is 3.9 times that of Whites.

Please see page 14 for data sources.

The purpose of this Toolkit is to build and strengthen municipal processes to be more **inclusive, cohesive, and representative** of all community members, now and in the future.

How Can We Build an Inclusive Process?

Think of this Equity Toolkit as your road map: it lays out a series of simple steps to help you connect with your community and identify issues that are important to them.

First, you will explore who lives and works in your community, and then determine how you may make connections. Once you have made connections, you can begin to define some important issues in your community and identify active organizations, non-profits, town departments, etc. Through this process, you will explore these ideas more deeply, as they might relate to Sustainable CT actions.

Remember to keep an open mind! As you learn more about your specific community's needs, be prepared to adapt your approach as needed.

GOALS OF OPTIMIZING FOR EQUITY

Broaden community connections and work together.

Value all voices and include the interests of all members of the community in decision making.

Create a community where all can thrive and where race, gender, age, or sexual identity do not determine opportunities or predict outcomes.

Recognize and embrace the strengths that all neighborhoods and community members bring to our communities.
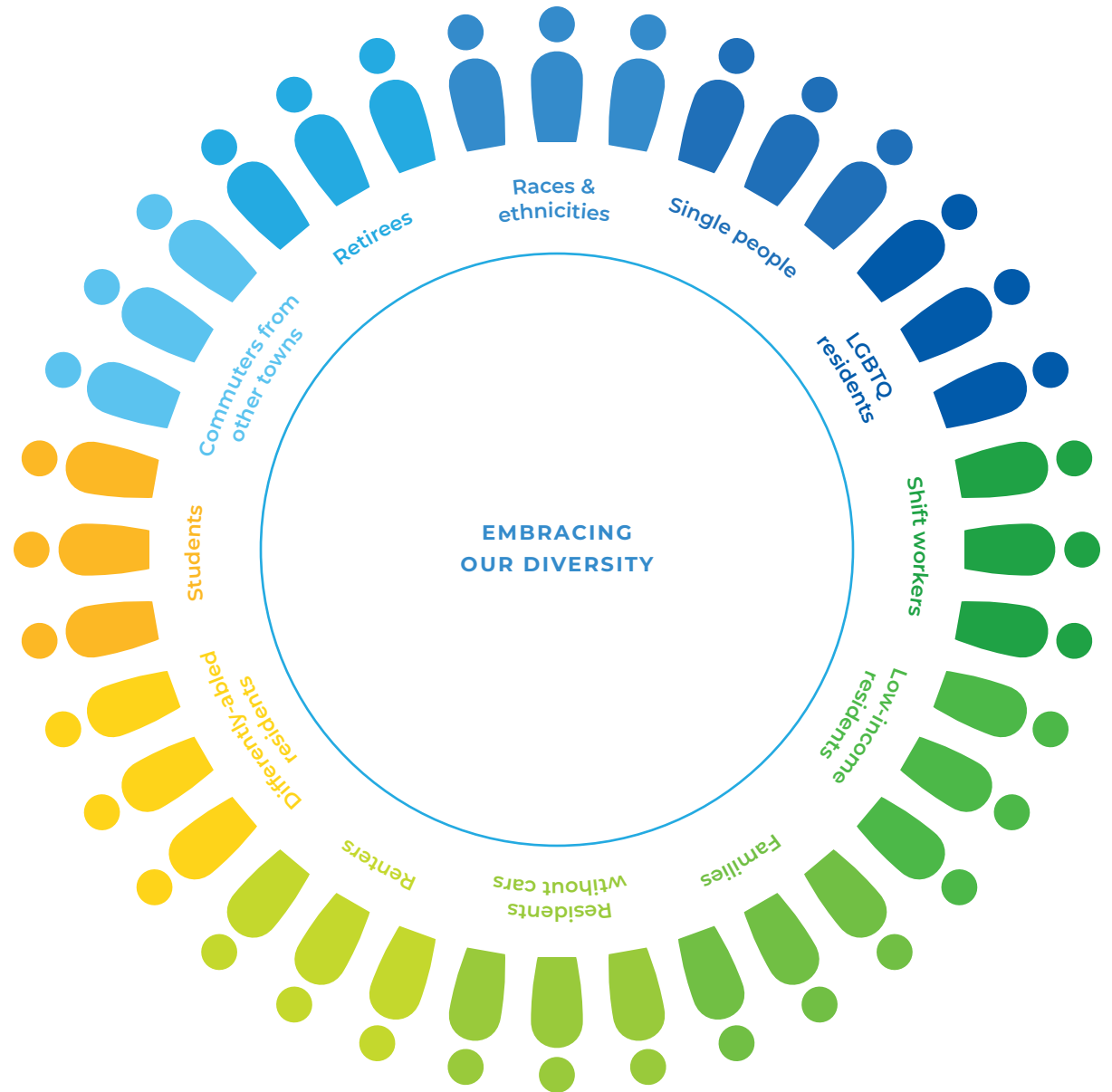
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Who Lives and Works in Our Community?

