

# CHAPTER 4 EQUITY AND MATERIALS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the materials management and sustainable consumption chapters we learned that humans both carry the burdens and enjoy the benefits from the production and consumption of materials.

We learned that all the stuff we consume has negative impacts for humans all along the materials life cycle. These negative impacts include: poisoned drinking water near extraction sites, risks to workers in manufacturing facilities, toxins in consumer products, and conflict and displacement caused by climate change.

We also learned that life expectancy and sense of life satisfaction are dependent on having a certain level of material necessities such as food, shelter, medicine and art and literature.

What has not been discussed to this point is that the benefits and burdens of consumption are distributed inequitably between differing populations and that this inequity is a great threat to sustainability.

This chapter will define equity and explore how institutional racism and poverty result in the inequitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of materials production and consumption. Materials production and consumption have the largest negative impacts on low-income communities and people of color. Meanwhile, those same people have less access to products that provide health and wellbeing.

This chapter will demonstrate the importance of addressing these inequities as we work to build new systems. Oregon's materials management vision takes a holistic view of environmental and social well-being and health across the full life cycle of materials. As we change how we produce and consume, we have the opportunity to ensure that this is done collaboratively so that communities of color and low-income communities are co-creators. We can also ensure that we create equitable avenues for wealth building. As we reduce the pollution caused by extraction, we can create safe, living wage jobs in recycling and reuse. As we reduce deforestation, we can increase access for recreation in our natural areas. As we redefine what it means to live a good and rich life, we can ensure that people who have traditionally had the least access to the American Dream will get to enjoy health and happiness. This inclusive process will result in more complex systems that better meet the needs of a diverse population.

*"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."*

Audre Lorde

## WHAT IS EQUITY?

**T**he Portland Plan uses the following definition for equity:

*“Equity is the right of every person to have access to opportunities necessary for satisfying essential needs and advancing their well-being.”*

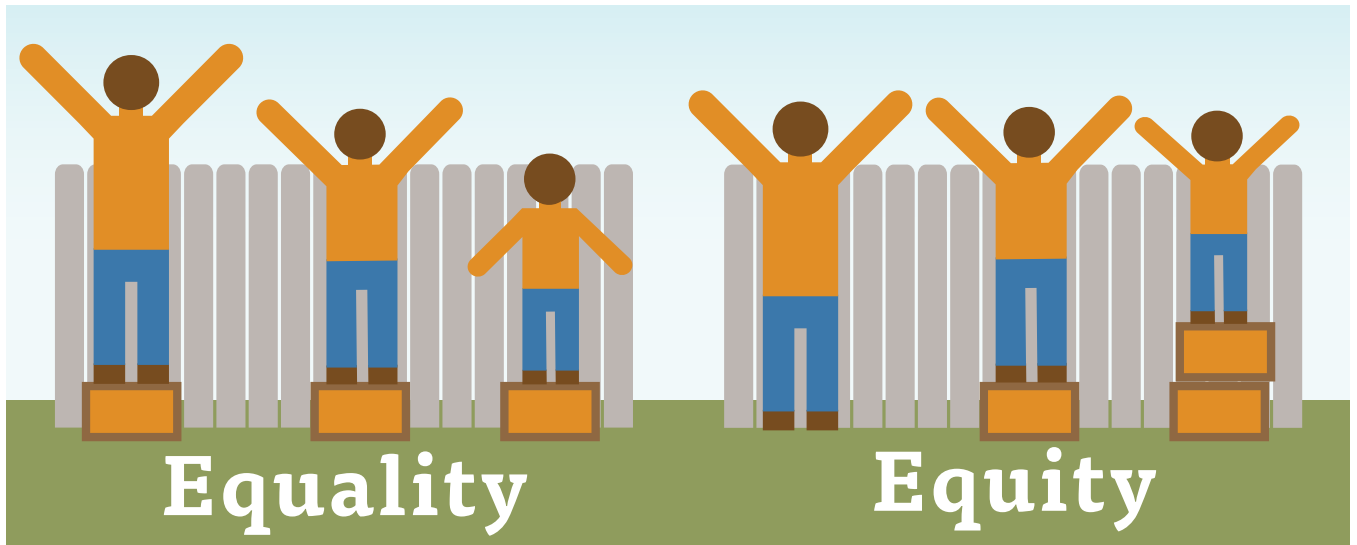
### What does equity look like?

- All residents have access to opportunities, such as good jobs, education, healthy food, housing and self-expression.
- The benefits and burdens of growth and change are equitably distributed across our communities.
- All residents and communities are involved as full and equal partners in public decision-making, problem-solving and implementation; and these processes consider the history of impacted communities.

