State of Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity in Civic Tech Organizations

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Code
for All
GLOBAL NETWORK

Executive Summary

Around the world, Code for All (CfAll) network and members stand and strive for equitable systems, starting foremost internally for their teams. The research presented through this report was conducted to better understand whether there are ways in which they function that hinders equity and inclusion for their members and programs, and what they could do to address them. The main project activities were participatory research with members of the network, interviews with equity and inclusion experts and people with lived experience at multicultural organizations and literature review. This report presents equity and inclusion hindrances, recommendations and playbook for civic tech organizations. It also documents general findings that emerged through the research process that paint a picture of the role that factors such as history, politics, access, resources, workflows and mental models bring to the practices and experiences of equity and inclusion.

The report explores some interesting concepts.

- The relationship between the health of an organization and diversity, inclusion and equity — diversity, inclusion and equity are mechanisms for building healthy organizations;
- The best time to program for diversity, inclusion and equity is before hiring — as such hiring only people we can offer equitable experiences and being upfront about potential inequities.
- The key blindspot to push for power shift lies with lack of nuance regarding power — power is not homogeneous and there's a reason it lies where it does currently.

Based on these findings, the report proposes the following recommendations as opportunity areas for addressing the identified gaps. An attempt has been made to cluster them by how related they are, but each recommendation can be taken on its own merits.

- Articulate the meaning and application of diversity, inclusion and equity for your organization.
- Ensure that the team and partners are clear enough about where the organization stands regarding diversity, inclusion and equity.
- Revisit frequently and with an open mind, the discourse and practice of diversity, inclusion and equity in your organization.
- Estimate in advance and alongside the resources required for the diversity, inclusion, and equity goals when they are being put in place.

This report also includes a playbook consisting of 3 tools useful for examining diversity, equity and inclusion in civic tech organizations. The tools are: 1.) Equity DNA; 2.) Equity Triangle, and; 3.) Equity Programming. The tools are open to further iteration and improvement based on the experience and lessons learned by users as they engage with them and share their feedback.

Acknowledgment

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Introduction

Code for All (CfAll) commissioned a research project to promote diversity and inclusion in the policy and programming of the network and its member organizations. The purpose of the research is to understand the ways CfAll and members currently function that hinder equity and inclusion and how they might address these gaps.

As a global civic tech network, CfAll aims to promote diversity and inclusion in their communities and values democratic institutions that provide equal platforms in the digital and non-digital space for all, citizens and non-citizens alike. CfAll seeks to advance democratic ideals and human rights through civic technology and collaboration with civil society organizations.

Recently the network was reminded through movements such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and Ni Una Menos that in the struggle for just societies, without targeted action, even the best of intentions often does not translate to meaningful and necessary change. In addition, the rise of COVID-19 intensified and highlighted inequalities for marginalized and underrepresented groups across the world. These socio-political movements and observations caused the network to pause and ask:

- What do equity, inclusion, and representation look like in a global context?
- How can it be reinforced in the CfAll network's structure?
- What protocols need to be restructured and or created that could work as a framework for the Network and its members?
- What capacity building is required on inclusion, gender focus, and human-centered tools for the Core Team to support the network members and overall civic tech community?

To do this, CfAll engaged an equity and inclusion consultant to research CfAll functions, structures, and protocols that might be enabling or hindering equity, inclusion, and representation. The project duration was from October 28, 2020, to April 30, 2021.

1. The report is organized into the 5 main sections;
2. Introduction, project approach, and meanings and agendas of equity and inclusion;
3. Key hindrances to civic tech organizations' practice of equity and inclusion;
4. Key findings on the practice of equity and inclusion in civic tech organizations;
5. Recommendations and;
6. Playbook of enabling concepts for equity and inclusion.

1. Project Approach

The project consisted of the following research activities:

A. Review of existing literature on equity and inclusion from different sectors including, academia, technology, international development and humanitarian aid organizations, civil society, and governance;
B. Interviews with subject matter experts and civic tech practitioners outside the network

to gather how they are actively researching and leading equity and inclusion and their lived experiences;

C. Participatory workshop with a subset of network members to explore current practices, realities, enablers, hindrances, gaps, resources, and strategies for more equitable and inclusive civic technology organizations and;

D. Survey testing findings with more members of the network, particularly those who didn't participate in the workshop and focused on gathering insights that either validate or inform iterations to the research findings.

The project approach is such that each activity builds on the preceding piece. The interviews helped inform the design and activities for the participatory workshop. Likewise, the insights of the workshop informed the survey design and questions. Find the comprehensive research methodology included in the annex.

2. Summary of Findings

Main Hindrances

1. Imprecise articulation of power: Organizations tend to romanticize the idea of shifting power but don't acknowledge that there is a reason power exists where it does.

2. Using conventional strategies: Civic tech organizations are hoodwinked by the general global discourse on diversity, inclusion, and equity which lacks the practical and specific details needed to promote a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable civic tech organization.

3. Misplaced DIE priorities and purpose: Organizations undermine the health of the organization and the ability of its members to look the part of an ideal, diverse, inclusive, and equitable civic tech organization.

4. Creating overreaching strategies: Organizations are overpromising on equity and inclusion and underdelivering on those promises to their members.

5. Challenge of inadequate resources: Civic tech organizations lack the money, time, and processes to understand, develop, promote, improve and be accountable to their diversity, inclusion, and equity in an applied way that fits their reality and context.

Other Findings

1. **Civic Tech Organizations are Influenced by Other Sectors:** Civic tech organizations are learning about diversity, inclusion, and equity principles, experience, and practice from sectors such as technology, academia, international development, and humanitarian aid organizations, as well as from feminist theories and prevailing socio-political debates.

2. **No One-Size-Fits-All Civic Tech Organizations:** Diversity, inclusion, and equity carries different weight and meaning for different organizations and largely depends on the organization's socio-political context, and culture and, the organization's realities such as its age, size, and resources.

3. **Debates that Exclude Power are no Longer Enough:** Civic tech organizations are actively seeking to have diversity, equity, and inclusion discussions and practices that

explicitly include how to shift and distribute power from predominantly global Northern centers.

4. **Efforts are Made or Marred by Use of Languages:** Language is an important part of the discourse on equity and inclusion, given that language is a primary source of how people identify and express themselves, but it doesn't get the attention it deserves.

5. **Quick Fixes are the Real Competition:** Civic tech organizations adopting and practicing "checkbox style diversity" are not necessarily trying to be disingenuous but are swayed by the ease with which their organizations can use such approaches.

6. **Diversity Increases Complexity:** Intensive resources are required to create equitable and inclusive organizations, and with more diversity, more resources are required, but the degree of intensity can be easily underestimated.

7. **Technology also Exacerbates Exclusion and Inequities:** Civic tech organizations tend to think of technology as great equalizers that promote equity and inclusiveness and end up paying less attention to the design processes around these platforms, as well as the access and pedigree of their members and community.

8. **Financial Resources are Proof of Value:** Civic tech organizations with diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their core value, have dedicated resources for activities that help foster them.

9. **Tensions and Trade-Offs are not Anticipated:** Making equity and inclusion a priority for the organization comes with trade-offs, which means forgoing other needs of the organization, and this can cause tensions in both the organizational priorities and best use of limited resources.

10. **Strategies are Conceived as Standalone:** Strategies for diversity, inclusion, and equity that are not integrated with the main and other organization strategies are dead on arrival.

11. **No Quick Results, Processes are Radical:** Investments in diversity, inclusion, and equity include both processes and outcomes and do not yield immediate results, and the processes can radically change an organization.

