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Testing and Adapting an Evaluation Framework for Equity and Justice in Climate Action at the City of Vancouver

KEY FINDINGS + RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by: **Christian Higham**
2024 UBC Sustainability Scholar

Prepared for: **City of Vancouver**
Lily Raphael (Solutions Lab Manager)
Margarita Pacis (Policy Analyst)

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Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of City of Vancouver staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Vancouver or the University of British Columbia.

Land Acknowledgement

The work for this project took place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded homelands of the x̣ṃəθḳʷəỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̣lilẉətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Prior to being violently displaced through the process of settler colonialism, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations stewarded thriving communities, lands, and waters across the region. The forced removal of the Nations from their lands disrupted the protocols and systems that supported balanced ecosystems and abundant resources for all.

To advance equity and justice in climate action, we must recognize the devastating impacts of colonization on the climate crisis that disproportionately burden Indigenous communities. The recommendations in this report support Indigenous sovereignty and a systems change approach to climate action.

Author's Note

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Introduction

The City of Vancouver's Sustainability Group is in the process of updating their climate adaptation and mitigation plans. As part of the update process and with a commitment to upholding the City's Equity Framework, staff are seeking new ways to meaningfully integrate and evaluate equity and justice in their work.

Expanding evaluation efforts is part of the work being done by City staff to intersect equity and climate change planning. Additionally, the Climate Justice Charter (CJC)—a document developed by the Climate Equity Working Group in collaboration with community—envisions a just and equitable response to climate change with reimagined approaches to evaluation. The CJC calls for evaluation that includes process-related criteria, acknowledging that ways of working are as important as results.¹ Evaluating processes includes paying attention to how we reflect on and learn from our efforts to integrate equity and justice into our work.

This report reviews the process of testing and adapting an evaluation framework for City of Vancouver staff to support equity and justice in their climate action work. The primary audience for this report is City staff, with the goal of offering learnings and possibilities for further development of an evaluation framework that aligns with the CJC's calls for equitable and just climate action processes.



Background

In response to the need for new evaluation approaches, a UBC Sustainability Scholar worked with the City of Vancouver in 2023 to develop a prototype framework for evaluating equity and justice in climate action.² The framework, currently referred to as the Equity Evaluation Framework (EEF), is rooted in participatory methods to advance climate justice and equity in both process and outcome. The EEF approaches evaluation as learning and engagement, guided by a set of core values and guiding principles grounded in the CJC and the City of Vancouver's Equity Framework.³

CORE VALUES

nəcá ʔmat tə šxwqweləwən ct
(We are of One Heart and Mind)

Indigenous Sovereignty

Thinking Beyond Borders

Redistribution

Fluidity

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Community as Authority: CJC is the North Star, accountability is to those most vulnerable

Participatory and Inclusive: "Nothing About Us Without Us"

Learning: Evaluation as a journey with continual growth

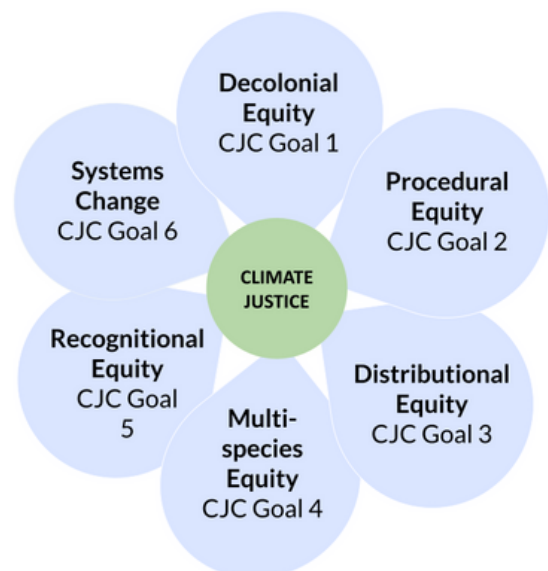
Thoughtful and Integrated: Evaluation is embedded throughout all policy stages

Robust: Inclusive of qualitative storytelling and quantitative metrics

The EEF is an interactive framework for embedding equity in the design, processes, and outcomes of climate policy. The prototype EEF was designed to facilitate the CJC's vision for climate justice, which **"requires an interconnected approach that addresses all forms of inequity and injustice."**⁴

Informed by this approach, the EEF offers diverse equity categories with related questions to evaluate equity and justice in climate policy. The categories include Equity Overall and six distinct sections designed to align with the **CJC's six goals:**⁵

- 1 Recognize and accept Indigenous sovereignty as a foundation of climate justice.
- 2 Ensure climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions are guided by those who are most impacted by systemic oppression and climate change.
- 3 Support the equitable redistribution of the burdens and benefits of climate response.
- 4 Restore and sustain our relationship to nature.
- 5 Respond to the need for accountability and resulting repair work related to climate injustices.
- 6 Catalyze systems change within climate policy and practice.