### Equity is not the same as equality

There are important distinctions between equality and equity. Equality aims to distribute exactly the same resources to everyone equally. The idea is that if we all get the same things, we will all enjoy life and health equally. Equality aims to promote fairness and justice, but equality can only work if everyone starts from the same place and has the same needs and wants. Equity, in contrast, involves ensuring that people have access to opportunities to enjoy full, healthy lives. Aspects of our identities, such as race, class, and gender, can determine the difference in what is made available to us as individuals to enjoy full, healthy lives. Equity requires looking at the historic, social, and institutional barriers that impact people’s access to opportunity and correcting for any negative outcomes.

A focus on equity recognizes that people do not start at the same place and consequently people have different needs. A focus on equality strives for a perfectly even distribution of resources. Whereas an equity approach takes into account the actual desires and needs of each population and their ability to satisfy those desires and needs.



*This image illustrates some of the differences between equity and equality. All three people want to see over the fence so they can watch a game. On the **equality** side of the graphic, each person is given an equal number of boxes. If the three people were the same height, this might be fair, but they are not, so the boxes only help the person in the middle. The tall person already had access to see the game and the shorter person still can't see it. On the **equity** side of the graphic, the boxes are distributed to ensure that all three can enjoy the game.*

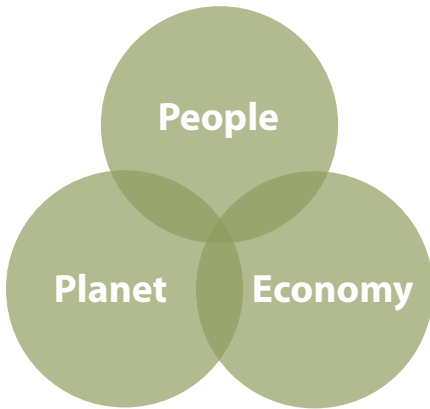
## EQUITY AND OREGON'S MATERIALS MANAGEMENT VISION

The equality vs equity graphic (shown above) can guide our thinking about how we meet Oregon's materials management vision. For "all Oregonians to enjoy life and attain well-being," it is important to understand the variety of people who live here and their communities.

Each community experiences different levels of access to consumer choices, healthy food and toxic-free households. This ease of access (or lack of) has everything to do with where people were born, economic background, and race.

Inequity is built into our institutions. So, addressing the material environment and economy without defining, addressing, and monitoring existing disparities will perpetuate those inequities. If we don't, those inequities will be perpetuated in our new environmental and economic policies.

## TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE OF SUSTAINABILITY



Many models of sustainability are based on the concept of a “triple bottom line,” that says we must plan for and measure economic, environmental and social outcomes. Unfortunately, economic and environmental factors typically receive most of the attention and precise accounting in the sustainability field. All too often, measures of social impact are simply tagged on at the end and rarely measure how differing populations may or may not be experiencing those impacts.

Julian Agyeman, an expert on environmental justice and sustainability and a professor at Tufts University, notes that “you cannot retrofit for equity.” To come up with solutions to sustainability problems, he argues, it is paramount that existing disparities are named at the outset and that the people who might carry the biggest burdens help shape and build the new system.

To be successful in creating a triple-bottom-lined sustainable Oregon, we must recognize our differences, particularly where there have been historical disparities. If we use the equity vs equality diagram, we can redirect our focus from moving around the boxes to ensuring that everyone gets to see the game. In other words, solutions must shift from measuring the movement of materials we produce and consume to satisfying the core needs of all people. This shift may allow us to meet the triple bottom line. Doughnut Economics and Just Transition are two models that directly put equity in the center of sustainable systems. Both global models are being applied to identify new solutions to our local consumption in the Portland metropolitan area.

## A SAFE AND JUST LEVEL OF CONSUMPTION

Kate Raworth, Senior Researcher at Oxfam Great Britain, believes that we can make this shift to an equity focus through a concept she calls Doughnut Economics. She says, “The Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries is a playfully serious approach” to framing the challenge.

Raworth argues that humanity’s 21st-century challenge is to meet the needs of all people within the means of the planet – that no one falls short on life’s essentials (from food and housing to healthcare and self-expression). And while doing this we don’t overshoot our pressure on Earth’s life-supporting systems, such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer.

Traditional sustainable consumption messages and programs focus on encouraging people to “consume less,” “live simply” and “make do.” These messages fall flat for communities who are experiencing a lack of basic needs. They also only focus on consumer choice, without addressing the systemic problems that cause over consumption and inequities.

