A Question of Equity

You have to do more than send a statement.

November 19, 2020 By Matthew Rose

As we head into 2021—a question for our community leaders and key stakeholders keeps coming to mind. It is a question that we need to fundamentally answer if we want to change this epidemic's course. For all that that we've seen, all that we've heard, my question remains: What does it mean to build equity, and how will it be now's being achieved? How can we say black lives matter but provide fundamental structural changes that can be called to save black lives?

It should be a simple enough question set. Many organizations say they care about supporting equity and ending health disparities, but what does that mean on a fundamental level to their organizational structure? Do they have metrics by which to evaluate themselves? Who decided that those metrics were the right indicators to track? Are these markers connected to true stakeholders who would benefit from a change in their resource allocations? Have they found opportunities to support employee growth and positions within the organization, allowing them to build the skills and abilities necessary to lead and give back to communities? Organizations should be working to develop emerging leaders.

We have not forgotten the promises you've broken, the vows left undone, and the realities that not much has changed. 2021 is going to be a challenging year. However, It's also a chance for opportunity. Members of the Black community, Latinx community, the native community, those of Asian descent, the immigrant community, the southeast Asian community, the Middle Eastern community, and many more have been out of the promise of maximal health outcomes. They have not forgotten the promises you have made and the declarations you've offered.

This past June, many of you signed on the statements and made calls of support and solidarity towards the call that Black Lives Matter. The Black Lives Matter movement is making an empirical claim on resources and power. This comes with the fundamental understanding that we have to shift the way we engage with the Black community and the greater community of people of color. The expectation is for more than *performative window dressing* to release a press statement or put up a banner. Legitimate resources must be allocated. A defined scope of work with related actionable activities informed by the community you are trying to serve must be established. This to work requires that we learn to build mutual power. And given our current political situation, we are where building equity and power should be a fundamental guiding principle and pillar of every organization's development plan.

It is no longer enough to say that we care about equity. If we will see an end to the epidemic, it requires organizations to invest in the very people who have been left behind, forgotten, pushed out, and ignored. Tangible steps must be taken, with measured reports and dialogue, and reported to the communities to dialogue with.

As 2020 comes to a close, you should have metrics or evaluation tools demonstrating what you have done to show that Black Lives matter to you.

2021 should be a year when we start to retire the singular focus of understanding health disparity. For the last 5 to 10 years, far too much time has been spent working to understand the disparity. Instead, we should be talking about what equity investments we have made and will make to build equity in historically marginalized communities. Hell, we will support the people who put their bodies on the line for our country, for our democracy, for their very lies—there must be a shift in the balance of power.

Do not let your conversation stop at ending the epidemic. To do so is to think too small. 2021 has helped lay bare the implications of people not participating in not getting the resources and things they need to live a fair and balanced life. Instead, let’s think about how we will build equity and ensure that claims to support black lives are met with tangible and measurable metrics that can be tracked over time.

I ask you to think about the spaces in which you show up in how you show up, and what you’re doing to make sure the spaces include. The allocation of resources must be fundamentally different. As we head into a new year with a new administration, we have a unique chance to think about not just what we’ve lost. And not just the pain we’ve endured but the opportunity that stands before us—the ability to create something that we could never have dreamed of in our current structuring. We have never seen a world where equity drives the conversation. And that alone is a fundamental shift we need to move us forward.

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