The first step to building an inclusive process is to identify who lives in your community. Demographic information generally includes data on race, ethnicity, age, gender, and income. Think broadly to identify additional characteristics of those in your community: for example, those who are differently-abled, retired or working, single or living with dependents, homeowner or renter, etc. By first identifying who lives in your municipality, you can begin to learn how different people experience the community.

💡 HELPFUL TIP

Find community-level data online: CT Economic Resource Center Town Profiles, Partnership for Strong Communities Housing Data Profiles, DataHaven, Kids Count, The National Equity Atlas, US Census Bureau.

EMBRACING OUR DIVERSITY

Retirees · Races & ethnicities · Single people · LGBTQ residents · Shift workers · Low-income residents · Families · Residents without cars · Renters · Differently-abled residents · Students · Commuters from other towns
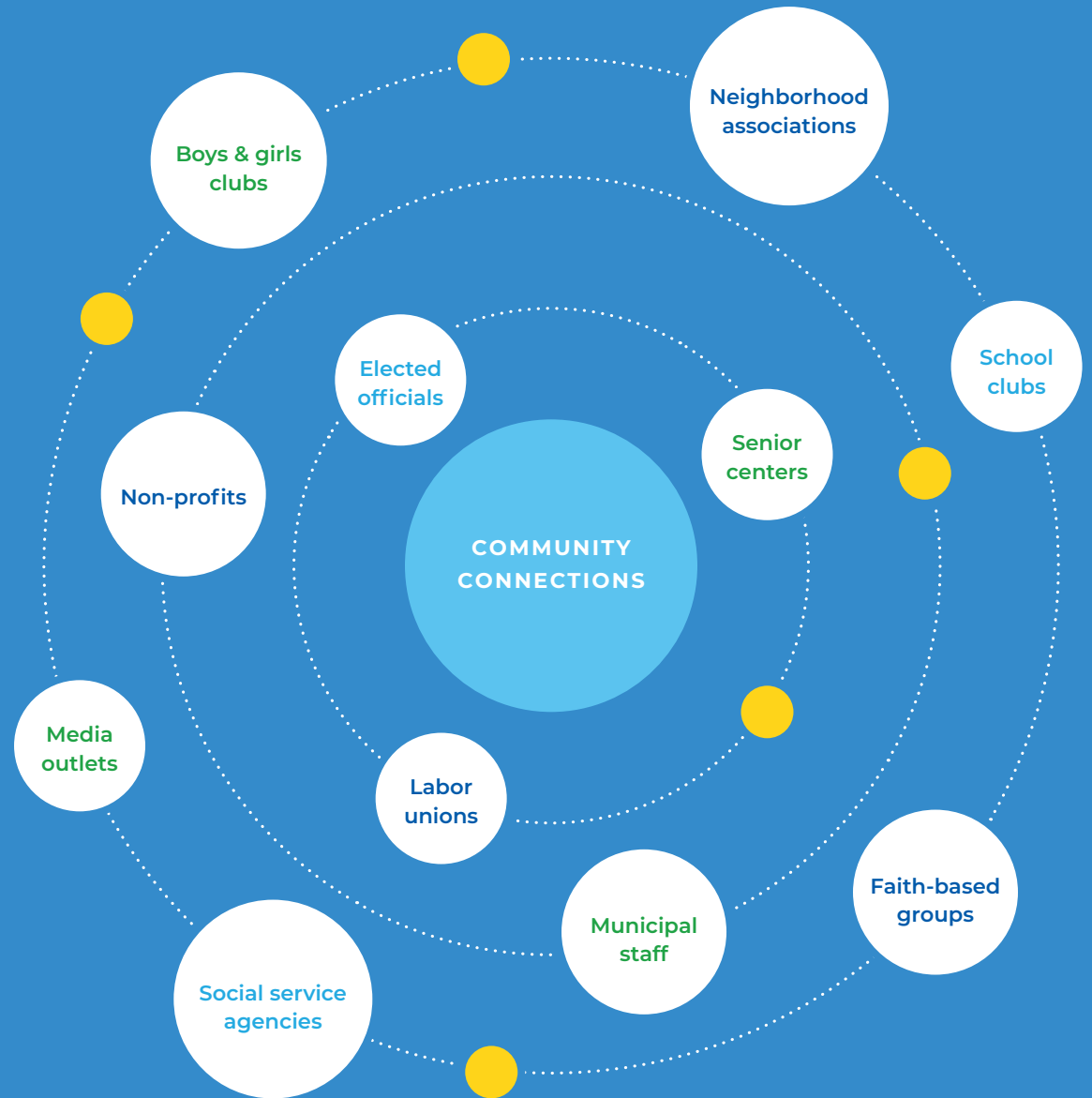
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How Can We Connect with Each Other?