The Doughnut Economics acknowledges the billions of people on the planet who fall short of meeting their basic needs. But it also describes a world where humanity is collectively overshooting our consumption at a level that is heading for collapse.

Doughnut Economics changes the goal from reducing all consumers’ consumption to identifying an economic system with a “safe and just zone” of consumption. In that system, ecological ceilings of consumption levels that are unsustainable are measured, with the goal to avoid an overshoot. But also measured is a foundation of basic well-being for all people.

The goal is to stay in equilibrium within that safe and just zone. Instead of a model of an ever-growing economy, a safe and just economy is regenerative and distributive. An economy that is regenerative is one where we take nature as our model, measure and mentor. With nature as model, we can study and mimic life’s cyclical processes of take and give, death and renewal, in which one creature’s waste becomes another’s food. Economies that are distributive by design are ones where all people who contribute to its value receive its benefit.



*Visit Kate Raworth’s website to see her Ted Talk, explore resources and more.*

*Join the debate at [www.oxfamblogs.org/doughnut](http://www.oxfamblogs.org/doughnut)*

*C40 operates a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change and supports cities to collaborate effectively, share knowledge and drive meaningful, measurable and sustainable action on climate change.*

## Portland and Doughnut Economics

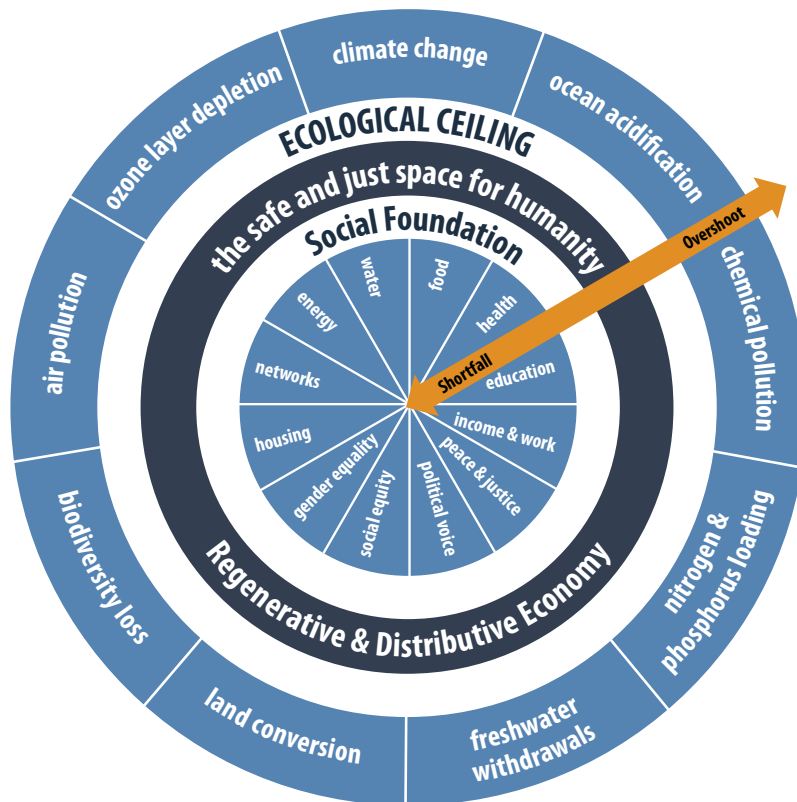
While the City of Portland is not tackling its fundamental economic structure, staff in the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) are actively using concepts from Doughnut Economics to create strategies to address consumption.

Portland's Climate Action Plan calls for BPS to develop a sustainable consumption and production strategy to prioritize local government activities that will support a shift to lower carbon consumption patterns. A Sustainable Consumption work project started in 2019. It uses the safe and just concept to ensure that whatever strategies are considered, each has a ceiling and foundation approach.

The City's first phase took place in the spring and summer of 2019. Workgroups of stakeholders examined where carbon emissions were specifically associated with consumption and production in Portland. They used this data to brainstorm interventions in the areas of construction, electronics, food, goods, and services. Then they charted ways these interventions could reduce consumption for consumers who are overshooting in our community and lift up shortfall consumers.

The current phase is a partnership with C40, a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change. The City of Portland was selected to participate in their Thriving Cities Initiative, a C40 pilot

### DONUT ECONOMICS MODEL



project focused on helping cities reduce carbon emissions and enhance quality of life for all residents through shifting to more sustainable patterns of consumption.

The initiative kicked off with a workshop for City staff with Kate Raworth, who shared her Doughnut Economics research and led City staff through activities using a city scale snapshot of Portland's doughnut.