12. **Blurry Line Between Core Value and Perception Management:** Funding and goodwill attached to showing up as a diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization blur the lines between the genuine pursuits and when organizations are primarily managing perceptions and public relations.

13. **Two Way Street that is Sensitive in Both Directions:** The personal nature of equity and inclusion makes it a grey area and overwhelming topic to discuss and practice. It brings into question personal values and ideologies regardless of which side of the table participants are on. This can be an uncomfortable process.

14. **Silence does not Translate Directly:** It is awkward and reductive for an individual or organization to limit their involvement (voice and action) to include others. Inclusion is not zero-sum; it can be made to work for everyone.

15. **Numbers Matter, but they can be Misleading:** Focusing on the performance statistics of diversity and inclusion are helpful conversation starters but are often only indicative of representation and not much else because ultimately, diversity and inclusion are lived experiences.

3. Meanings & Agendas of Equity and Inclusion

Social organizations and movements — new and old, are pushing for more equitable and inclusive societies and have reached greater consensus on the existence and work of inequitable systems, but they are far from eliminating systemic inequities and exclusion. At the same time, it is hard to generalize these results when we take a closer look at different local contexts. On global and international scenes, several high-level discourses converge on the point that the issues have systemic enablers and those actions such as advocacy, protests, votes, and change management processes can help improve the situation. In many local contexts, the issues are far more complicated and do not lend themselves readily to linear actions and theories of change. The issues are embedded into constructs and functions based on deeper social, cultural, historical, and political realities that are not easily shaken. Consequently, the varying effects of these sociopolitical and cultural forces trickle down into the workplaces existing in the given environments, affecting how employees may relate with each other (McCluney et al., 2017).

In summary, different social and political environments respond to the dictates of equity and inclusion in different ways. Propagating single narratives of equity and inclusion — which are mostly western, does not do justice to collective interests. The fight against inequities and exclusion is ultimately as diversified as they come. Together, these differences leave no single 'right way' to discuss and assess the meanings and agendas of equity and inclusion.

A meaningful diversity, inclusion, and equity conversation that intersects different contexts should be approached as a spectrum with related but relative facts and experiences. There is no single product that summarizes what should be done about inequities and exclusion. It stems and iterates from the fabrics of how societies are organized, see, value, and treat each other, and this, in turn, is constantly changing in response to the changes in both local and international contexts.

In the case of international communities like CfAll, it gets more complex because as contexts change, principles and values agreed upon, adopted, and applied by individuals and organizations might come in different shades of what is most pressing and feasible in their contexts. Invariably, unequal circumstances mean that the relevance of best practices in equity and inclusion dynamics are uneven, and that unevenness needs to be taken into account.

> **It is still an environment where diversity, equity, and inclusion doesn't exist in terms in which I hear about it at work, but I guess it is what we are addressing when we talk about quotas for ethnic, religious, and gender groups. We even have these conversations when we seek admission into schools and institutions.**

There is a need to keep the discourse and practice as intersectional as possible. There are dominant strains like race, gender, and sexuality, but by themselves, they do not do justice as they also cut across class, caste, ableism, ageism, tribe, religion, qualifications, language, physical appearance, physical stature, and more.

A more valid consensus across international and local contexts is an appetite for more

engagement around these topics and issues. As such, the engagements need to be kept deep and open enough, without harsh, insensitive judgments but with guidance on how these engagements are facilitated or on how people interact. For civic tech organizations, questions like these can help spur better diversity, inclusion and equity, conversations:

- Diversity: How might we ensure that our diversity is not merely a tool for optimizing organizational productivity or managing public relations and perception?
- Inclusion: How might we reimagine the term "inclusion" to mean more than tolerating people in our space to create new shared spaces where everyone has a sense of belonging?
- Equity: How might we distribute power in a functional and adaptive way that respects and values the changing competency of everyone?

Civic technology organizations have helped bring these debates to the limelight, but the spotlight is also on the civic tech community to examine its policies and programs for equitable and inclusive practices.

A Spectrum of Related but Relative Facts and Experiences

A quick online search shows standard meanings and implications for diversity, inclusion, and equity, and these are valuable for creating a shared understanding of these important concepts. However, to consider them as the norm and acceptable models across the board will be misleading. The reality is that the meanings and agendas for these concepts are complex and change on a context-by-context basis. This fluidity introduces a risk that, in practice, subjects the meanings to biases and convenience, which is particularly bad if they are perverse. But to not embrace this fluidity means that there is no realistic way to embody diversity, inclusion, and equity in all contexts. The hard truth about work to be done is that no one size fits all. There are nuances to work through before reaching a working model for each civic tech organization or community. Even then, the model will remain in constant evolution. The following are some highlights from the research projects that help guide such reflections toward determining a model that works. It is key to think about these considerations individually and collectively.

Operating Scale

It matters at what scale a civic tech organization works when making sense of the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and equity. A cursory look at the Code for All network shows that organizations fall within three scales: a) international organizations; b) home-based organizations, and; c) hybrid organizations. The complexity at play for home-based organizations is probably less than what is at play for international organizations, but the constraints might be more deeply rooted. While race might be a prime conversation within an international organization, it might take the lens of ethnicity or be absent in home-based organizations. This means that the principles and goals promoted for international and home-based organizations should be different or adapted to fit.

Organization Size

Similarly, the size of a civic tech organization suggests varying shades for the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and equity. A 3 person organization should take a different approach to understanding and practicing diversity, inclusion, and equity from a 10 or 30 person organization. There is only so much meaning to diversity, inclusion, and equity in a 3 person organization compared to a 10 or 30 person organization. Some organizations are most effective staying small to continue delivering on their mission

and have no business growing their employee size to come across as diverse and inclusive. When small, it makes sense for a civic tech organization to focus on having like-minded members on the team, and this might offer little room to think about diversity on the team. However, organizations grow, and when they start to expand, diversity concerns could become more relevant.

Organization Ecosystem

The considerations above for making sense of diversity, inclusion, and equity focus on thinking through the internal reality of an organization. But civic tech organizations do not exist in isolation, and broadening out the perspective into the ecosystem in which the organization works, brings into focus the question of how diversity, inclusion, equity interactions occur with collaborators, communities, and the broader system. It creates new layers of analysis as to what diversity, inclusion, and equity means in principle and practice for the civic tech organization. The sheer fact that the number of people interfaced with has increased brings more considerations into play. At the same time, it is also a question of how other organizations in the ecosystem are inclined toward good practices in diversity, inclusion, and equity and their power and influence on the civic tech network. This is the initial grounds on which civic tech organizations in similar contexts can share common analysis, regardless of differences in their operating scale and size of their organization.

Organization Health

While all the above considerations are important to pursue, a civic tech organization's health is not an opportunity cost for diversity, inclusion, equity. If organizations pursue diversity, inclusion, and equity principles and goals that are unrealistic for them, it could lead to strain and subsequent demise of the civic tech organization. Diversity, inclusion, and equity are mechanisms for building a healthy organization. In this case, a healthy organization means one where people feel treated fairly, heard, and belong. At the same time, balance is maintained with and across all other organization affairs to ensure its sustainability.

Civic tech organizations are usually established with a long-term goal in mind. Alignment between existing objectives and all ethical considerations (diversity, inclusion, and equity included), without forgoing one for the other, is crucial to realizing those goals. With diversity, inclusion, and equity strategies blending into the processes and workflows of an organization, leadership will invariably be committed to creating and establishing unity among diverse employees (Norma, 2001). This is not to say that DIE

integration translates to management dictating the rules of cohesion to members. Instead, it offers an opportunity to build an avenue for members to express their differences in a shared space where these differences could be recognized, acknowledged, and supported. Thus, creating a healthy working environment where experiences and views are valued across all organization strata.