Research Approach

This project used an action research approach integrated with systems and design thinking methods. It involved an iterative process of rapid prototyping, reflecting, and adapting the existing EEF alongside prospective users and beneficiaries of the framework. Rapid prototyping is a way to test and iterate different dimensions of an idea in a short amount of time to understand its potential usefulness.⁶ Using this method, we explored the EEF's possible uses, forms, and designs through a series of tests with different users, including City staff in climate planning and a community group working in collaboration with the City. Each test produced learnings that were incorporated into subsequent prototypes, resulting in emerging directions for implementing the EEF at the City to support climate action work moving forward.

RESEARCH PROCESS

REVIEW

- Reviewed documents that informed the EEF, including the City's Equity Framework and Climate Justice Charter.

INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

- Learned from City staff about their approaches to equity in climate adaptation and mitigation to determine how the EEF may integrate with existing strategies.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

- Explored similar frameworks and practices for evaluating equity and justice in climate action, including the JustAdapt Framework (Okamoto and Doyon).⁷

PROTOTYPING AND TESTING

- Designed and iterated EEF versions for each test group.
- Reviewed the testing feedback and adapted the EEF based on learnings.
- Ideated emerging directions and potential iterations through visual storyboarding.

REFLECTION

- Reflected individually and as a project team on what it means to hold the role of an evaluator, including tensions related to accountability and positionality.

Summary of Tests + Key Findings

1 TEST WITH CITY STAFF AT EQUITY LEARNING JOURNEY (SUSTAINABILITY STAFF MEETING)

Approach

- EEF in the context of introducing the department's equity approach to climate planning.
- Testing ways to approach the framework and reactions to applying it to an existing project or policy.
- Establishing the EEF as part of the City's accountability to the CJC's calls to action.

Questions

- How do people approach frameworks (e.g. combine, strictly follow one)?
- Which EEF petals are people drawn to? Which EEF parts are most useful?
- What are the points of tension or confusion with the EEF in its current form?

Preparation

- Built the EEF into a set of slides containing the equity categories and questions with room for staff to apply them to a project or action.
- Incorporated feedback from the initial EEF staff presentation and clarified some of its language to align with other City equity documents.

Key learnings

- Staff are open to using frameworks in flexible and adaptable ways to meet the needs of different projects and teams.
- There is interest in a user guide to facilitate interaction with the EEF.
- There is interest in embedding the EEF into a project plan or charter to support ongoing use.
- The EEF questions require review for clarity and deeper exploration of alignment with different equity types.

2 TEST WITH CITY STAFF AND A COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP (TOPIC: GREEN BUILDINGS)

Approach

- Testing how City staff and community engage with the EEF together.
- Testing user experience with pre-selected questions.
- Exploring the role of community participation in the evaluation process.

Questions

- How do we instruct users to interact with the EEF?
- How might we adapt the EEF to support working with community on a project or action? What is required to support this approach or work?
- How might the EEF support the integration of community input into climate actions?

Preparation

- Met with the staff team to pre-select EEF questions to explore in the context of proposed green building policy for multi-unit buildings.
- Pre-selected questions from the EEF related to the group's work and goals.
- Recorded an EEF overview video to share with group members.
- Created an interactive EEF prototype on Mural and a facilitation plan for the test.

Key learnings

- It is helpful for users to have an EEF introduction and guidelines in advance.
- The EEF shows potential to support community involvement in evaluating equity for a project or policy. Collaborative EEF work requires preparation, including but not limited to adapting questions to the group's context and building an adequate understanding of the subject of evaluation before engaging with the EEF.
- This test group found the EEF helpful for structuring conversations about green building policy and generating ideas and further questions.
- Users require considerable time to fully engage with and reflect on learnings from using the EEF.

3 TEST WITH CLIMATE MITIGATION STAFF TEAM (CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN)

Approach

- Testing EEF applicability at the strategic planning level (e.g. for an overarching climate action plan).
- Working through questions and discussing in real time with staff what the EEF needs to support the evaluation of strategic-level processes.

Questions

- Which parts of the EEF are applicable at a higher level, like strategic planning?
- How might the EEF be adapted to support equitable evaluation in major climate plans and processes?

Preparation

- Created an interactive EEF prototype on Mural with questions organized by equity category.
- Added new questions that emerged through previous tests.
- Included a version of the **evaluation gradient** with the test questions.