In the Spring of 2020, City leaders will partner with community-based organizations and business actors to determine how they can address unsustainable patterns of consumption and production and create a thriving city.

With the Sustainable Production and Consumption Strategy and the Thriving Cities Initiative, Portland is embarking on a journey to understand what it means to be a 21st-century thriving city.

## JUST TRANSITION: LETTING COMMUNITY LEAD

Like Doughnut Economics, Just Transition is an international concept with local activities. But where the origins of Donut Economics were academic, Just Transitions is born out of decades of grassroots environmental justice organizing to find common ground and shared benefit in the transition away from polluting industries. Just Transition highlights that economies based on growth are extracting resources from both the environment and workers – without benefit to them. Just Transition addresses pollution and toxics that are critical issues in the environmental justice movement, but it also addresses the urgency that climate change presents.

The movement works to advance ecological resilience, reduce resource consumption, restore biodiversity and traditional ways of life, and topple extractive economies. They celebrate a concept called “Buen Vivir,” which means that we can live well without living better at the expense of others or the planet.

A critical aspect of the Just transition concept is that “Frontline Communities” must lead in the co-creation and co-delivery of strategies, programs and systems that come out of the transition from an extractive economy. Frontline Communities are those that experience “first and worst” the consequences of climate change. These are communities of color and low-income populations. Their neighborhoods often lack basic infrastructure to support them, and they are increasingly vulnerable as our climate deteriorates. These are Native communities, whose resources have been exploited, and laborers whose daily work or living environments are polluted and/or toxic.

*The Thriving Cities Initiative (TCI) is a journey for cities to explore and embrace a vision for a thriving city that appreciates what makes cities unique while understanding its global influence and responsibility. Together with diverse city representatives, participating cities embark on a journey to understand how to create thriving people in this thriving place, while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the whole planet. This is a collaboration between C40, Doughnut Economics Action Lab and Circle Economy.*

### TERM

#### **Frontline Communities:**

*those that experience “first and worst” the consequences of climate change. These are communities of color and low-income, whose neighborhoods often lack basic infrastructure to support them and who will be increasingly vulnerable as our climate deteriorates. These are Native communities, whose resources have been exploited, and laborers whose daily work or living environments are polluted or toxic.*

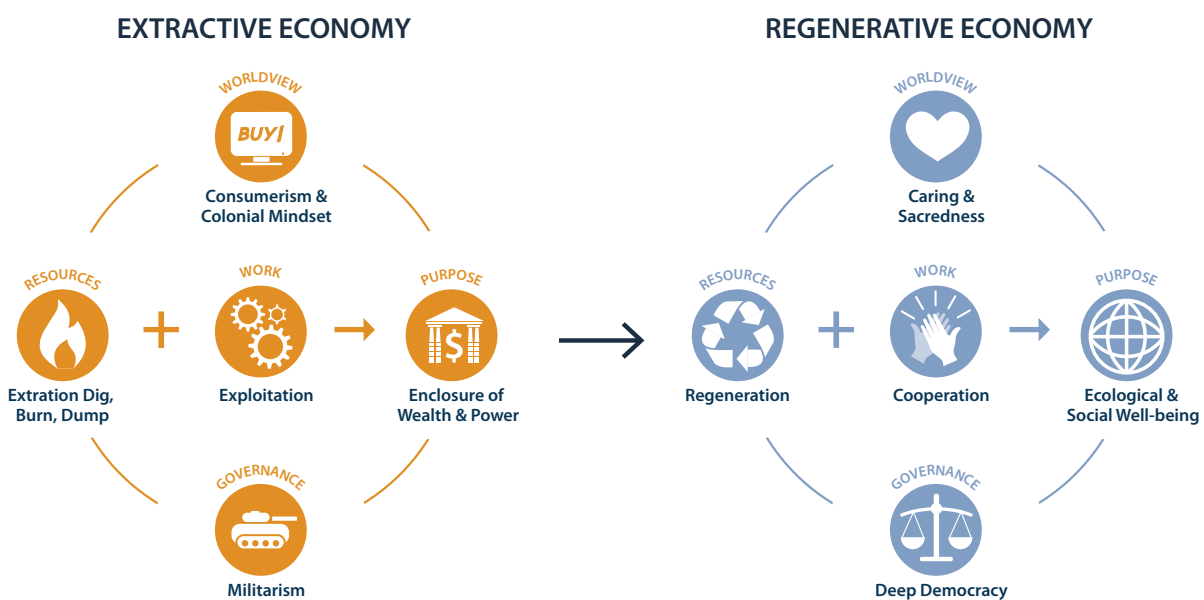
## Local Just Transition

Communities in the Portland metropolitan area and Oregon are embracing the just transition concept and making substantive change using its tenants. The Oregon Just Transition Alliance (OJTA) is a project of OPAL, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, Beyond Toxics, Pinosos y Campesinos el Noroeste (PCUN), Rural Organizing Project, and Unite Oregon. They see just transition as the framework where frontline communities in Oregon can build existing and new relationships and nurture leadership to ensure the new economy works for them.