The push for equity in the workplace is not the duty of an individual or one management level. Discordance and deep-seated resentment exist in civic tech organizations where the push is only coming from the lower or mid-management level, or both, while the top management remains indifferent to the concerns. Furthermore, the burden of ensuring equity and inclusion is not a task for members who are often saddled with quarterly, annual, or biannual goals to attain in their workspace. Such a tactic creates distraction and may lead to members becoming less productive in executing other vital tasks. All these can ingrain lasting detrimental effects on the organization's health, leading to overall underperformance with root causes that are sometimes difficult to detect and fix.

Diversity, inclusion, and equity are tools for steering the organization towards unwavering progress and innovation (D5 Coalition, 2015). The best DIE values and principles are ones that have been considered and thoroughly researched by the organization's leadership and which the team members' contributions are part of its refinement and enforcement. Such strategies bolster collaboration across all organizational units and enhance collective efforts and inputs towards other policy refinement and adoption. They are strategies that include and value the members' contributions as vital parts of the organization's existence. Otherwise, members may feel undervalued, unincluded, unsafe, and exhausted from trying to navigate a work environment and its policies, at which point it becomes clear that the organization is tilting towards the lines of being unhealthy (Mary-Frances Winters, 2020), both for the members and itself.

> **A healthy organization is one where the staff feel valued and heard. It's an organization where people feel supported to grow and develop their roles; where there's trust and respect so you can have difficult conversations without blame; where opinions can be aired and listened to so that staff members feel like they have a stake in where the organization is going and not that they are just being told what to do with no input...an organization where differences are recognized, acknowledged and supported so that all staff members feel they have a good working environment and their views and experiences are valuable. — Clara**

DIE strategies that stand as an independent pursuit or an autonomous unit of the organization are not the best fit for any civic tech organization, irrespective of the

scenario. They are not worth the resources that are likely to be wasted on their pursuit. In contrast, favorable strategies are often subject to the cross-functionality of teams and the intersectionality of identities across organizational levels. Also, they have clear-cut procedures and protocols on how to address occasions where DIE policies are broken. The goal is to adopt strategies to make the organization healthier, provide members with a sense of belonging, and improve the organization's processes significantly.

4. Main Hindrances

The key hindrances and gaps for civic tech organizations interested in being more diverse, inclusive, and equitable are in how they articulate, strategize and resource their diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts.

Imprecise articulation of power

Although civic tech organizations have rightly identified power shift and redistribution within their organization as an important piece in better DIE practices and policies, often, their perspective still lacks nuance. The mentions of the need for power distribution and shifts are growing but not in ways that discern between power allocation based on competency and solely as a function of privilege.

"It is hard to implement an equitable institution - because people are unable to acknowledge their power. A lot of processes are not formalised and makes it harder to analyse these power distributions. A lot of people shy away from it because they don't want to lose privileges, making it a hard conversation." - Chhaya

Perhaps because a common counterargument for resisting power redistribution and shift is that its current dynamics are based on competencies, and there are some notable instances where this is true. Invariably, this resistance continues to limit the opportunities for members of traditionally marginalized groups in civic tech organizations and communities to build their competency through practice.

With such evidence, civic tech organizations are either disarmed or driven to proceed in ways that are not strategic. In response, civic tech organizations miss the argument that without explicit and intentional strategies for power distribution and shifts, the present issues will persist indefinitely. There is a need to present evidence that can substantiate the argument that suboptimal performance — due to embracing flexible assessments of competency — might be a temporary and worthwhile cost to pay for reducing inequities in civic tech organizations, projects, and communities. The evidence can be surfaced from having traditionally marginalized groups lead to allowing greater responsibility for project beneficiaries. There might be consequences for lowering competency in the interim, but competencies are also often built and learned through practice over time.

Using conventional strategies

The numerous global and international high-profile debates and events on diversity, inclusion, and equity are swaying the perceptions of civic tech organizations on appropriate approaches and actions they should take on the subject matter. Often, these perceptions mean well on the surface and near term, but the detriments show up only after they have run their courses. The strong opinions expressed through these conversations and amplified by media channels ensure that civic tech organizations' perceptions and culture are shaped in ways that are not tailored to their context, status, and realities.

The perspectives coming out of these high-profile debates and events are valid but often based on strokes too broad to find direct relevance and application at the organization and community strategy level. It seems convenient and safe to work with what now appears to be a global tradition. However, the nature of civic tech as a relatively new sector combining two very different fields as one necessitates a unique approach that utterly responds to the unique DIE concerns that may be found within its operating system. The counterargument may be that civic tech organizations risk faulting on the lines of appeal to novelty fallacy. However, numerous studies and reports have also indicated that these conventional strategies never truly work - not in the long term - as organizations that adopt them often fall back to square one (Dobin and Kalev, 2016). To be fair, no DIE strategy truly reflects a one-size-fits-all solution, and it would be unfair to cast aspersion on any supposed idea of a traditional DIE strategy. It also becomes apparent why civic tech, as an entity and as a component member of a global system, could be regarded as an institution needing to familiarize itself with its unique differences and the motivations behind them. And in moving forward, develop strategies that are tailored to its unique challenges.

Misplaced DIE priorities and purpose

Arguably, the work of diversity, inclusion, and equity is an end in itself. It is also a means to building healthy organizations — an organization where people feel treated fairly, heard, and belong (see the section on meanings and agenda for definition). Building on conventional strategies, civic tech organizations do not keep the organization's health in view when developing and pursuing their diversity, inclusion, and equity strategies. If the DIE work does not result in people feeling that they have been treated fairly, heard, and belong, the purpose is defeated. Every other metric used in assessing DIE that does not consider the "organization's health" is entirely performative.

It is nice to have a workplace that is mixed across various intersections of marginalized groups. Still, the crucial questions remain: How do organizational processes ensure all members' fair treatment across all levels? Beyond stereotypical hiring, were merits duly considered in the recruitment process? Beyond the need to appear inclusive, do the adopted strategies also make the civic tech organization a truly cohesive entity driving towards exponential progress? If affirmative answers cannot be immediately provided in response to these questions, it is time to reassess the strategies.

Creating overreaching strategies

Between sheer enthusiasm and being reactionary to inequities, civic tech organizations develop impracticable DIE strategies that look good on paper but which the organizations lack the means and resources to deploy. The bandwagon approach to diversity, inclusion, and equity ensures that the cost analysis for and stress testing of DIE strategies are not done correctly, if at all. They lead members of organizations and communities to have high and misleading expectations.

These sorts of strategies result from external pressures stemming from a need to appear in the same light as other organizations within the same sphere. Eventually, attention is diverted from what really matters, and the unique DIE issues of the organizations are seldom fully resolved. Within the civic tech sector, DIE needs will always vary across civic tech organizations from various regions across the globe. Implicitly, the nature of DIE concerns differs across these regions. When organizations try to copy and replicate strategies that do not address identifiable issues within their system, they become likely to get stuck in a loop.

Challenge of inadequate resources

Beyond challenges with DIE articulation and strategy, civic tech organizations do not dedicate sufficient resources to DIE work — this is due to outright lack of resources or priorities competing for the organization's resources. Overall, they lack the money, time, human capacity, and processes to understand, develop, promote, improve and be accountable to diversity, inclusion, and equity that fits their context, culture, and realities.

