

Justice for All:

Promoting Social Equity in Public Administration

Norman J. Johnson and James H. Svara, Editors

(Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe Publisher, 2011)

Chapter 14.

Toward a More Perfect Union: Moving Forward with Social Equity [excerpts]

Norman J. Johnson and James H. Svara

In any society, the equitable treatment of all regardless of membership in particular social groups is essential to support the democratic process. This is particularly important in the United States with its history of exclusion, and its explosion now in social diversity. Although we declared our right to independence because all men are created equal, we have not treated all men or all groups equally. Our aspirational ideals draw us forward as we seek to make the union more perfect, but old issues and old infrastructure linger and new challenges arise. From its initiation in 2000, the Standing Panel on Social Equity of the National Academy of Public Administration has sought to raise the salience of social equity and provide guidance about how to achieve it.

The Panel issued a Call to Action in 2005 that stated the rationale for increased commitment to advancing social equity.

The United States faces critical issues in the fair, just and equitable formation and implementation of public policy, distribution of public services, and management of the organizations that do the work of the public. While many public programs are delivered equitably there are also:

- Fundamental class, racial, and ethnic differences in access to basic services
- Differences in the quality of programs provided and services received
- Systematic differences across racial and ethnic lines in the way people are treated by public officials.
- Disparities in outcomes for population groups (e.g., by race or income) as a result of differences in social conditions and individual behavior as well as differential distribution, access, and treatment.

Not all Americans have an equal base level of opportunity and protection. Risk is not randomly distributed.

The ideas presented in this book help us to understand our shortcomings and identify the possibilities for positive action by those who seek to advance the public interest and serve the people in our society.

There are four broad approaches that can be used to measure social equity: access, quality, procedural fairness, and outcomes. They are useful as indicators of inequity because each suggests different kinds of governmental response to improving equity. The measures should be understood in human as well as analytical terms.

- Access in social equity is a commitment to reduce omission and neglect that contribute to systematic inequality in access to services. In distribution of existing services and recommendations for policy change, access social equity seeks to promote equality in the provision of services and benefits or to direct resources to address specific needs.
- Procedural fairness in social equity is a determination to eliminate acts of commission that deprive individuals of fair and consistent treatment and to act with urgency when members of groups are systematically treated unfairly.
- Quality in social equity ensures that those who receive services and benefits are not slighted and consigned to a level of quality that does not measure up to acceptable standards.
- The outcomes emphasis in social equity rejects systematic differences in life chances across groups in society. Social equity does not accept the idea that certain groups must be limited to poorer outcomes and promotes the idea of narrowing and eliminating disparities.

These four measures of social equity can be illustrated in the case of public education. Although the battle for equal access to schools has been won, there are continuing differences in the quality of educational services and the preparation of teachers in predominantly minority schools, and greater likelihood that minority children will be suspended or expelled in the enforcement of disciplinary policies. Minority children will achieve at lower levels and fewer will graduate. Their likelihood of attending college lower is less while being overrepresented in the pipeline to prison.

Now in 2010, the time has come for moving forward. In our introductory discussion, we stressed that the advancement of equality as a value in American society must move in tandem with our commitment to freedom, and our concern for justice for all social groups must rest on justice for all individuals. The values reinforce each other in some respects. All persons and all groups should be equally free to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and fairness should be equally available to all. Freedom cannot, however, extend to oppressing others. We live in a society with uneven distribution of resources in which some groups are advantaged over others. The standards of a humane society assure that the disadvantaged have access to the minimum resources that make it possible to compete freely and experience a decent life if they have met their personal responsibility to advance

themselves and contribute to society. Social equity also requires that efforts be made to remedy the effects of group discrimination and exclusion that limit the options of individuals.

Frank Fairbanks, city manager of Phoenix, Arizona, from 1990 to 2009 and recipient of a 2005 National Public Service Award,¹ summarized the social equity responsibility of a society in this way: “Government needs to help those who need the most help to succeed in building a great city”—or state, or nation.

Steps to Take

There are a wide range of steps that those in the public administration community must take to help the executive and legislative branches of government reduce or eliminate the disparities in American society. While public administrators cannot erase all poverty or make every citizen color-blind, they can seek to understand why the disparities exist and how public programs can be improved and managed better to overcome them. Some see the involvement of public administrators as agents of social change as a departure from the established logic of administrative practice and call for public administrators to be “transformative” (King and Zanetti 2005) and engage in small acts of “radicalness” (Box 2008) in their dealings with elected officials, staff, and the public. Others see the involvement of administrators in shaping policy and sound practice as long-established elements of the practice of public administration (Svara 2001). In either case, the scope and the consistency of the commitment to advance social equity can be expanded in a variety of ways. The seven steps proposed here can be taken by “public administrators” defined in a broadly inclusive way to refer to all those who contribute to governing society.