In Spring 2017, more than 50 community organizations organized the People’s Climate March. It was an opportunity for frontline communities to connect and find common ground. From that gathering, energy spread into projects large and small. Day laborers began to identify ways that they can play a role in the City of Portland’s emergency plans and that any job can be a green job through a project with Voz Workers’ Rights Oregon and the City of Portland. The Coalition of Communities of Color developed a program called Redefine to advocate for climate solutions that are led with racial and economic equity. Their principals demand policies that prevent further harm to communities of color, reinvest revenues to reduce disparities, create opportunities directly in underserved communities, and ensure inclusive design and implementation.

Allies successfully developed, advocated and won a ballot measure call the Portland Clean Energy Fund. The Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (Fund) was created by a local ballot measure (Measure 26-201) that is anticipated to bring \$54 – 71 million in new revenue for green jobs and healthy homes for all Portlanders. The initiative ensures that the City of Portland’s Climate Action Plan is implemented in a manner that supports social, economic and environmental benefits for all Portlanders, including the development of a diverse and well-trained workforce and contractor pool in the field of clean energy. The measure passed with 65 percent of voters in support, making it Oregon’s first-ever environmental initiative created and led by communities of color. The community coalition that created and led the ballot measure is working together with the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to design and implement the program.

### JUST TRANSITION MODEL





## METRO'S 2030 PLAN: LEADING WITH EQUITY

# Leading with equity

*Our region is stronger when everyone has access to financial prosperity, a healthy environment and the range of opportunities that allow us to thrive.*

But unfortunately, a long history of exclusionary and discriminatory policies has harmed communities of color in the Portland metropolitan region. As a result, communities of color currently experience the worst economic and social outcomes of any demographic group.

Within the garbage and recycling system, inequities appear in a variety of ways, including:

- The garbage and recycling industry tends to lack diversity in the workforce—except in the job categories that pay the lowest wages.
- Procurement processes for solid waste operations contracts often include barriers to participation for minority-owned and woman-owned small businesses.
- Communities of color experience barriers to accessing Metro's recycling information, education services and household hazardous waste services.
- People of color own few of the businesses that run our region's system.

Metro, cities and counties are committed to creating the conditions that allow everyone to enjoy the benefits of our growing region. With our programs, policies and services, we are working to make this a great place for everyone—today and for generations to come.

To ensure an inclusive process from the start, Metro convened an Equity Work Group to ensure that racial equity was incorporated into the plan. The work group participated in each phase of the process, working alongside staff in drafting elements of the plan. Metro and eight community-based organizations also organized discussions to learn how residents envision the future of the garbage and recycling system. These discussions informed many of the actions in this plan.

## CONCLUSION

As we have recognized the ecological importance of biodiversity, we are increasingly also recognizing the importance of human diversity. Researchers have estimated that there are between three to 30 million species on Earth, with a few studies predicting that there may be over 100 million species on Earth! This great variety of life and its processes is called biodiversity. Ecosystems have evolved over thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of years, and are therefore in delicate balance, with each species playing a vital role. This interrelatedness of species means that safeguarding biodiversity is essential to safeguarding our natural systems. Coming to understand this has been an important paradigm shift for conservationists, and it has led to the understanding that each species, no matter how small, plays an important role in the ecosystem.

Much as biodiversity is important to environmental sustainability, human diversity is essential to economic and social equity. In this chapter we learned that equitable solutions arise only out of a careful consideration of our diversity and our differences. Because people do not start out from the same place and because they have different wants and needs, equity cannot be achieved by distributing resources to everyone exactly equally. Rather, an equitable distribution of resources must take into account current inequities and barriers to access. And equitable solutions to materials management must consider all people, including the workers who sort recycling, people who live near manufacturing, or households that do not have the materials to meet basic needs. Utilizing an equity lens while working on making shifts in our consumption and production of materials will improve our chances of creating rich complex systems that build benefits and serve a variety of cultures and communities.



*Workers at a local Material Recovery Facility (MRF)*