Once you have identified who lives and works in your community, begin to think about how you might connect with all community members. Are there active non-profits or interest groups? What are some of the pressing issues your community is facing? What organizations are working on those issues? For groups that are not typically represented in community decision making, are there organizations that might help you connect with them?

💡 HELPFUL TIP

If you're not sure how to find non-profits and local service groups, try asking your school system, Department of Social Services, senior center, etc. If you don't know where to begin to identify issues in your community, read the local paper, attend a town council meeting, talk to leaders of non-profits and faith communities.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Boys & girls clubs
- Neighborhood associations
- Elected officials
- School clubs
- Non-profits
- Senior centers
- Media outlets
- Labor unions
- Social service agencies
- Municipal staff
- Faith-based groups

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Create Opportunities for Dialogue

You might set up individual meetings or choose to have larger events with the community groups you have identified. Regardless, be sure to make space for open and honest dialogue. Recognize that building trust takes time, and that building an inclusive process is, in itself, a process. As you proceed, you will likely continue to make new connections within your community.

As you hold your meetings, look at the list of Sustainable CT actions and identify some that might help address the needs, pressing issues, and values of your community. Work together to select a Sustainable CT action to complete and to determine a strategy for inclusive implementation.

For example, if you find that members of your community do not own cars (due to income, physical challenges, age, preference), how might *Action 5.1 Implement Complete Streets* or *Action 5.5 Promote Public Transit and Other Mobility Strategies* be implemented to open up mobility options for all members of your community?

HOW TO HOLD AN INCLUSIVE MEETING

Hold meetings at varied locations, on different days, and at different times of day.

Ensure that neighborhoods that might be impacted by your discussion topic have access and can get to the meeting easily.

Include interpreters/translators for key languages represented in the local community.

Provide snacks and child care services.