First, as leaders and advisors on policy, public administrators can speak out, particularly in the areas of their expertise.² This does not necessarily mean shouting publicly about unfair policy, although there may be times when that is called for. But it does mean “speaking truth to power” in the corridors of policy making and clearly identifying the aspects of social equity problems that are attributable to policy commissions or omissions. The responsibility goes beyond the formal policy process. Shafritz and Hyde (quoted in Standing Panel on Social Equity 2000, 11) assert that public administrators need to provide “moral leadership” to encourage people generally “to do the right, decent, and honorable thing.” Crosby and Bryson (2005, 158) identify the importance of entrepreneurs who are able to “catalyze systemic change.” Viewed in this way, the entrepreneurs can come from many places and may be visible or work behind the scenes. Policy entrepreneurs from the business sector can help to reframe social equity choices as investments, as noted previously, and social entrepreneurs can harness the resources of companies or nonprofits to directly intervene in solving a social problem. Governmental administrators can be the advocates and entrepreneurs, but they will often be leading from behind, supporting the out-front leaders. A convener brings together individuals and organizations that can potentially be enlisted in a change effort, but the official who identifies and then enlists the convener makes a critical contribution that may not be widely perceived. The British Society on Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE

2005) identifies the local government top administrator as the “chief strategic officer” who organizes people and other resources to achieve key goals. Public administrators need to play the same role in promoting social equity strategies weaving together the contributions of a wide range of other leaders.

In formulating new policy, public administrators should promote equal distribution, compensatory redistribution, and efforts to correct past discrimination, depending on the nature of the problem being addressed. For some services, simple equality is the relevant standard to produce fairness; for example, there needs to be the same level of solid waste collection in all parts of a city and the same water pressure and water quality. For other services, however, equality of services does not lead to the same outcomes because of the differences in starting points. In these cases, equity requires higher service levels for low income groups and disadvantaged minorities in order to redress disparities. For example, in the seemingly straightforward case of solid waste collection, there are income differences in the ability of a household to compact and securely store debris. Once a week garbage pickup may work adequately in higher income areas but lead to unacceptable outcomes in poor communities in densely populated areas.³

Public officials should avoid creating barriers to access, such as service fees for essential services, which impose a disproportionate cost for those with fewer resources. For example, when towns charge for access to recreational programs without providing relief such as a sliding scale based on income, children and families that need the services most may be excluded.

In developing policy proposals that entail redistribution, public administrators should take into account the obligation to be accountable to the rule of law, respect individual rights, and make the best use of scarce resources (Rosenbloom 2005).

Second, within the range of their discretion, public administrators should work diligently to mitigate the unfair consequences of policy. For existing policies and programs, distribution and access should match the intended purpose. Imaginative and targeted outreach that makes affirmative efforts to reach underserved or high need groups is imperative. Whether all are to receive a service or benefit or distribution is limited to those who meet eligibility criteria, then it should be made available to all who qualify with appropriate outreach efforts that will reach diverse audiences. Since the late nineties, the federal Food State Program has been transformed from a public assistance program whose recipients were stigmatized and forced to overcome administrative restrictions to qualify into a safety net program for all persons who have difficulty obtaining adequate food. After initial efforts during the Clinton administration to reframe the program as one that helps the working poor, the Bush administration with bipartisan support “led a campaign to erase the program’s stigma, calling food stamps ‘nutritional aid’ instead of welfare and made it easier to apply” (DeParle and Gebeloff 2009, 1). This emphasis has been continued by the Obama administration that sees the program as an important source of assistance during the economic crisis. There is a commitment to enroll more of the one third of the eligible persons who not currently covered, and many states have undertaken aggressive outreach campaigns to expand coverage (DeParle and Gebeloff 2009, 25).

Public administrators should be committed to consistency in the quality of services and benefits delivered to all groups of people and strive to ensure that prevailing standards of acceptable practice are met for all groups. They cannot be satisfied to have dilapidated classrooms and a poor library in schools in one part of town while other schools in the same jurisdiction are in pristine condition. Effective administrators allocate maintenance resources based on need and pursue creative approaches to securing more books for schools with less community support.

Third, public administrators have the authority and obligation to promote process equity—equal access and opportunity, equal treatment and protection, and due process. They need to work constantly and consistently to achieve it in every agency at all levels of government. Any improper deviations in treatment should be corrected and the factors that contribute to this behavior should be eliminated. The deviations may be commissions, as in the disproportionate use of suspensions to remove black males from schools, or omissions, as in the failure to protect women who are victims of domestic violence.