Key learnings

- The Equity Overall category is missing questions related to higher-level climate action planning.
- There is interest in learning how to approach the EEF at different project or policy development stages.
- The EEF may support evaluating draft actions to determine resource allocation using an equity lens.
- The EEF is not a static tool; users need to play an active role in adapting it to their project contexts. Some EEF questions require rewording or adaptation to support different teams and approaches.

EQUITY UNINTENTIONAL:

Policy does not sufficiently integrate an equity lens in the proposed approach nor target equity barriers.

EQUITY INTENTIONAL:

Policy is designed to reduce equity barriers to resource access or increase the evidence base around equity barriers.

EQUITY TRANSFORMATIVE:

Policy is designed to reduce equity barriers in agency or control over resources and impacts.

EVALUATION GRADIENT

Rather than being fixed categories or rankings, the gradient invites thinking about equity impact in terms of levels of depth, knowing that there may be nuance and complexity between the different levels.

Through testing, we found that the gradient may benefit from an additional category to capture situations where a project intentionally considers equity but with unrealized outcomes (not pictured here).

4 TEST WITH CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION STRATEGY (CCAS) STAFF TEAM

Approach

- Exploring how the EEF applies retroactively to evaluate and learn from climate actions.
- Testing the EEF at a higher (strategic) level and specific action level simultaneously and in an integrated way.
- Testing user experience of working on individual boards and selecting questions independently.

Questions

- Does the EEF support retroactive or reflective evaluation?
- What determines how users select questions?
- How do users interact with the evaluation gradient?

Preparation

- Met with CCAS team to discuss EEF test formats and goals.
- Updated the EEF overview video to share with CCAS team.
- Created an interactive EEF prototype on Mural with attention to UX design.

Key learnings

- Users notice that they select questions based on familiarity with the topic and the ability to respond with clarity or ease. There is interest in and recommendations to develop instructions for selecting questions to encourage engagement with challenging or less familiar ones.
- The evaluation gradient helps point towards directions for future work. However, the EEF could benefit from more nuance to reflect different equity intentions and outcomes.
- Users appreciate having a spacious amount of time to interact with the EEF.
- Users value being able to do this exercise alongside others, even while working independently for part of it.

EEF Status

Building on the work of the first EEF, this project focused on understanding how the EEF works with different climate action projects and teams and iterating it based on learnings. Throughout the testing process, we adapted the questions, design, and interface, and the EEF now exists as an interactive Mural board with opportunities for further development and integration.

The more developed deliverables, including the most up-to-date prototype of the framework, were provided to the City of Vancouver for current internal use. Deliverables include:

- Interactive Mural board
- Word document with updated questions
- EEF overview slide deck
- EEF overview video
- Record of EEF versions and testing notes
- Folder of visual assets

The following page presents a series of recommendations for moving forward and invitations for City staff to continue progress on the EEF.

Recommendations

Develop an EEF user guide that includes:

- Opportunities for users to reflect on their positionality and assumptions
- Guidance for approaching the EEF at different levels of depth or familiarity with equity and justice in climate action
- Instructions for selecting questions to encourage engagement with questions from across the different EEF categories
- Examples of using the EEF in an engaging media format

Build the EEF into project plans or charters to support evaluation as an ongoing practice of learning, engagement, and adaptation throughout a project or policy life cycle. Move away from the idea that evaluation is just for reporting metrics and happens only at the end of a project.

Consider a staff position dedicated to facilitating EEF use and supporting the evaluation of equity and justice in the City's climate action planning. Follow the recommendation from the first EEF project to prioritize and fund learning, evaluation, and engagement work.⁸

Continue prototyping EEF applicability at the strategic planning level. Additional testing at this level could help generate more specific learnings than what was possible during rapid prototyping.

Continue prototyping interface, design and organization options, including, for example, categorizing questions by phase (planning, process, outcome).

Build or strengthen relationships with community groups to support ongoing accountability to lived experiences. Uphold the EEF's Core Values and Guiding Principles to ensure community-driven evaluation processes and outcomes.

Invitations for Using the EEF

Expect to give evaluation more time than you think you need.

Embrace an orientation that the evaluation might not be perfect and iteration is essential.

Be open to the unanticipated directions that the EEF may lead you or your project in, including the non-linear process of exploration and learning.

Cultivate patience for becoming familiar with the EEF and mindsets around evaluation as a tool for learning and adapting processes for systems change.

Try using the EEF with others in a coworking session.

Reflect in an ongoing way on your positionality, privileges, experiences, assumptions, and values you bring to your work and your approach to evaluation.

Continue to engage with the question: who has the authority to evaluate?

Notes

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