Hold meetings at venues that are accessible by public transportation.
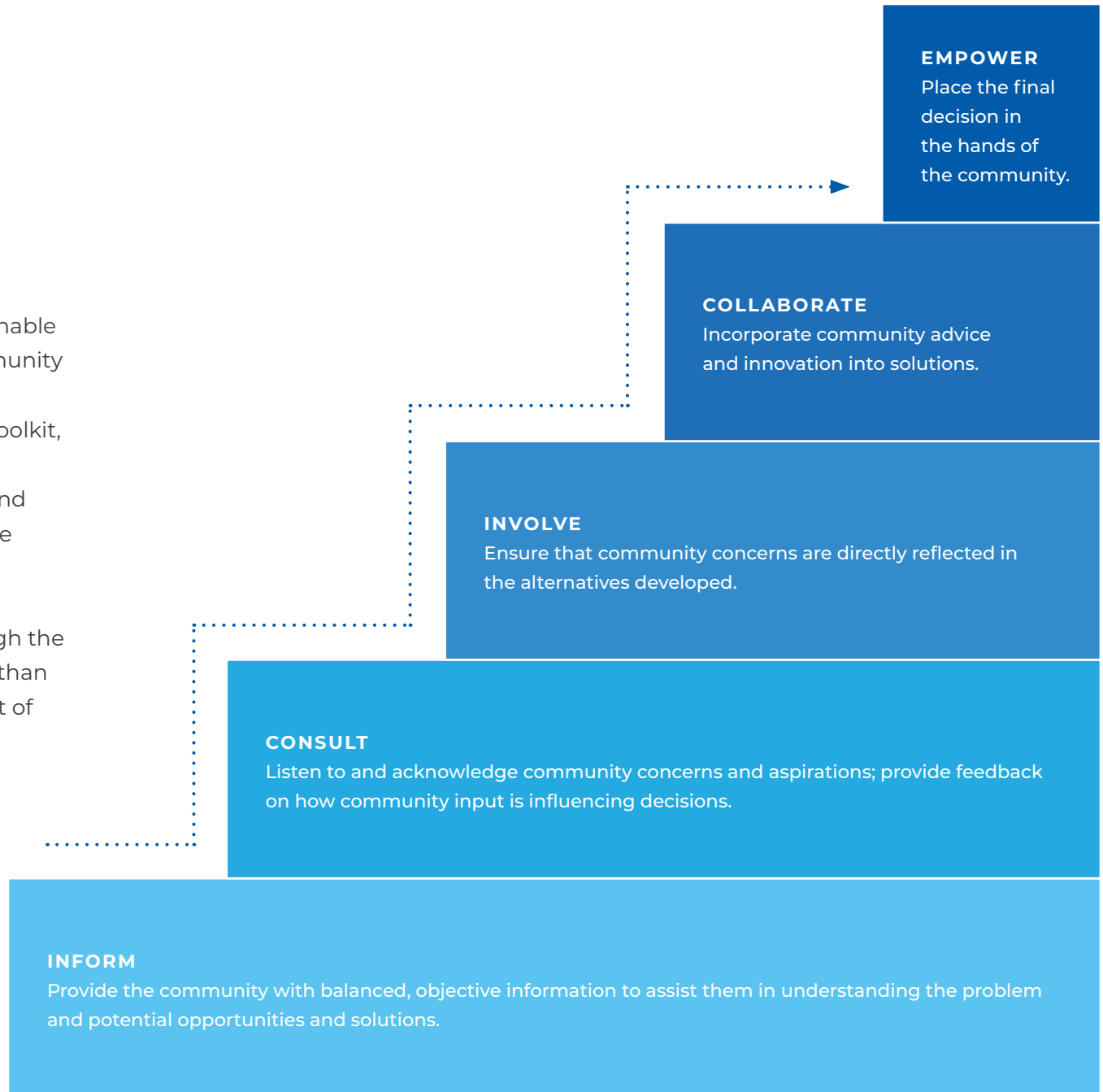
Ensure that all residents are able to obtain meeting information.

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Collaborate and Co-Create

It's time to start work on the Sustainable CT action you identified with community members. Using the strategies you develop as you work through this Toolkit, carry out the action in an inclusive manner. It is important to involve and update community members as the action implementation evolves.

Remember, you are working through the action *with* the community, rather than *for* the community. Maintain a spirit of collaboration and co-creation.

EMPOWER
Place the final decision in the hands of the community.

COLLABORATE
Incorporate community advice and innovation into solutions.

INVOLVE
Ensure that community concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives developed.

CONSULT
Listen to and acknowledge community concerns and aspirations; provide feedback on how community input is influencing decisions.

INFORM
Provide the community with balanced, objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and potential opportunities and solutions.

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Refine, Revisit, Improve

As you worked through this Toolkit, you probably found the process both challenging and rewarding. Hopefully you have broadened your perspective and begun to grow towards a more inclusive community. Take a moment to reflect on the process. Did you achieve the goals for optimizing for equity? What lessons did you learn? What surprised you?

Making real progress towards equity and inclusion takes time and trust: remember that this Equity Toolkit is just the beginning of a process. Continue to refine, revisit, and continuously improve your strategies and perspectives as you co-create an inclusive and sustainable community for current and future residents.

We started to look at future challenges from a more diverse point of view.

In order to eliminate unrecognized biases, we expanded our team to become more inclusive.

This process is a source of empowerment: everyone can play a role in effecting positive change in our community.

To satisfy Action 9.1 Optimize for Equity, you must **submit a short narrative** describing how your Sustainability Team applied the Equity Toolkit.

Submission Requirements

1

WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

List the groups and stakeholders your Sustainability Team identified and engaged.

2

HOW DID YOU CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER?

Describe how and when the engagement took place and what was discussed. List the shared goals determined through your community co-creation and engagement process.

3

WHAT EMERGED FROM YOUR DIALOGUE?

State the Sustainable CT action to which you ultimately chose to apply the Equity Toolkit; include why you selected this action.

4

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF YOUR COLLABORATION?

Describe how you implemented the action based on the input received during the community engagement and co-creation process. Highlight how your Sustainability Team incorporated the community input and how the action implementation was different because of this input. How might you include or expand services to additional community members in the future?

5

HOW WILL YOU REFINE, REVISIT, AND IMPROVE?