Available resources are often stretched thin in a bid to accommodate all aspects of DIE during its implementation. There is always a deliberation on who should spearhead the DIE integration process; if it is necessary to hire an expert or create a team specifically for DIE implementation; how long should the process last?; what sort of programs or workshops should be incorporated into strategy, and; the financial resources to allocate for the course. Although a crucial part of organizational growth, allocating resources — time, finance, and people — to DIE pursuits almost always leaves civic tech organizations with the realization that they do not have enough resources for DIE integration. Some civic tech organizations resort to assigning the task to a team member, putting them in a strenuous position that has them juggling between their original roles and the new role.

5. Other Findings

Civic Tech Organizations are Influenced by Other Sectors

As a relatively young sector, civic tech and civic tech organizations are learning about equity and inclusion principles and practices from older sectors like technology, academia, international development, humanitarian aid organizations, feminist theories, and prevailing socio-political debates. Most attempts at adopting equity and inclusion practices are founded on experiences derived from these sectors and interests and often pioneered by individuals with backgrounds in these sectors.

Equity and inclusion sit behind rich and influential socio-political, historical facts and events. These historical facts and events are vital in creating the structures and systems that have shaped major sectors and institutions. In turn, these sectors and institutions have been battlegrounds for understanding and determining the meanings and agendas for equity and inclusion. When civic tech organizations discuss and take a stand on equity and inclusion, what is brought into focus does not reflect these facts and events fully. In worse cases, civic tech organizations assume that the principles and practices are original to them.

The extent to which civic tech organizations investigate the roots of its existence and that of other sectors to determine why equity and inclusion principles and practices are not working as expected is an open question. What is clear is that deep dives are not happening — going beyond what is easily obtainable or admitted as equity and inclusion principles and practices to explore the diverse experiences that shaped and tailored the principles and practices in these sectors

In one way or the other, members of civic tech organizations and communities are connected to these sectors and institutions and draw their perspectives from them. When the perspectives are not historical, they are from recent high-profile movements, voices, events, and theories shaping the narrative on equity and inclusion. For example, the tendency for women in technology to be on the fringes or sometimes addressed in tokenistic ways still play out in civic tech. Issues as archaic as unequal wages still occur. Practices that disenfranchise black and people of color, as seen in academic institutions, also get carried over to civic tech. Yes, there are attempts to be more inclusive in recruitment processes, but often, these attempts end up as window dressing of sorts, where minorities are recruited to take on bottom strata roles without prospects of ever getting into top leadership positions.

It is true that civic tech organizations do not hold the position of key players directing any of these exclusionary narratives, but they are often responding to effects and outcomes resulting from the interactions in historical institutions and high-profile movements, voices, events, and theories. Merely gathering as civic tech organizations and communities do not address the relationships that members of civic tech organizations and communities share with these overarching influences and the unfair historical influences that have been casually assimilated. Even within the gathering, members still feel the brunt of exclusion and inequity in ways that are sometimes glaring.

No One Size Fits All Civic Tech Organization

Bearing in mind that there are various civic tech organizations across different continents, it becomes clear that experiences across different subjects are most likely to vary - and indeed, they do. As a sector, civic tech leans toward addressing issues homogeneously while looking at one end of the spectrum. But in reality, the issues and topics under diversity, inclusion, and equity are subject to concepts and narratives that change as focus shifts from one organization or region to another. Without recognizing how easily these variations can occur, highly polarized discussions in a battle for right and wrong sides can occur.

Generally, organizations in the sector have shared narratives, beliefs, and comprehension. Still, in practice, things turn out differently for each organization as they struggle or attempt to conform to these commonalities. Though founded on the sector's common grounds, approaches taken to address equity and inclusion lack the flexibility at points where they address an organization's cultural contexts and its prevailing socio-political narratives. Regardless of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the tendency is to impose unhelpful and ineffective models that are based on hardlines that do not reflect native context and necessities. Once the hardlines are explored in practice, they are often blurred and stretched thin into a spectrum by several factors in a civic tech organization's context, culture, and realities.

Furthermore, most narratives used to define concepts in the civic tech sector are mostly suitable for the Global North. In fact, there is a sharp contrast between what defines equity and inclusion practices in the Global South and the Global North. For instance, equity and inclusion mean a different thing for organizations situated in countries where girl child education is still being debated, democracy is being repressed, crime syndicates are blatant, or ethnicity is considered a criterion for employment compared to advanced countries where these issues are less severe.

Organizations in societies that have put such factors behind cannot immediately relate to these concerns. Unsurprisingly, organizations from these latter societies overshadow the debates and discussions on the subject matter. As a result, organizations in less privileged societies focus on the depravity of imposed contexts rather than reflect on meanings of equity and inclusion in their context. In the same vein, the scenario repeats itself when more prominent and better-resourced organizations engage and contemplate more sophisticated and nuanced discussions and practices of equity and inclusion. They are more likely to be outspoken about their position and call the shots, but their counterparts might not have the

resources or democratic backing to toe the same line.

Debates that Exclude Power are no Longer Enough

Diversity, inclusion, and equity have been continuously explored and seem to be at a point where details and frameworks appear to be recycled. There are pockets of notable changes here and there. However, the significant patterns remain largely the same — a pattern where the groups in the Global North continue to work on processes and frameworks that allow others to be included.

> " I grapple with the word inclusion, it already disposes the role of a gatekeeper that chooses who gets included. It is a big and hard question, getting people to acknowledge power - it is kind of what it comes down to. We struggle with some of the things that the tech space struggles with. Seen in the top down (North - South) leaning in civic tech as well. Acknowledging that those powers are powers. — Elias

Invariably, where these groups are always at the lead of the discussion, the others are excluded, often finding themselves at the receiving end of the system's inequities. Sometimes, in a bid to appear inclusive and equitable, organizations employ minority representation as a tool to appear diversified while deeper problems persist and the search for a lasting solution continues - or not.

Civic tech organizations have reached a point of exhaustion on the merry-go-round. Organizations have come to the realization that beyond diversity, inclusion, and equity discourses, change starts from the top, where certain groups continue to dominate and wield the power to include and foster equity. The issues here are severe, as power-holders are somewhat oblivious to the meaning and impact of the power they wield. Yet, being aware does not automatically translate to the willingness or ability to rescind any part of it. Ceding power is a challenging adventure that is hardly explored in diversity, inclusion, and equity strategies.

Traditional attempts at diversity, inclusion and equity often end up with people of color and women in the bottom and middle management, while top management remains predominantly white males (Simard et al., 2008, Correll and Mackenzie, 2016). A counterargument is that historical facts and events have led the situation to this point — creating a status quo that is not easily changed. Irrespective of interpretations, who holds the most power makes the decisions that affect the rest of the operations chain. Even in instances where some organizations have more women than men or people of color than whites, but with more white (men) in key positions at the top, equity and inclusion remain a problem. There is a skewed imbalance, where an organization appears diversified and inclusive but remains otherwise at the core of its affairs.

Though the intentions might be good, continuing this pattern that earnestly seeks to cater to others' sense of belonging within organizations and institutions is incapable of addressing the challenges at its core. Deriving solutions that address the subject matters completely are

near impossible because diversity, inclusion, and equity start from the table where they are being discussed. However, excluded groups are not active parts of the discourse. The current discussions exclude perceptions that provide deep insights into the concerns of the excluded and disenfranchised.

Efforts are Made or Marred by Use of Languages

Language in the space of inclusion discourse explores the confines of accessibility to untapped human capital and knowledge. It is an essential part of the discourse on diversity, inclusion, and equity, given that language is a primary source of how people identify and express themselves. However, most discussions on diversity, inclusion, and equity tend to skip language as a factor to consider. This negligence is disadvantageous to both the organizations and the exceptional staffing prospects that miss out on opportunities to boost their processes due to the language barrier.

