



NATIONAL  
EQUITY  
PROJECT

# PROPOSAL FOR LEADING FOR EQUITY SERVICES AND DISTRICT 90 EQUITY ASSESSMENT

Presented to:  
Ed Condon, Superintendent

*Prepared by:*  
Kathleen Osta, Regional Director, Midwest Region  
[kosta@nationalequityproject.org](mailto:kosta@nationalequityproject.org)  
510-484-4021

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*“Those who practice leadership for equity must confront, disappoint, and dismantle and at the same time energize, inspire, and empower.” – Sharon Daloz Parks*

The National Equity Project has 20 years of experience partnering with educational, non-profit, government, and philanthropic leaders to deliver on the promises they make in their communities. Our unique development approach focuses on the technical, relational, social, and cultural aspects of complex change efforts focused on achieving equitable results.

In our view, working to achieve equity entails:

- Removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with race, socio-economic status, and any other social or cultural factor.
- Ending inequitable practices, addressing individual and systemic biases, developing and implementing equitable policies, and creating inclusive communities in which every family and child experiences a sense of belonging and thrives.
- Discovering and cultivating the unique talents and interests that everyone possesses.

Our mission is to dramatically improve the experiences, outcomes, and life options for children and families situated furthest from opportunity in our communities. We do this by building the capacity of leaders to reimagine, redesign, and retool structures and processes in service of every community member having access to the opportunities they need to be productive members of their communities and thrive.

## Our Approach

As a strategic consulting and leadership development organization, we offer sustained, embedded support to system leaders working toward equity. Our commitment lies in increasing the capacity of leaders (formal and informal) across a system to identify inequities, diagnose equity problems, and develop people and relationships in service of creating more equitable policies and practices.

### Our Unique Approach to Developing Equity Leadership

Most of us are accustomed to leading and being led from the “outside-in”. More often the drivers of our decisions are external requirements, mandates, expectations, programs, or supervisors. Rarely do we have the opportunity to tap into our own will to make a difference, what author Michael Fullan calls *intrinsic motivation* which he names as one of the four drivers for whole systems change (Fullan 2011).

In our experience, Leading for Equity requires us to:

- Navigate the discomfort of not knowing the “answer”
- Explore and heal from the negative effects of our own oppression and privilege and support others to do the same
- Create and facilitate *brave* spaces that honor both cognition and emotion
- Develop the courage to interrupt and transform inequitable systems into places of opportunity and belonging for young people and adults.

Leading for Equity Competencies

### NEP's Equity Leadership Competencies

Working towards equity requires courageous and thoughtful leadership. Tackling inequity involves working through social relationships, personal beliefs, and organizational values as well as



managing plans, programs, and initiatives. Leaders for equity must be able to raise difficult issues while building unity across difference in order to advocate for and support more equitable policies and practices. We support the development of a set of core competencies required for strong equity leadership. Equity consciousness and commitment allows leaders across systems to articulate clear and universal goals while acknowledging the reality of structural inequity. Leaders understand the shared fate of all people and communities and thus commit to target strategies and resources so that residents furthest from opportunity reach the goals no matter how wide the current gaps.

Transformational leadership flows from an internal reservoir that allows leaders to persist with equal parts strength and care when the terrain feels dangerous. In contrast to most technical assistance organizations and intermediaries; the National Equity Project supports leaders to identify their core beliefs on equity (as individuals and as teams); begin to filter their actions through the prism of these beliefs; utilize new tools and frameworks that match different levels of complexity; and consider new ways of thinking and talking that catalyzes creative, innovative and collective action. We develop leaders to incorporate and apply both a *racial equity* and *systems-thinking* lens to their understanding of the current and historical factors contributing to inequities in their communities and to the design of more inclusive, equitable, and liberating policies and practices.