Evaluate the Equity Toolkit application process. What did your Sustainability Team learn? What challenges did your Sustainability Team encounter and how might you make improvements for future applications of the Equity Toolkit? How might you engage and include more community members?

IMPORTANT!

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Along with your Optimize for Equity action submission, you must also submit the required materials for the action to which the Equity Toolkit was applied.

Additional Resources

Government Alliance on Race & Equity
https://www.racialequityalliance.org

Race Forward
https://www.raceforward.org

PolicyLink
http://www.policylink.org

Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative
https://www.seattle.gov/rsji

Connecticut Economic Resource Center Town Profiles
https://www.cerc.com/resources/town-profiles

Partnership for Strong Communities Housing Data Profiles
http://www.pschousing.org/publications

DataHaven
http://www.ctdatahaven.org

Kids Count
https://datacenter.kidscount.org

The National Equity Atlas
http://nationalequityatlas.org

US Census Bureau
https://www.census.gov

Data Sources

Poverty
National Equity Atlas, 2015 data

Housing Burden
National Equity Atlas, 2015 data
Kids Count, 2016 data

Income and Wage Gap
National Partnership for Women and Families, 2015 data

Disconnected Youth
National Equity Atlas, 2015 data

Exposure to Pollution
National Equity Atlas, 2015 data

Incarceration Rates
The Sentencing Project, 2014 data

Sustainable CT Actions

1. Thriving Local Economies
1.1 Support Redevelopment of Brownfield Sites
1.2 Implement Sustainable Purchasing
1.3 Inventory and Promote Local Retail Options
1.4 Provide Resources and Support to Local Businesses
1.5 Promote Sustainable Workforce Development
1.6 Participate in and Promote C-PACE Program

2. Well-Stewarded Land & Natural Resources
2.1 Provide Watershed Education
2.2 Create a Watershed Management Plan
2.3 Engage in Watershed Protection and Restoration
2.4 Develop an Open Space Plan
2.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory
2.6 Manage for Drought and Municipal Water Use
2.7 Provide Education on Water Conservation
2.8 Implement Low Impact Development
2.9 Manage Woodlands and Forests
2.10 Facilitate Invasive Species Education and Management
2.11 Implement Green Grounds and Maintenance Program

3. Vibrant & Creative Cultural Ecosystems
3.1 Map Tourism and Cultural Assets
3.2 Support Arts and Creative Culture

3.3 Develop a Creative Placemaking Plan
3.4 Provide an Arts and Culture Program for Youth

4. Dynamic & Resilient Planning
4.1 Integrate Sustainability into Plan of Conservation and Development and Zoning
4.2 Adapt Permitting Process to Promote Sustainable Development
4.3 Develop Agricultural-Friendly Practices
4.4 Assess Climate Vulnerability
4.5 Inventory and Assess Historic Resources
4.6 Streamline Solar Permitting for Small Solar Installations

5. Clean & Diverse Transportation Systems
5.1 Implement Complete Streets
5.2 Promote Effective Parking Management
5.3 Encourage Smart Commuting
5.4 Support Zero Emission Vehicle Deployment
5.5 Promote Public Transit and Other Mobility Strategies

6. Effective Physical Infrastructure & Operations
6.1 Benchmark and Track Energy Use
6.2 Reduce Energy Use Across All Municipal Buildings
6.3 Achieve High Energy Performance for Individual Buildings
6.4 Increase Use of Renewable Energy in Municipal Buildings

6.5 Develop a Municipal Energy Plan
6.6 Manage Municipal Fleets
6.7 Install Efficient Street Lights
6.8 Implement a Community Energy Campaign

7. Strategic & Inclusive Public Services
7.1 Hold a Sustainability Event
7.2 Provide Effective Community Communications
7.3 Train Municipal Commissions
7.4 Encourage Healthy and Sustainable Food Networks
7.5 Report Materials Management Data and Reduce Waste
7.6 Implement Save Money and Reduce Trash (SMART) Program
7.7 Recycle Additional Materials and Compost Organics
7.8 Develop a Food Waste Reduction Campaign
7.9 Conduct Health Impact Assessments
7.10 Improve Air Quality in Public Spaces

8. Healthy, Efficient & Diverse Housing
8.1 Design and Implement a Housing Needs Assessment
8.2 Grow Sustainable and Affordable Housing Options
8.3 Benchmark Energy and Water Use for Multifamily Housing

10. Innovation Action
10.1 Implement Your Own Sustainability Action