Fourth, public administrators can give to issues of fairness the same creativity and attention they give to measuring performance and improving productivity. Analytical approaches include social equity impact analysis of policy proposals, impact analysis of performance, and an equity inventory for agencies or local governments. An examination of a variety of performance management systems—including those of two federal agencies, two states, two cities, and two community-based quality of life report card initiatives—found that there is generally little attention to social equity in the results-oriented measurement systems of these entities (Jennings, 2004). A broader review of all federal agencies reporting under the Government Performance and Results Act found quite limited attention to social equity (Jennings, 2005).

Equity considerations are relevant to a wide range of administrative and management analysis. It can be added to assessment of programs that may be contracted out and monitoring service delivery. For example, this factor is missing from current federal A 76 standards (OMB 2003, Radin 2005). Given the incentives that contractors have to cut costs, it is likely that clients with the fewest resources are more vulnerable to lapses in service. Policy research and program evaluation should examine specific groups rather than relying on aggregate data. Strategic planning should address differences among population groups. The development of new programs or major changes in existing programs could be accompanied by social equity impact analysis. In this approach comparable to environmental impact statements, a government agency would assess and share with the public an assessment of a program or policy's impact on issues of income and resource inequality (Rosenbaum 2002).

Fifth, public administrators need to measure social equity and track progress in alleviating disparities. The concept that “what gets measured gets done” can be used effectively to assess progress toward goals and objectives. It can also be seen as simply counting data that do not relate to mission or goals, or as an added burden for managers. It is essential for public managers to not only develop tools to track progress but to educate policy makers and the public as to why they are important and how the data collected can make decisions more fair to all. Given the reality that measurement shapes action, the failure of public agencies to measure equity in their processes, outputs, and outcomes means that they are less likely to pursue or produce equity through their actions.

Sixth, public administrators must take proactive and creative action to ensure that all persons, regardless of resources or individual characteristics, have a place at the table when needs are identified, policy options discussed, and programs and services assessed (Box 1998). It is easy to ignore or assign a lower priority to the poor conditions of streets in a lower-income neighborhood when no citizens who live in the area with poor streets are at the hearing on the city's public works budget. It may not be customary to post signs about the meeting in local day care centers or churches, but perhaps that is the best way to reach everyone affected by the public works budget. Proactive steps should be taken to insure that representatives of all persons impacted by programs are involved. The test is not who is informed or invited but who actually comes and the outreach methods should be adapted until they succeed in getting effective participation from all parts of the community.

Finally, public administrators must build partnerships with other organizations and the community to address equity issues. Linkages can be inter-governmental as well as cross-sectoral. In urban regions, it is critical for cities, counties, school systems, and special districts to work together rather than attempting to address equity problems as single jurisdictions. Although regions cannot viably pursue redistribution programs on their own without threatening their competitive position, governments within regions can cooperate in providing low income housing opportunities across the region, improving transportation, better linking jobs and the areas where low-income residents live, and sharing resources for educational improvement across all systems (Rusk 1995; Drierer et al. 2001).

Governmental resources alone are often not sufficient to address the full extent of need (Rusk 1999). Furthermore, private and nonprofit organizations and other governmental units can help achieve access, support citizen empowerment, and provide complementary services and assistance. For example, Our Healthy Community Partnership in Omaha brings together over thirty state and local governmental, university, nonprofit, business, and community organizations to improve the health of Douglas and Sarpy Counties through a community-driven process. The partnership works with neighborhoods to identify community assets, prioritize the issues, and develop solutions that rely on the assets of the community.

A guide to equity analysis at the agency and jurisdictional level is presented in Appendix 1. It provides steps to follow in examining all four measures of social equity. For example, school systems now assess children before they reach school age so that if there are impairments to learning the child receives help early, when, for example, speech therapy can have the most impact. But, do young children in poor or crime-ridden areas receive the same level of assessment—an equity access issue? Do they receive services that are performed as well as in other areas—an equity quality issue? If problems are detected, do they get the same referrals for therapy as children in other parts of the school system—a procedural equity issue? Finally, are their learning impairments alleviated at the same rates—an equity impact issue?

Whenever a “no” is encountered, administrators must take steps to correct the shortcoming through the efforts of their own staff and in partnerships developed with other organizations. Throughout the process, parents should be informed and involved in order to be empowered to effectively monitor actions taken and offer appropriate input. Assessments of this kind should be systematically conducted at the program level, the agency level, and the jurisdictional level to develop a social equity agenda. In her chapter, Gooden illustrates how an agency can identify discrepancies in treatment of clients for job training and then

demonstrate a serious commitment to understanding why they are occurring and how they can be eliminated. The results of that internal study have implications for work in other spheres like sentencing in the courts and racial profiling in police agencies. Such assessments of disparities by race or other characteristics promote social equity and good government both of which are required to continue building a more perfect union in our complex, nuanced, 21st century society. Public administrators must conduct self-analysis on a continuing basis in order to catch problems early.