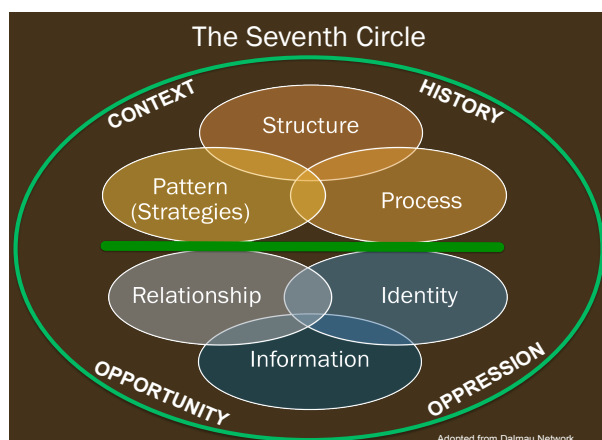
### *We Use A Racial Equity Lens*

A “lens” is a metaphor to communicate the idea of looking at an event, experience, and/or a set of data through a particular perspective. We develop leaders to intentionally employ a racial equity lens to sharpen our focus on the ways in which any given form of oppression (in this case racism) may be negatively impacting people’s opportunity, and ability to make progress on the things they care about or preventing individual or collective action toward the achievement of a particular goal.

### *We Employ a Complexity and Systems-Thinking Lens*

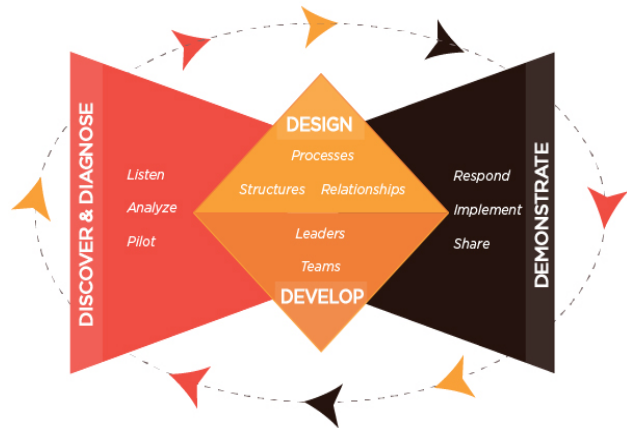
We have adapted Tim Dalmou and Meg Wheatley’s 6-Circle Model as a scaffold to delineate the critical balance between both the technical and adaptive elements that are constantly at play in any organization. Unless equity leaders attend to the “below the green line” (e.g., values, identity, core purposes, and relationship) dimensions of their context and their “above the green line” efforts will inevitably fall short of the goal of advancing equity.

We support leaders to address both *technical* and *relational* challenges – supporting them to identify and develop necessary structures, strategies, and processes (operations) to advance their equity work, while simultaneously attending to and integrating the often-overlooked dimensions of information, relationships, and identity within their organizations. The Seventh Circle encompasses the other 6 circles and acknowledges issues of power and social justice and focuses attention on the deep-rooted, systemic policies and practices that serve to marginalize some people and produce and perpetuate racial disparities in every domain of culture and society. The Seventh Circle reminds us that in order to create more equitable experiences and outcomes, we must apply an equity lens to understand current context and design new approaches.



Our NEP “Equity by Design” Cycle recognizes that equity work in complex systems is not linear or static. Ours is a human-centered approach informed first by stakeholders (including community members) in the system itself. At every stage there are a set of decisions and actions that system leaders can make. Our work with systems leaders is to support them to see the choices and make decisions in alignment with their values and desired outcomes.

The Equity by Design Cycle encourages us to begin with current state – listen to what the system is telling us and together determine and identify the contributing factors to the problems we seek to address. We then have the choice to both develop human capacities and reimagine or design structures, processes and practices that support us to reach our goals.



### Background and Equity Assessment

Over the last several years River Forest D90 has made significant advances in identifying the need to address educational equity and inclusion in River Forest. The Superintendent, Board of Education, and administrative team have emerged as strong champions for equity and have thoughtfully engaged all staff members in the district as well as key constituencies of parents and community members in building awareness, shared language, and a common set of experiences reflecting on and learning about equity issues in education.