Members of civic tech organizations have had to learn a second language either because it is an official language or it helps them fit into workplaces and societies that they find themselves in. This seems like a reasonable compromise on the surface, but for such members, there are unacknowledged discomforts to be dealt with while executing their tasks. Meanings are lost, intentions are misconstrued, and ideas are bottled up due to a lack of suitable expressions.

> Code for All is a very lovely idea - I think it is very American - I don't think we are in equal circumstances and so doesn't allow us to work together or participate...It is hard that I can't speak Spanish to anyone. I am way smarter in Spanish, some things will be easier to approach in Spanish - it was created with an american way of thinking with this lovely idea of let's work together. Not acknowledging those differences and power dynamics doesn't allow us to move forward. - Charlotte

Language diversity gets simplified by laying focus on widespread languages like English, Spanish and French. By doing so, civic tech organizations sideline basic considerations for other members' comfort level after being included in the workspace. In addressing language concerns in the discourse, it is important to note that it is about bringing along a multiplicity of languages and being sensitive to differences in usage and interpretation. When members think in other languages and communicate with the English language, it becomes hard to capture some necessary nuances. The options don't exist for members to express themselves in their native language, either in writing or vocally. Organizations are not open to accommodating local language diversity in their structures that might allow them to explore uncondensed local contexts and ideas.

Quick Fixes are the Real Competition

When addressing diversity, inclusion, and equity, it is convenient to apply existing strategies in legacy sectors. However, most of these approaches are only as good as they appear.

Probing most of these approaches' intricate composition and output reveals that what is obtainable can best be referred to as "checkbox diversity." Civic tech organizations often follow the trends of legacy institutions to adopt and practice this checkbox diversity. They do not do so because they are disingenuous; instead, it is more a case of being swayed by the ease with which they can apply such strategies.

Such quick fixes are only able to address DIE superficially, while the problems therein continue to fester. As evidenced in past experiences across legacy institutions such as academia, checkbox diversity does not envelop or appreciate various perspectives, which can be created or found in the intersection of multiple identities (Philip Lee, 2013). It places aesthetics and public perception over value, and to an extent, limits a member's organizational impact to their preferred identity.

> **You can invest all you want in recruitment, but it could be window dressing. What matters more is what goes on day to day in the organization, what is the actual experience of belonging? If an organization retains people from minority groups who end up in roles they are not fit for, then their recruitment is like dressing the front window of a store and it is a garbage pile when we walk in. All you do is feed people into a toxic space. It is the actual day to day that means more. Is your place a place that people want to return to, feel fond of and affection for? - Gina**

Members who got into civic tech or similar organizations through these quick fixes tend to question their capacities within the organization or feel undervalued. A toxic work environment is created when members perceive that they are fitted to a role that does not align with their experiences based on their identity. More so, when they feel like the odd one out in a pool of colleagues with similar orientations or identities, and the most attention they get is tied to their identity. People want to be hired because of the value they offer, not because of their origin or skin color.

It is apparent that adopting and practicing checkbox diversity as a quick fix to DIE concerns provides no meaningful offering in most cases. Addressing the full extent of DIE is a complex process. Strategies that provide a sustainable fix will take years to implement across sectors and even more years for the desired effects to materialize. Although civic tech organizations work towards enhancing human experiences and intra- and intersocietal relations, they are daunted by the steps needed to address and fix the subject matter fully. The process will place a lot of pressure on available resources, but the prospects and sustainability of derived solutions make it worthwhile.

Diversity Increases Complexity

If there were an order of concepts leading up to equitable organizations, the progression would be, first, more diversity, then the work of inclusion, and finally, the question of equity in the organization. The value of diversity in an increasingly multicultural world cannot be overemphasized, and much less its value to organizations. It brings in new ideas and

experiences, and people can learn from each other to better solve problems, innovate and be adaptable in societies and organizations. Working in diverse teams opens dialogue, promotes creativity, solidifies a stronger sense of identity and well-being, and has better education and career outcomes. Put together, diversity is not only valuable but trendy, and its pursuit can be misleading to civic tech organizations.

The point is not to discourage diversity but to flag that organizations are not giving thorough considerations to what it means to be more diverse before they jump at it. The implications of being more diverse for continued inclusion and equity plans are extensive. Civic tech organizations seeking to be more diverse are not fully processing these complexities in advance. Ordinarily, intensive resources are required to create inclusive and equitable organizations. And with more diversity, more resources are required. When these aspirations are not carefully thought through, employees who were added to the team with genuine intentions for greater diversity end up bearing the brunt of this oversight and may end up as "not the right fit." The alternative is that the employees become blindly assimilated, and the original goal of creating a truly diverse organization is defeated (Nicole Anand, 2019).

Civic tech organizations on this path can be oblivious or numb to these facts — of either an employee getting assimilated into hardline cultures or that not all cases of "not the right fit" are correct. There is more to failing to consider the cost and actual meaning of diversity in an organization. Bringing this realization to focus can be a bit tasking but crucial when nudging civic tech organizations to lean towards the easily accessible, less daunting traditional approaches to DIE that do not strain their resources.

Technology also Exacerbates Exclusion and Inequities

Civic tech organizations are by nature technical - in the sense that some degree of technical proficiency is required for the organizations to function effectively. However, technical skills are not the only skill asset needed by a civic tech organization to function, but highly technical skills tend to be the ones that occupy prominent positions within their organizations. This is a good example of where competence leads to holding power and could lead to inadequate consideration for non-technical members of the organization. Programs and projects tend to be heavy on technical skills, and rightly so. Opening up responsibilities to members with low technical skills, even with the intent to learn, can come at the cost of not delivering or costly delays on such programs and projects.

Technology has also helped to foster team collaboration and efficiency, with new tools and updates constantly emerging. The logical action is to adopt better tools and updates when available; however, there are differences in the learning curve and the time required to get acquainted with these resources. Also, there are different levels of comfort for different personalities when it comes to switching working tools. In more dire situations, there is the question of different limitations with access that could be brought about by poor internet connectivity, power outages, or the absence of viable tech ecosystems. Although these differences can be largely hidden, some platforms cannot be accessed in every part of the world or might utilize a different security protocol depending on the users' country of origin.

> **"** I have consulted for other organisations, making policies, digital policies - to ensure that politicians are reaching out to people in rural places. Some of the conversations are centered around digital spaces and fail to understand that a large population are not digital platforms. They were only tending to microcosms that are all so small. - Quincy

Technology is not neutral, and often the creator's biases are built and designed into technological mechanisms. Civic tech organizations tend to think of tech platforms as great equalizers that promote equity and inclusiveness and pay less attention to the design processes around these platforms. Digital citizen engagements, which are usually designed to close gaps between citizens, and citizens and governments, often end up as avenues to expend resources to create platforms that are mainly available to the privileged. Civic tech projects might end up widening the gap they set out to close, especially when these engagements are initiated in low-tech contexts. Strategies are not devised to seamlessly integrate the processes of traditional organizations that focus on offline methods of inclusion. Thus, failing to create equitable and inclusive platforms for the privileged and less privileged (who often do not have access to digital spaces).

Financial Resources are Proof of Value

Even the most basic strategic consideration in an organization requires dedicated resources to put them into action and realize the objectives that they represent. Civic tech organizations are conceiving strategies for DIE without thinking of the implications for resources, particularly financial resources. The notion appears to be that spending time resources alone to discuss the DIE status of the organization is sufficient to make changes. It is generally assumed that the arena of change with DIE issues is limited to mindset shifts.