Going Further—New Forms of Partnership with the Public

Public administrators must act, and they must also involve others and include those who suffer inequities in the fight to advance social equity. George Frederickson offers this reminder.

Like it or not, senior public administrators and those who study public administration are part of the elite, the privileged. In much of our literature and ideology there is a distinct patronizing tone to social equity. A commitment to social equity obliges us to see after the interests of those who are denied opportunities or are disadvantaged regardless of their competence. At the intermediate and upper levels of public administration we tend to avoid the uncomfortable issue of competence, although street-level workers have no illusions about competence. I am partial to the blunt words of Lawrence M. Mead on this subject: “To recover democracy, government must assume greater competence in lower-income Americans than the elite finds comfortable. We would rather lay the burden of change on ourselves than on the less fortunate. We believe in our own abilities; we are less sure about theirs. But, unless some minimal capacities are expected of the less privileged, change becomes unimaginable, and a caste society will emerge.” (Mead, p. 674) In much of social equity there is democratic rhetoric but aristocratic assumptions. We search still for versions of social equity that are truly from the bottom-up. (Frederickson, Social Equity Leadership Conference, Cleveland)

The choice of methods to involve citizens must be matched with the ends to be accomplished (Roberts 2004; Thomas 2008). A bottom-up approach is needed when the success of social equity actions depends on the active engagement and commitment of the persons who seek to improve their lives and overcome the problems they face. For example, to improve the educational accomplishment of low income minority children, several actions by government are needed—particularly early childhood health and educational development programs to promote “better beginnings.” As we noted earlier, Stiefel, Schwartz, and Ellen report that once children get into school the most important predictor of performance is how they performed the previous year. Starting behind creates a deficit that is hard to overcome. There are other school improvements that can be made as well. The critical additional needed component, however, is the engagement of a parent or parents in the intellectual development of their children starting when they are infants. The Harlem Childrens Zone with its baby college speaks to the oft noted parent engagement issue. Talking to them, reading to them, expanding the store of words and images on which they can draw when they go to school is critically important. It is not just the parent, grandparent, uncle, or sibling that provides this enrichment, it is the community—the “village”—that supports the intellectual growth of each child.

The American Dream Academy conducted by the Center for Community Development and Civil Rights at Arizona State University has succeeded in dramatically expanding the involvement of parents in the schooling process and improving educational achievement.⁴ The organizers reach out aggressively to inform parents about the program and to get them to attend orientation sessions. Each parent provides a description of their child and writes his or her name on a board at the front of the room. The session leader talks about the statistical likelihood of failure and dropping out if kids don't have the support of their family and randomly crosses out the names of the children reflecting the proportion likely to fail. Parents immediately get the message and want to know what they can do to keep this from happening. Attitudes toward education and its importance begin early in a child's life. When parents instill the value of education in themselves, they also instill it in their children. The program has "graduated" more than 7,000 parents of students attending 41 different schools, and indirectly impacted more than 24,000 youth of Title I schools throughout the greater Phoenix region since the program began three years ago.

The improvements in the health care delivery system must be supported by improved health practices by each person. Preventive care is an example of the early investment that has a favorable SROI, and it should be expanded. In addition, healthy practices with respect to diet, smoking, exercise, etc., are just as important as the foundation for health. Other examples could be offered in crime prevention and environmental protection.

Taken together, it is important to advance self-determination and make it available to all persons. All should equally have the ability to exercise the freedom to choose based on cognition--the combination of knowing, awareness and judgment-- and access to the essential resources. The agency approach discussed by Buss and Ahmed reflects the same orientation. The distinction is between socially excluded groups viewed as beneficiaries of the development process whose well-being it enhances—the welfare approach—and socially excluded groups viewed as agents of development, as movers and shapers of change that benefits themselves, others and society as a whole as well—the agency approach (Hamadeh-Banerjee 2000, 7). For agency or self-determination to work, the most effective strategy involves facilitating the participation of those who were once treated as subjects or excluded from participation in responsible positions to help make plans and contribute to their own development.

The end result is not just more resources or services but increased human dignity. Dignity includes both having respected social standing and a personal sense of pride, voice, and contribution. Dignity links social equity by government with individual personal responsibility. It includes the attributes of both freedom—ability to make any choice—and equality—being treated the same as others. Public administrators should look for ways to advance dignity in their interaction with all citizens.

