



Equitable Governance:

2022 NACo DEI COUNTY CONVENING
KEY COUNTY ROLES, OPPORTUNITIES AND
STRATEGIES FOR GOVERNING WITH EQUITY

RETHINKING GOVERNANCE IN AMERICA'S COUNTIES

County leaders are well-positioned to resolve disparities by asking questions grounded in the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). When we ask different questions, we can achieve different outcomes. By embracing the diversity within communities, ensuring equitable access for all to resources and opportunities and practicing inclusive decision-making, county leaders create the conditions to achieve better outcomes for all.

Counties can lead a paradigm shift. To advance this work, the National Association of Counties (NACo) hosted a full-day DEI County Convening before NACo's 2022 Annual Conference to discuss the importance of equity in governance and how to strategically align efforts at the county level. The convening brought together over 50 participants from over 20 counties who sent a team comprised of a DEI practitioner, county administrator and elected official. Throughout the convening, attendees discussed the unique challenges and opportunities they see in their distinct roles and explored how to advance the principles of DEI by considering community data differently.

The National Association of Counties employs the following definitions of **diversity, equity** and **inclusion**.



DIVERSITY

The presence of different and multiple characteristics that make up individual and collective identities, including race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, socio-economic status, language and physical ability.



EQUITY

The process of identifying and removing the barriers that create disparities in the access to resources and means, and the achievement of fair treatment and equal opportunities to thrive.



INCLUSION

The creation of an environment in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued to participate fully.

KEY TAKEAWAYS ON EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE



Developing a shared language and framework is crucial for fostering a better understanding of DEI practices. When we are all on the same page, we can conduct more thoughtful discussions and make informed decisions.



How residents feel about their government is the beginning and end point of their willingness to engage. The ability to find resonance with those who you are trying to call in can help further DEI efforts in the community.



Equity audits can be beneficial to assess county processes, accessibility, quality and outcomes. They can help to normalize and operationalize considering equity in policy and program delivery.



Data is an integral part of DEI work, but the process of collecting and analyzing that data should be interrogated to identify missing components and biased perspectives. The “Ladder of Inference” model provides clear points where we can disrupt our biases and reimagine the questions we are asking.



Institutionalizing equity is a collective responsibility, regardless of one’s individual role. This requires examining the people, processes and performance within local government so that we can achieve social equity.

“Without conversations about DEI, there is no real opportunity to understand the issues, their impact and then to develop solutions. We have to come together to create change.”

President Denise Winfrey

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion County Convening at the
2022 NACo Annual Conference & Exposition in Adams County, Colo.*



UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT ROLES & PERSPECTIVES

To further understand DEI work on the county level, participants joined with their peers to identify the opportunities, challenges and needs that each role faces in this space:

| DEI Practitioners | County Administrators | Elected Officials |
|--|--|---|
|  Challenges | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Breaking down the silos in county government▪ Developing a shared framework and language | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ County leadership buy-in▪ Identifying policies and practices not in alignment with DEI principles | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sanitizing the language around racism▪ Securing the trust of the community in a volatile political climate |
|  Needs | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Resources and infrastructure to sustain the work▪ Understand where harm is being caused and address it with purposeful planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Presentation of fact-based information using available data▪ Leverage one-on-one conversations as teachable moments | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Build relationships with community partners already doing the work▪ Set expectations for what data is needed to drive policy |
|  Opportunities | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Coordinate service delivery with a shared framework▪ Codify DEI practices through policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lead a cultural shift in the workplace to focus on belonging and safety▪ Reimagine qualification requirements that act as a barrier | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Implement equity through strategic plans▪ Put funding where the rubber hits the road |

NEXT STEPS?

NACo will conduct a landscape analysis on governing with equity to gauge our diverse membership's experience and needs. This landscape survey will help us better answer some of the questions that arose during the convening and inform how we can support those doing the work.

Fostering a sense of community is essential for strengthening the collective work of advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. This convening was a first step to create a space where county officials can come together to share, learn from one another and build a community of like-minded professionals. NACo is committed to continuing this work and creating more spaces to explore difficult conversations and forge a better future for all. For more information about our DEI work and resources, please visit our website at:

<https://www.naco.org/county-resources-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>.

KEY CONTACT

If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact:

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CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION
ADAMS COUNTY COLORADO

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
County Convening

Immediate Past President Larry Johnson

*Speaking at the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion County Convening at the
2022 NACo Annual Conference & Exposition in Adams County, Colo.*

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and resources about our DEI work