District 90 has created several structures and processes that support on-going equity work and learning including:

- The D90 Inclusiveness Advisory Board which consists of community members, parents, teachers, staff, site and district level administrators. This group has engaged in on-going equity focused learning and initiated the creation and implementation of a district wide Inclusiveness Survey. This survey was administered and results analyzed in 2015 and 2017 and served to clarify and codify the district’s shared vision for creating a welcoming and inclusive community for all families and students. Most recently, the IAB has decided to engage student leadership and voice as a way to deepen its understanding of the issues and needs of D90 students.

- The Board of Education Equity Committee which serves as an oversight body and identifies key equity metrics against which to measure progress. The Board Equity Committee identified key priorities in the areas of student achievement and recruiting and retaining a racially diverse faculty and staff.
- In addition, the D90 Board of Education and Superintendent have taken leadership across the Oak Park and River Forest communities, initiating and hosting a joint meeting of the D90, D97, and D200 school boards to engage in cross-district learning about the educational issues impacting our shared students and families.

In addition, for the last several years, D90 faculty and staff have participated in equity focused professional learning in the areas of leadership for equity, implicit bias, understanding systems of oppression, stereotype threat, and creating culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments. Some of the equity-focused professional learning has included:

- All members of the administrative team attended the National Equity Project's Leading for Equity Institute; a 3.5-day residential institute focused on developing the capacity of leaders to identify, diagnose, and respond to inequities at the interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels.
- The National Equity Project has facilitated several full staff professional learning sessions to build staff awareness of educational equity issues, engage staff in reflection on equity challenges within their classrooms and schools and begin to "test" practices to create more equitable learning environments.
- The National Equity Project provided quarterly consultations to the full administrative team to strategize about equity priorities in the district and design and plan site-level professional learning and collaboration.
- More recently, the administrative team has begun to discuss policies and practices that may be contributing factors to persistent inequities in the district and begun to explore how to initiate change in some key areas.

District 90 has also endeavored to study and implement pedagogical approaches that have been shown to increase access and equity including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Co-teaching, and Project-based Learning. In this way, district and site-level leaders are evolving the work away from "equity" as a stand-alone strand of work and instead seeking to embed their equity and inclusion efforts in all facets of the district's policies, practices and ways of working. District 90 has made impressive strides in setting the foundation and conditions for engaging stakeholders in a deeper analysis and change process aimed at creating equitable learning environments and student outcomes. Through the thoughtful and systematic efforts of the last several years, D90 has created the conditions most strongly associated with making progress on equity: strong, committed leadership, a high level of relational trust, collaborative teaming structures, community engagement, and shared learning experiences to build foundational knowledge and shared language in educational equity.

These efforts are impressive in and of themselves, however, are particularly notable given the absence of a public demand or large-scale crisis regarding equity in the River Forest community. The equity commitment demonstrated by the Board and Superintendent reflects a cross-jurisdictional, proactive leadership effort that has already catalyzed dialogue and action in districts across the region. Through formal presentations at conferences and convenings as well as sharing within professional networks, the Superintendent and Board members have inspired and pushed school districts to examine their own contexts and begin to take formal action to address educational inequities.

## **Recommendations**

River Forest D90 is now well poised to deepen and expand its equity efforts and accelerate the pace of change in service of measurable progress toward equity for students and families. The

National Equity Project recommends several interrelated strategies to accomplish this acceleration:

- Engage in deeper analysis of qualitative and quantitative data disaggregated by race, socioeconomic status, special education and other social factors to identify the most pressing equity challenges.
- Engage a wider group of stakeholders in understanding, discussing, and taking shared responsibility for priority equity challenges.
- Set measurable goals and identify meaningful metrics for tracking progress.
- Strengthen the use of collaborative teaming structures to engage in structured inquiry and learning about the factors contributing to inequities and design processes to generate district wide and site specific solutions and innovations.
- Continue to engage parents and community members in discussion and learning about the interconnection of excellence and equity for all students and inspire community members toward a vision of an inclusive, equitable, and thriving community.