The Meaning of Social Equity

We conclude with a revised definition of social equity that builds on the version of the NAPA Social Equity Panel. It refers explicitly to the obligation to act that the term has always implied. Social equity is a commitment to attack disparity and advance equality for persons in groups that have been (or in the future might be) subject to treatment that is inferior,

prejudicial, or hostile. The definition incorporates dimensions of measurement. Beyond the actions that government can take for people to improve their conditions, the definition also refers to the responsibility of persons involved in governance to enable all persons to act for themselves. We offer the definition as a starting point for a new stage of dialogue and debate among those interested in advancing social equity.

Social equity is the active commitment to fairness, justice, and equality in the formulation of public policy, distribution of public services, implementation of public policy, and management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract. Public administrators, including all persons involved in public governance, should seek to prevent and reduce inequality, unfairness, and injustice based on significant social characteristics and to promote greater equality in access to services, procedural fairness, quality of services, and social outcomes. Public administrators should empower the participation of all persons in the political process and support the exercise of constructive personal choice.

The practices that support equity, e.g., managing with fairness, should be reflected in the behavior of public administrators. This commitment is reflected in the original definition of social equity developed by the NAPA Social Equity Panel. Similarly, Shafritz and Russell (2005, 465) in their definition simply refer to “fairness in the delivery of public services” and “the principle that each citizen has a right to be given equal treatment.”

Social equity as a value demands more in three respects. First, treating all *individuals*—pleasant and unpleasant, well informed and confused, encountered early in the day or at the end of a shift—the same is an essential requirement for public administrators, but there must be explicit recognition that *group characteristics* are important to understanding how individuals fare in this society. Second, the tradition of social equity has stressed correcting shortcomings and advancing equality as well. It should also include explicit attention to expanding participation and self-determination. Third, there is emerging recognition, as Buss and Ahmed observe, that all persons deserve the “equality of voice” reflected in the ability “to influence and contribute to the political discourse and the development process” (International Monetary Fund 2007, 106). Public administrators need to support meaningful involvement by all persons in the governance process. This renewed commitment to political engagement is accompanied by emphasis on encouraging individual responsibility in personal life.

The targets of action and methods of practice evolve as progress is made. At one time, disseminating information to all persons or creating programs that address social needs would have been viewed as positive steps. Now there is recognition that the same words do not mean the same thing to all persons, and the impact of the same program differs depending on how well the delivery of the program matches the characteristics of the recipient. The attention to “cultural competence” opens up new meanings of fairness, justice, and equality. Furthermore, the concern for achieving greater equality in the impacts of programs and in the social outcomes that programs are intended to affect indicates a deepening and broadening of the commitment to social equity. The actors potentially involved in promoting social equity are also broadened beyond government to include nonprofits, businesses, and a variety of other organizations that contribute to governance. Thus, the relevant question is no longer simply

“what do I do or what does my agency do?” It becomes “what do I do to engage other organizations in the promotion of social equity?”

The definition ends where personal initiative begins and links public administrators to members of society. Personal initiative has always been important. At all times in all conditions some individuals heroically overcame the forces that oppressed others. America has progressed to the point that engagement and self-renewal are widely required to achieve additional progress. For over two centuries there was active exclusion and for another century systematic discrimination that held most members of marginalized groups in check and severely limited the possibility of individual advancement. Promoting social equity required removing barriers or ending oppression and is still the initial challenge in many countries in the world. Starting a half century ago, the opportunities expanded but serious obstacles remained. Government policy and more slowly the views of the favored majority supported individual advancement, but many could rightfully claim that resistance restricted their options and resources were too limited to overcome accumulated deficits. Social equity required protection of rights, affirmative efforts to expand opportunity, and creation of a wide range of social support programs targeted to those in need. The programs that were developed lacked the integration and comprehensiveness of a “system” observed in European countries, but the U.S. of 2009 has a collection of resources to support the welfare of the poor and minorities unimaginable fifty years ago. The effort to move further in perfecting the union continues, but the challenges of each new stage must be confronted to open the way to the next.

Programs and services need to be improved in design, operation, and support, but at the same time greater action by individuals is needed as well to overcome adversity and strengthen capacity. The current and continuing challenge is to increase the mutual support of organized and individual action. Early childhood education must be reinforced by involvement of parents and relatives in encouraging learning. Educational support for students from low-income families must be matched by the efforts of students and support of the family and community. Health care needs to be enhanced by better diet and healthier habits. Ronald Haskins explains the need for the personal responsibility in this way:

To begin with, society — from parents and teachers to celebrities and political figures — should send a clear and consistent message of personal responsibility to children. They should herald the "success sequence": finish schooling, get a job, get married, have babies. Census data show that if all Americans finished high school, worked full time at whatever job they then qualified for with their education, and married at the same rate as Americans had married in 1970, the poverty rate would be cut by around 70% — without additional government spending. No welfare program, however amply funded, could ever hope for anything approaching such success.