Talking about DIE as an organization is the first right step, but financial resources will inevitably be expended if any meaningful changes are expected. The efforts get truncated when civic tech organizations reach the point where they have to commit financial resources. In other instances, they seek low-fidelity options or no-cost alternatives. This can come in the form of assigning responsibilities to team members without the requisite comfort level, exposure, skills, or mandate (authority) to propose transformative changes. Making equity and inclusion a priority for a civic tech organization comes with tradeoffs, which could mean forgoing other needs of the organization. Where the resources have not been allocated in advance, the situation creates tensions for the organization regarding priorities and the best use of their limited resources.

The tensions are both internal — in terms of getting the organization leaders to support such repurposing of limited financial and time resources — and external because funders of civic tech organizations need to be on board as well for funds to be repurposed. There are not many funders who are investing adequate resources to transform DIE policies and practices in their organizations, much less fund civic tech organizations to think about and improve their DIE strategies. It is not a disregard for DIE strategies. It is an issue that cuts across the board when funders are expected to approve the reallocation of already earmarked funds. But most times, the program officers who civic tech organizations interface with have their hands tied

to follow through with the predetermined multi-year agendas. In turn, the funding organizations are also bound to adhere to country-level policies that guide where they invest.

Tensions and Trade-Offs are not Anticipated

Building on the failure to allocate financial resources for DIE work in civic tech organizations, the tensions and trade-offs from doing the work are not foreseen. However, financial resources are essential for the materialization and sustenance of DIE applications (Diversity VC and Atomico, 2018). Enthusiastic civic tech organizations are blindly walking into these discomfort zones and getting burnt as an organization, or the fallouts get directed to specific unfortunate individuals on the team. Failing to anticipate these tensions and trade-offs leads to false expectations being created because the means to actualize them are lacking.

Beyond the tensions and trade-offs with reallocating organizational resources such as time and money, some border on the organization's efficiency, power dynamics, and team members feeling tokenized. DIE work can mean taking less efficient approaches to an organization's priorities in a bid to make their affairs more inclusive and equitable for the diversity a civic tech organization or community might represent.

Civic tech organizations are not anticipating these needs to slow down or always be able to accommodate them. Similarly, the effect on established organization power dynamics can be unpredictable; the intent to mildly cede some power to marginalized team members might trigger a conflict that the leadership is unprepared to handle. There are assumptions made about the experience of marginalized team members that get debunked when the conversations get broached. The intent to discover the impact of marginalization does not count as adequate preparation to make extensive changes.

Strategies are Conceived as Standalone

DIE strategies in civic tech organizations are not their own thing, but they are intertwined with other organizational strategies. They are about how existing strategies can integrate and reflect DIE values, from hiring team members to implementing programs and projects to the leadership of the civic tech organization. DIE strategies have to be taken into account when creating other strategies and processes in the organization. The challenge is that DIE strategies are often an afterthought, and with other strategies further along, rolling them back becomes difficult. At other times, the mere fact that the drivers for other strategies and DIE strategies are different makes it difficult to reach any practical alignment.

Civic tech organizations with clear project priorities are stuck in a cycle where they develop terms of reference for a new role. And at the end of the ToR, slap on overused DIE boilerplate language to attract a diverse pool of talents. There is a likelihood that they will succeed in recruiting for diversity; the thing to realize, though, is that many times such talents are outliers and not a good representation for breaking the broader dominant societal divides that exist. The starting point for DIE consideration is at the point of framing the project priority or even the organization's mission and values. Yet, recruiting for diversity is better than nothing — however, the DIE accounting needs to be done appropriately.

Creating balance and synchrony between the strategy and all other organizational workflows helps avoid dilemmatic scenarios that debate the essence of DIE strategies. DEI strategies do not fare well as standalone pursuits. The best strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion adopt a structure that envelops and integrates with existing organizational objectives to achieve the organization's goals.

No Quick Results, Processes are Radical

Perhaps the hallmark for DIE work is the thoroughness needed to design long-term processes and articulate results. The tendency is for organizations to make and celebrate superficial efforts, but the results are rarely ever immediate. Actions like releasing public declarations in favor of great DIE practices and hiring for diversity are only a part of the work, and they can placate the enthusiasm to do the deep work that is needed. They bring the insights to follow but are unable to produce the essence to cause transformation.

These challenges are all intertwined; the lack of resources to commit, conditions their appetite to accept quick results and shun processes that could further work. The greater challenge is that even if an organization was interested, there is a paucity of processes that can enhance long-term pursuits. At such crossroads, civic tech organizations are making do with checkbox diversity. Investments in DIE are better with close consideration for the processes and with outcomes in mind. Ahead of the outcomes, a well-strategized process can radically change the fabric of organizations if applied correctly.

Hence, as much as civic tech organizations might want to be at the forefront as the epitome of diverse, inclusive, and equitable organizations, there is also an equal need for significant attention to be placed on the planning phase of DIE strategies. Articulate planning significantly increases the chances of developing practicable and effective processes that yield sustainable outcomes that can be scaled and replicated across sectors. Methods that are not well thought out may waste resources or make the organization feel burnt out in its pursuit of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Consequently, this could make them abandon the subject matter altogether.

Blurry Line Between Core Value and Perception Management

What inspires civic tech organizations to pursue diversity, inclusion, and equity? The agreeable assumption would be that civic tech organizations are altruistic or meant to be altruistic. Hence, all efforts towards being more diverse, inclusive, and equitable are spurred by genuine concerns. However, across the civic tech sector and legacy sectors, there are fundings and goodwill attached to showing up as diverse, inclusive, and equitable organizations. This blurs the line between the genuine pursuit of these values and when organizations are merely managing public perceptions. The former allows for a more intricate application of these values. In contrast, the latter enables organizations to window dress their establishments with members of traditionally marginalized groups at lower management levels, often without prospects of climbing up the organizational ladder.

In the absence of these external incentives and prying public concerns, it is hard to tell if organizations will remain proactive in their DIE pursuits. The argument could be that what matters the most is that civic tech organizations are making attempts to be diverse, inclusive, and equitable in their membership composition and management of their affairs. True, that is a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, it remains imperative that these steps are progressive and sustainable. Actual DIE is not a checkbox process; instead, it is a continuous process that adapts to changes in organizational culture by instituting internal capacity building, developing equitable systems internally and externally, and creating an environment for members to talk about DIE productively (Mary-Frances Winters, 2020). If pursued otherwise, civic tech organizations might have to revisit the same issues when another public outcry surfaces.

Two Way Street that is Sensitive in Both Directions

Among civic tech organizations, the two-way street point of view appears to be unpopular and is fostering divisiveness in efforts to do DIE work. The personal nature of diversity, inclusion, and equity makes it a grey area and overwhelming topic to discuss and practice regardless of who is on the table or the side they belong. Mostly because it brings into question personal values and ideologies that those holding the discourse fail to consider. This breeds an "us versus them" dynamic that is kept silent in civic tech communities.

Traditionally marginalized groups in civic tech organizations tend to approach the debate as though it is a one-way street — in which they are recipients of the inequities meted to them by groups privileged by the system. Consequently, they fail to see how supposedly privileged groups are often influenced by factors outside of their sphere of influence — partially or fully. The underlying disposition of marginalized groups is to perceive groups with privilege as the cause for their experiences and the broken state of the system. This outlook can be further hardened when privileged groups are oblivious to the realities of marginalized groups.

> **We understand equity and inclusion when it affects us but not when it transcends to someone else that is not us or our kind." - Aqib**

In reality, it is a two-way street — the broken systems entrap both the privileged and marginalized groups, blinding the former to the realities of the marginalized and meting out inequities to the latter. The expectation is that individuals with more knowledge and awareness of DIE challenges faced by their organization should take responsibility for driving the efforts required for DIE work, but that is hardly the case. Depending on where the knowledge and awareness lies, it is a different kind of responsibility for both parties. Nonetheless, it is a struggle for anyone genuinely interested in making a difference.