### **Proposed Services**

The National Equity Project proposes to continue our partnership with River Forest D90 to leverage the foundational work that has been done in service of creating greater equity. The primary goals of these proposed services are to:

1. Build the capacity of site-level administrators to identify, diagnose, prioritize and design collaborative solutions to site-level equity challenges.
  - a. Conduct equity assessments using quantitative, observational, and qualitative data to identify and prioritize equity challenges at the site and district level.
  - b. Review policies and practices that may be contributing to inequities or exclusion of groups of students.
  - c. Design interventions and “tests of change” to dismantle inequitable policies and practices and create greater inclusion and equity.
  - d. Set measurable goals to track progress over time.
  - e. Study policy and practices that have been implemented with positive equity outcomes in other districts regionally and nationally.
2. Build the capacity of site and district level administrators to communicate the interdependence of excellence and equity in a way that inspires change and shared commitment to the D90 Vision for Equity.
3. Ensure the integration of an equity lens and focus in the design and implementation of curricular and pedagogical frameworks and initiatives including UDL, SEL, and Advisory.
4. Make recommendations regarding the use of collaborative time and the structure and cadence of professional learning for faculty and staff to ensure high impact use of time. Provide technical assistance and consultation of the design, content, and facilitation of equity-focused professional learning and aligned follow-up coaching.
5. Deepen the level of parent engagement in understanding the mutual benefit of pursuing the creation of a more equitable, inclusive, thriving community.

## Summary & Costs of Proposed Services

Program Component	Client Group	Timeline & Deliverables	Cost
<b>Leadership for Equity Capacity Development</b>	Director of Curriculum and Instruction & Site-Administrators	<p>August 2018-June 2019</p> <p>(3) half-day site visits to gather observational data</p> <p>(10) monthly collaborative inquiry sessions to include review of quantitative and qualitative data disaggregated by social factors</p> <p>(5) executive leadership coaching &amp; strategy sessions to reflect on implementation and evidence of impact and identify needed adjustments</p> <p>8 days</p> <p>1 NEP Staff</p>	\$18,400
<b>Parent and Community Engagement</b>	IAB Board Equity Committee	<p>(2) Half-day IAB/Equity Committee Sessions</p> <p>Fall 2018: Session #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formalize “team charter” roles and responsibilities</li> <li>Prioritize equity challenges</li> <li>Set measurable equity and inclusion goals</li> <li>Agree on ways of working and communicating in alignment with the values of inclusion and belonging</li> </ul> <p>Spring 2019: Session #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data review session</li> <li>Reflect on progress and stuck points</li> <li>Adjust and refine approaches</li> <li>Develop engagement and communication plans</li> </ul> <p>2 days</p> <p>1-2 NEP Staff</p>	\$9,200
<b>Staff Professional Learning</b>	<p>Director of Curriculum &amp; Instruction</p> <p>New Hires</p> <p>Full-staff at 3 Schools</p>	<p>(1) Half-day Foundations of Educational Equity Session for New Teacher Induction</p> <p>Develop a prototype that can be replicated and implemented in subsequent years</p> <p>(1) Half-day Consultation and Planning Session – Admin Team</p> <p>Design and provide facilitation support for</p>	\$6,600.00

		<p>full-staff professional learning session</p> <p>2 day</p> <p>1-2 NEP Staff</p>	
<p><b>Equity Integration: Instructional Design and Practices</b></p>	<p>Director of Curriculum &amp; Instruction</p> <p>UDL Committee</p> <p>Advisory Team</p>	<p>(3) 4-hour consultations on strategic integration of equity and inclusion principles, practices and messaging in key district instructional initiatives</p> <p>3 days</p> <p>1 NEP Staff</p>	<p>\$6,900.00</p>
<p><b>Project Fees Subtotal</b></p>			<p>\$41,100</p>
<p><b>Estimated Travel Costs</b> <i>Billed as actuals not to exceed 10% Project Fees Total</i></p>			<p>\$2,055.00</p>
<p><b>Total Expected Fees</b></p>			<p><b>43,155.00</b></p>