Janita Patrick, a 15-year-old African-American from Cincinnati, put it this way in a letter she wrote to the Black Entertainment Television that circulated widely on the internet.

I’m used to seeing the sagging pants, tattoos, lack of emphasis on reading and respecting women that makes up your videos. People in my class live this out everyday, while teachers tell us that we’re acting just like the people in your shows. ... Guess who watches your network the most? Not those who are intelligent enough to discern

foolishness from substance, but those who are barely teenagers, impressionable and believing. It's awfully cruel to plant seeds of ignorance in fertile minds.

Her letter indicates that an alternate message is getting through, but it needs to be strengthened. The same could be said of the need for boys generally to be encouraged to pursue education and socially constructive activities in order to offset the growing gender gap in academic achievement and commitment.

Public administrators need to be committed to the basic social equity measures of access, fairness, and quality, and seek new ways to achieve them. Stated simply, public administrators need to treat all fairly and equally to prevent acts of commission and consider special needs to reduce instances of omission. They also need to consider the new strategies that will be needed to reduce disparate conditions and promote greater equality in outcomes.

There is a wide range of social equity imperatives for public administrators to consider. Here is an initial list expressed in a way intended to provoke action: Social equity is--

- the relentless systematic instigation of inclusion and denigration of exclusion.
- the intentional and unyielding commitment to identify those eligible to receive targeted services and deliver those services in a culturally appropriate manner.
- the uncompromising adherence to equal treatment and fair process even when ones own agency is inconvenienced.
- the intentional and unbending commitment to quality of services, programs, and facilities for groups that lack the political clout to demand quality.
- the intentional and clear-eyed examination of impacts of programs and disparate outcomes and unflinching statements about what is needed and what is not working.
- fearless formation of new relationships with other organizations and with members of the society to pursue social equity together.

In an era made new by the country's acceptance of a president from a group that was formerly at the bottom of society, there is an opportunity to expand the commitment and rethink the approaches to advancing social equity that combine organized and individual action. Bold efforts should be made to seize the promise of the opening words of the Constitution. It is "we the people" drawing on the talent and imagination of public officials but not dependent on their leadership alone that must take the significant next steps toward perfecting the union. Each generation must make its contribution. Advancing from where we are depends on the full involvement of the American public contributing to sound collective choices and as individuals taking the actions they have the power to choose to make their lives better.

Making progress and even holding ground in social equity is a constant challenge. Natural or economic catastrophes can produce setbacks that fall disproportionately on minorities and those already economically disadvantaged. Lacking comprehensive social, housing, or medical safety nets, those who lose jobs or cannot find jobs in the economic

downturn face personal and family disaster. New technologies can create new divides. The global economy produces economic disruptions that fall more heavily on low-skill workers.

Although “equity” is a challenging goal in itself in a changing society and economy, it is the “social” that never rests. At the same time as progress is being made on some fronts, social equity is being rearranged and reversed on others. Longstanding divisions and disadvantages persist but take new forms with changing social, economic, and political conditions. For example, a larger proportion of young black men are in a pipeline to prison than in a pipeline to college, and changing that pattern will require an alteration of attitudes and practices in a wide range of governmental and social institutions. There is progress in expanding gender equity, but at the same time we become more aware of the mistreatment of women in terms of pay discrimination in employment and physical abuse that was long ignored. New lines of division emerge with the influx of immigrants, and changing policies and attitudes alter the salience of legal status. New sources of injustice enter the public consciousness as different gender orientations have come out of the closet and now are demanding equal recognition in law and policy. These continuous changes in social characteristics and dynamics produce imbalances in the wheel of social equity.

Failure to recognize change and make adjustments is a dangerous flaw that has the potential to undermine the enterprise that has created a great though unfinished constitutional democracy. Disparities of income, wealth, and access to opportunity and due process undermine the ideal of equal citizenship and government by the people. What is clear in this pursuit of the vision of a more perfect union is the requirement to continuously rebalance and recalibrate this wheel called social equity.

Some argue that the American society is post racial. There is an abundance of evidence, however, that suggests that we as a nation are no where near this hoped for aspiration. We are delusional to believe that racial differences no longer exist, that race no longer matters, or that prejudice has been eradicated. It should be noted that the society is neither post gender nor post sexual orientation. American society has always been relatively diverse compared to most countries. The question has been whether the new group or the “other” would be ignored, left out, or even exploited for the benefit of the majority, on the one hand, or given a full role to contribute to expanded vibrancy and innovation in the larger society, on the other. The inclusion of groups in the past and expanded acceptance of other groups today does not offset the pain for persons who are still excluded or denigrated because of their group identity. The group basis for differences in access, treatment, quality, and results is powerful and pervasive in American society and continuously takes on new forms. Public administrators must be attentive to new expressions of social inequity challenge and creating in combating these inequalities.