Silence does not Translate Directly

Sometimes, members and organizations find themselves censoring or limiting their involvement (voice and action) to make others more included in the work environment. This can be an awkward and reductive posture to promote inclusion. It is an approach that overly simplifies the problem but does not do a lot to solve it. On the one hand, it is applaudable to create room for marginalized groups to find their footing in the system. On the other hand, such censorship or self-limitation could unintentionally create a sort of benefactor-beneficiary smokescreen. The former inadvertently continues to perceive and treat the latter primarily as a minority instead of as a member bringing in unique values to the organization.

Choosing to be "silent" does not make others have contributions to make. If anything, it may establish an unspoken workplace culture that drives team members to keep to themselves, become reserved and less keen on building interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. What makes the team a great team is the sense of community that comes with it, and consequently, the members' active and continuous efforts towards ensuring that a sense of community is sustained in the workplace. Organizations that thrive have effective communication as an instituted component in their system. Such is an organizational community where team members have open and honest discussions, share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions (Garvey, 2018). Communication is an essential component for any group. The absence of effective communication can lead to tensions, conflicts, and low performance, which may fester for longer than is necessary to become part of workplace culture. The choice to be silent should be provoked by an interest to listen and learn from others, not just for the sake of allowing them to express themselves.

An equitable organization allows for all involved (both leadership and members) to freely express themselves and be recognized and acknowledged for the value they offer. The work environment gets tinted with subtle othering when a civic tech organization's leadership or members from a privileged group limit their rightful actions, presumably for the benefit of the marginalized. It is important to note that marginalized or not, people feel safer and valued in an environment where they are duly recognized for their inputs instead of what they represent. Even in the slightest form or inspired by best intentions, othering could create a work environment where the othered member feels like they do not belong (Thorpe-Moscon and Pollack, 2014).

Numbers Matter, but they can be Misleading

Thinking of diversity, inclusion, and equity in terms of numbers alone is convenient and one of the easiest ways to demonstrate perception management. Approaching diversity, inclusion, and equity from a numbers-only mindset makes the work happen quickly and guarantees that deep DIE changes do not occur. The numbers can be temporarily satisfying, but after a while, the cracks in the organization will appear. In some cases, the leadership of the civic tech organization can resort to other disingenuous methods to sustain the appearance.

> **"**
> Sometimes E&I can fall into a checkbox, more people of color, more women, but that doesn't mean they can make decisions, we have 50 women but none in positions of power. We need to take a look at how the numbers are obtained and what is changing in the organization with the numbers. - Sylvia

There are fundamental qualitative implications for DIE work — members of the organization should feel a sense of belonging. Focusing on the performance statistics of diversity, inclusion, and equity are helpful conversation starters but are often only indicative of representation and not much else because DIE are ultimately lived experiences. DIE by numbers is a form of social innovation that only attempts to have a given percentage of underrepresented groups in the workplace while disregarding the underlying causes of inequality. This sort of solution may relieve civic tech organizations from concerns such as the symptoms of institutionalized racial disparities. However, the underlying racial bias and attitudes may continue to go unchecked, consequently leading to new social problems (Ginwright and Seigel, 2019). Undeniably, it is a question of whether marginalized groups continue to be and feel marginalized or not.

6. Recommendations

The set of recommendations presented in this section of the report are aimed at addressing the key hindrances (articulation, strategy, and resources) that trail civic tech organizations pursuing diversity, inclusion, and equity. An attempt has been made to cluster them by how related they are, but each recommendation can be taken on its own merits.

A. Articulate the meaning and application of diversity, inclusion and equity for your organization.

Assess your organization's realities, including who the members are and what they represent.

A key submission of this report is that the appropriate meaning and application of diversity,

inclusion, and equity should change to fit the organization in question. It is clear that for attempts at DIE to be successful, the strategies in use must align with the organizational needs and concerns —this extends to the needs and concerns of its members. Otherwise, the civic tech organization may pursue DIE goals that do not make the organization as diverse, inclusive, and equitable as intended. More so, untailored strategies would at the very best do the least to propel the organization's growth.

Before trying to create a representative organization, think about what the members of the organization represent. Without judgment, learn more about the personal individual and career histories of the organization's members. From a DIE perspective, the civic tech organization learns how diverse they are, is informed on how diverse they can be, and the direction to follow if they are to become more diverse, inclusive, and equitable. From a business growth perspective, the derived knowledge will help inform potential areas of interest to explore and whom to call on when needed.

Give careful consideration to the organization's age, size, and operational scope (whether international or local). Bearing in mind that organizations operating for a longer time are more likely to have accumulated more human resources and often have better managerial qualities due to experiences over time (Li et al., 2018). Toeing the same line, and depending on the operational scope, civic tech organizations that have many employees operating on a large scale are likely to have more resources and better managerial capabilities (Ployhart et al., 2014). The considerations, if done correctly, can help the organization create a DIE roadmap that aligns with its realities, strengths, and capabilities. Consequently, the chances of creating an overreaching DIE strategy can be greatly minimized.

Ideally, this assessment should be a team and organization-wide exercise. However, the organization's leadership can get the organization started with some of the needed reflection in advance.

Ascertain the socio-political and cultural factors that surround and influence your organization.

Civic tech organizations do not exist in a vacuum. As such, should identify with contexts — at the very least to be aware of the different constraints and challenges to how the team wants to think about DIE. In identifying with the organization's socio-political and cultural environment, the civic tech organization must pay attention to the areas of advantage that they can maximize within their environment.

Consider scenarios outside the organization's realm of control and how best the team would respond. These problems and opportunities must be understood such that the organization can define which really affects them and how to resolve or maximize them. Taking on problems that do not affect the subject matter or which do affect it but are outside the civic tech organization's control would only lead to waste of resources and burnout when the organization is unable to find a way around them.

Outline the diversity, inclusion, and equity topics of interest and think about how the socio-

political and cultural factors might impede or promote them. It is important that strategies and their consequent goals are targeted to minimize the chances of unnecessary trials and errors in DIE integration into the organization. Proper problem diagnosis should be conducted and re-assessed to ascertain that DIE strategies cover most, if not all topics of interest. Civic tech organizations should exercise a lot of focus at the point of problem diagnosis because it is at this point that most organizations fail at creating proper solutions (Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2017).

In addition, think about the nature of the civic tech ecosystem in which the organization is connected - the experiences of other organizations in the immediate environment can be helpful reflection when making sense of one's realities. A civic tech organization seeking inspiration for DIE integration strategies in its workplace may find it helpful to take a page from similar civic tech organizations in its region, especially those that have run some DIE integration processes in the past. The aim should be to gain traction in the right direction from the onset.

Aggregate equity and inclusion policies and practices from other contexts and check if they could work in your context.

Taking a look at the relationship between the DIE strategy of civic tech organizations in other contexts and the socio-political and cultural factors surrounding them can be an important additional step towards better articulating DIE for the organization. Most civic tech organizations are young and do not have a plethora of experiences to learn from, necessitating the need to assess the experiences of organizations that have been in existence for a long time. This provides civic tech organizations with the information necessary for navigating socio-political and cultural contexts in their environment. And help streamline the DIE strategies they may adopt. The point is not to transfer any policies and practices verbatim to your organization but to use them to make decisions more robust and informed.

B. Ensure that the team and partners are clear enough about where the organization stands regarding diversity, inclusion and equity.