Deciding whether and how to resolve social and economic disparities is influenced by the conflicting values of freedom and equality and our orientation to the political process. For example, in the current debate over health care, the equality principle argues for affordable coverage for all persons. Even with one party in control of the White House and Congress, however, it has been extremely difficult to cobble together an acceptable approach. Some object to altering a system that has given many the freedom to choose how (and whether) they will acquire their health care. In our individualistic political culture, reducing disparities may provoke the response that individuals are responsible for their own welfare. Furthermore,

many individuals and groups are unlikely to be able to get beyond feeling that something is being taken away from me/us and organize to resist change. The attitude commonly heard in European countries that taxes are the price of a decent society is likely to be countered in the U.S. by many who argue that taxes take away the people's money. The opposing views reflect ideological differences and emphasis on self versus shared interests. The debate, however, has implications for social equity and can disturb the fragile balance in the wheel.

Public administrators are not on one side of the ideological debate in their official actions (despite their personal political preferences), but they operate within the context shaped by this debate and the complex intergroup dynamics that characterize American society. They are obligated by public administration values to advance social equity, and they do so by identifying problems and recommending policies and by using the policies and programs that are available to correct disparities and advance equality. They also promote social equity by their principled and intentional adherence to procedural fairness and by the way they manage the resources of their organizations. This work is not the final word in this continuing effort to assure justice for all, but hopefully it is a primer that clarifies the case for social equity and provides new methods that can be used to achieve it. Most important, it calls for us to be ever mindful of our vision and aspiration to build a more perfect union. In the twenty-first century, it will take new approaches and a renewed commitment to create one nation with liberty, equality, and justice for all.

Notes

¹ The award is presented by the American Society for Public Administration and the National Academy of Public Administration.

² Portions of this section are from Frederickson and Svara (2002) and Svara and Brunet (2005).

³ Example provided by Sylvester Murray in Gooden and Myers (2004).

⁴ Dream Academy website

References

- Box, Richard C. 1998. *Citizen Governance: Leading American Communities into the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Box, Richard C. 2008. *Making a Difference: Progressive Values in Public Administration*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Crosby, Barbara C. and John M. Bryson, 2005. *Leadership for the Common Good: Tackling Public Problems in a Shared-Power World*, 2nd Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- DeParle, Jason and Robert Gebeloff, 2009. "Food Stamp Use Soars Across U.S., and Stigma Fades," *New York Times*, National Edition. (November 29): 1, 25.
- Dreier, Peter, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, 2001. *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Frederickson, H. George and James H. Svara, 2002. "Public Administration and Social Equity," *PA Times*.
- Frederickson, H. George, 2005. "The State of Social Equity in American Public Administration." Social Equity Leadership Conference, Cleveland.
- Gooden, Susan and Samuel L. Myers, Jr. 2004. "Social Equity in Public Affairs Education." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 10:2:92.
- Hamadeh-Banerjee, Lina. 2000. "Women's Agency in Governance." In *Women's Political Participation and Good Governance*, ed. UN Development Program, pp.7-13. New York: UN Development Program.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2007. *Global Monitoring Report: MDG—Confronting the Challenges of Gender Equality and Fragile States*. Washington, DC: IMF.
- Jennings, Edward T. Jr., 2005a. "Results Based Governance and Social Equity," a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration, Como, Italy, July 11-15.
- Jennings, Edward T. Jr., 2005b. "Social Equity and the Government Performance and Results Act," a paper presented at the Public Management Research Conference, University of Southern California, September 29 - October 1.
- King, Cheryl Simrell and Lisa A. Zanetti, 2005. *Transformational Public Service*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- OMB, 2003. "Categorizing Activities Performed by Government Personnel as Inherently Governmental or Commercial," OMB Circular No. A-76, Attachment A, May 29,
- Radin, Beryl A. 2005. "Direct Administration and Questions of Equity." Paper presented at NASPAA Annual Meeting (October 15).
- Rest, James et al. 1999. *Postconventional Moral Thinking: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.

- Rest, James et al. 1999. *Postconventional Moral Thinking: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Roberts, Nancy. 2004. "Public Deliberation in an Era of Direct Citizen Participation." *American Review of Public Administration* 34, 315-353.
- Rosenbaum, Allan, 2002. "Program Evaluation and Inequality: On the Need for Social Equity Impact Analysis," paper presented at the Seventh International Congress of CLAD (October 8 – 11, 2002, Lisbon, Portugal).
- Rosenbloom, David, 2005. "Taking Social Equity Seriously in MPA Education." *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 11:3:247-252.
- Rusk, David, 1995. *Cities Without Suburbs*. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Rusk, David, 1999. *Inside Game/Outside Game: Winning Strategies for Saving Urban America*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999.
- Shafritz, Jay M. and E.W. Russell, 2005. *Introducing Public Administration*, 4th edition. New York: Pearson Longman.
- SOLACE. 2005. *Leadership United: Executive Summary*. London: Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers.
- Standing Panel on Social Equity, 2000. *Issue Paper and Work Plan*. Washington: National Academy of Public Administration.
- Svara, James H. 2001. The Myth of the Dichotomy: Complementarity of Politics and Administration in the Past and Future of Public Administration. *Public Administration Review* 61:176-183.
- Svara, James H. and James R. Brunet, 2005. "Social Equity Is a Pillar of Public Administration," *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 11:3:253-258.
- Thomas, John Clayton, 2008. "Involving the Public and Other Stakeholders in Public Management: A Practical Theory with Case Applications." Paper presented at the Minnowbrook Conference, 2008.

Appendix 1.

CONDUCTING A GOVERNMENT EQUITY INVENTORY

Equity Inventory at the Departmental Level

1. What is the purpose of the department, what services does it provide, and whom does it serve? Identify any equity issues that have arisen recently. Meaningful citizen input should be included in the assessment process. What are the equity areas that are likely to be relevant to the department and its programs?
 - procedural equity (see definitions at end.)
 - access and distributional equity
 - quality and process equity
 - equal outcomes

2. Assess agency procedures to identify any equity issues?
 - How well does the agency meet the procedural fairness standard in its current operations?
 - What changes are needed to improve procedural fairness?

3. Assess the nature and distribution of benefits and services distributed externally, e.g., services, benefits, enforcement activities, etc., or internally, e.g., hiring, promotions, access to training, etc.
 - What criteria for access/distributional equity are currently followed?
 - What criteria should be followed?
 - How well is the agency performing in terms of the preferred criteria?
 - What impact is the agency having on equity outcomes relevant to its purpose?

4. Assess the quality of services provided.
 - Are there differences in quality by area of the city or characteristics of the client?
 - What changes are needed to improve the uniformity in quality?

5. Assess the outcomes impacted by the department's performance, e.g., sense of security, cleanliness of area, job placement, or health.
 - Are there systematic differences in outcome indicators?
 - What changes are needed to reduce disparities in outcomes?

Equity Inventory at the Jurisdictional Level

1. After reviewing departmental reports, what are the areas of strength and weakness in departmental equity results?
2. Are there systemic factors that explain the results across the city or county?
3. What factors produce success and shortcomings?
4. What policy and procedural changes are needed to promote social equity?

Background: Measures of Equity Developed by Social Equity Panel, National Academy of Public Administration

- A. Access and Distributional Equity. Review access to and/or distribution of current policies and services. Measures of distributional equity include
 - (1) simple equality—all receive the same level and amount of service. Examples: solid waste, water,
 - (2) differentiated equality—services provided to persons who meet selection criterion or who have higher need. Examples: low-income housing assistance grants; concentrated patrolling in areas with more calls for service.
 - (3) targeted intervention—services concentrated in a geographic area. Examples: community center or health clinic in low-income area.
 - (4) redistribution—effort to compensate for unequal resources. Examples: Housing vouchers and public assistance.
 - (5) In rare instances, services may be distributed in such a way as to attempt to achieve equal results, e.g., equal cleanliness or equal test scores, or to achieve fixed results, e.g., acceptable level in incidence of communicable disease.
- B. Procedural Fairness: Examination of problems or issues pertaining to groups of people in
 - procedural rights: due process and participation

- treatment in procedural sense: equal protection
 - determination of eligibility within existing policies and programs.
- C. Quality and Process Equity. Review of the level of consistency in the quality of existing services delivered to groups and individuals. Process equity requires consistency in the nature of services delivered to groups and individuals regardless of the distributional criterion that is used. For example, is garbage pickup the same in quality, e.g., extent of spillage or missed cans, in all neighborhoods? Do children in inner city schools have teachers with the same qualifications as those in suburban schools? Does health care under Medicaid match prevailing standards of quality? Presumably, a commitment to equity entails a commitment to equal quality.
- D. Outcomes. Disparities in outcomes for population groups (e.g., by race or income). The analysis should include consideration of how social conditions and individual behavior affect outcomes or limit the impact of government services, i.e., what underlying conditions contribute to differences in outcomes?