Clarify what is feasible and meant by a diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization from your organization's point of view.

When it comes to diversity, inclusion, and equity, a lot can be subject to interpretation. Beyond the collective articulation of the text noting the shared policies and practices, it is worthwhile to pressure test the text by discussing feasibility and meaning with team members. It will be an exercise to acknowledge the organization's limitations and provide some rationale behind constraints and how the organization plans to work through them. This line of action provides a vivid sense of direction, instituting a tailored DIE course of action that best aligns and works with the organization's existing processes towards overall improvement.

DIE as an integral part of a civic tech organization's process is best approached when done within its capacities. Ascertaining the organization's capacities for DIE should not stop at the surface assessments done by the management. The process should consider the insights from team members, feedback from component teams, review of budget plans and resources, evaluation of past attempts at DIE, and means to ensure effortless application of DIE in the organization. It might sound like a lot to do, but it will go a long way to clarify the civic tech organization's DIE policies, minimize trials and errors in DIE strategies and implementation, and keep members abreast of their roles in the process.

Disseminate your organization's insight, learning, and journey to encourage broader accountability and inform your community.

Publish information and resources about the approaches to DIE policies and practices that your organization is taking as it could be beneficial to other organizations who want to compare notes. A great outcome will be if others revert with relevant reflections that could be used to improve the work that has been started. In so doing, a collection of information detailing what works, what does not, and what can be tweaked could be compiled for future reference. Consequently, a guideline for sustainable diversity, inclusion, and equity practice may be developed. The absence of such resources may leave room for a few actors who are often about less granular assessment for the practicability of diversity, inclusion, and equity to continue to define DIE across the sector.

Publishing the organization's diversity, inclusion, and equity strategy and experience also provides some measure of accountability if the organization deems it as such. Civic tech organizations may also choose to regard such reports as lines of progress or benchmarks, prompting the organization to move a step forward continuously (never backward) when ensuring its workplace remains diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Improvements and lags, if any, become visible. And the civic tech organization stands to cheer itself on or take a reflective stance to set things right.

Normalize making adjustments when changes happen so that people are not led under old assumptions.

Ultimately, if DIE strategies are conceptualized as contextual, they have to be equally seen as highly iterative. The trouble is carrying on without acknowledging and discussing the changes happening in the organization and the contexts causing the DIE strategy to change. As the work environment or socio-political contexts change, there may be a need to adjust to suit and keep up with these changes. However, it should not be randomly sprung up on members — that is, members of the organization must be part of the process, if not in real-time, immediately after.

As a principle, inclusion in the workplace entails ensuring that the work environment encourages and values consultation, communication, and input from the organization's members. Accordingly, members must be consulted before a change is made and be made aware of the change in the organization's DIE policy after it has been effected. Bear in mind

that an employee's perception of the organization's DIE efforts can influence their engagement and job satisfaction (CNBC, 2021), so it is necessary that members are kept informed at all points of DIE implementation.

C. Revisit frequently and with an open mind, the discourse and practice of diversity, inclusion and equity in your organization.

Create processes and accountability mechanisms that ensure that diversity, inclusion and equity are revisited frequently.

Several organizations have good intentions but are missing triggers that prompt them to deliberate and take action on diversity, inclusion, and equity. We are no strangers to the fact that time comes with changes, and it only takes a moment of oblivion to go out of fashion and err on the side of modern validity. To that end, civic tech organizations need to have the DIE discourse frequently, not just as a practice that ensures they remain accountable to the course or pushes them to bear the sectoral DIE torch as organizations with the most diverse members in an inclusive and equitable workplace. But also as a practice that helps them understand the new and changing needs of the end-users utilizing their products or services.

The schedule for these conversations to happen and the processes to facilitate them may be a little tasking; however, they are vital for the organization's exponential growth. Developing an accountability mechanism will require civic tech organizations to expend and dedicate resources towards the goal. So, it makes sense that civic tech organizations should structure these conversations in a way that increases their likelihood to yield insightful and practicable outcomes, ensuring the most use of expended resources.

Civic tech organizations often start well with great DIE strategy sessions but hardly build on the outcomes and outputs of such conversations. Thus, defeating the purpose of having these conversations. Following such a line of action does nothing to improve the organization. Instead, it translates to misuse of resources set aside for these conversations to happen. Civic tech organizations should remain accountable to themselves, their members, and end-users by following up on the outcomes of their DIE discourse. And one way to do that is by establishing accountability mechanisms.

Plan for ways to absorb the cost related to frequently revisiting the discourse and practice of equity and inclusion.

Revisiting DIE conversations frequently will come at a cost to the organization, and for those frequent conversations to happen effortlessly with great outcomes, they must be planned in advance. While making plans, it will not be logical to think that such processes would not dent the organization's resources. Hence, resource allocation should be accounted for when plans are being made for DIE integration and sustenance, as the costs cannot be attended to ad-lib.

Examine the different opportunity costs and plan on what makes the most sense for the organization. At this point, it is necessary to reiterate that while making plans and assessing probable opportunity costs, the organization's health should always remain at the forefront. With that in mind, DIE sustenance should not come at a price that sets the organization back significantly, nor should it come at a low cost that makes the outcome of its practice insignificant.

Basically, there is barely anything about DIE that is cost-free — not the initial setup nor the iterations. In the absence of adequate plans, the DIE strategy may fail, or other undetected issues pay the price.

Lead the team and partners as often as necessary to examine how power is distributed, functions, and exists across the organization.

The research noted that DIE conversations that do not examine the power allocation within the organization could be pointless. Unfortunately, such incomplete discussions are what most organizations choose to go with, often laying focus on making their workforce diverse as possible without making provisions for the distribution of power nor indicating how power is distributed. Power and power differentials must be part of the conversation (Castillo Elizabeth, 2018). It comes as no surprise that organizations that avoid this crucial part of the conversation will always have that air of uncertainty or tension among the team members, creating a sense that something foul is at play. In some cases, members who do not understand the power functions of the organization may think they are mere pawns in the grand scheme of things. Such feelings do nothing to make members feel like they are a part of the organization.

The process to shift power is not automatic. But it helps to know that there is a basis for the distribution of power in the workplace, backed by the certainty that the organization can do it and that there are attempts to make it happen. This is not an excuse to, for the sake of equity and inclusion, uphold cultural diversity as the fundamental criteria for the distribution of power. Instead, it is a call to acknowledge and make all members and partners aware that an equitable system governs all facets of management within the organization.

Without understanding the underlying conditions that support the current distribution of power, it will not be easy to shift or redistribute power. As members down the line are then unable to fully grasp what it means (literally and in its application) to wield power in the organization. Lack of alignment and agreement on how and why power in the organization is distributed is a key tension point. Often, members are seeking a better understanding of how things work at the organization. When there is no defined explanation to latch on to, members often turn to speculations and assumptions that may affect their productivity and harm the organization. It could be tasking leadership to make power a very transparent discussion, but the payoff could be great.

D. Estimate in advance and alongside the resources required for the diversity, inclusion, and equity goals when they are being put in place.

Acknowledge DIE work as time away from programs, projects, and regular operations that the organization might be better adjusted to.

Organizations are not prepared to slow down from the deadlines and deliverables that go on non-stop. Those hyper activities are the business that keeps the doors open and the lights on, but they are also the opportunity cost for a better DIE strategy and work. They are the priorities that preoccupy the team and organization and steal away time for any reflection on the ways of working. The assumption could be that everything is working fine, and there is no need to disrupt the process; "Why fix what ain't broken?" But then, with members constantly having their backs bent in work and without a break to have the conversations that may reveal their concerns, you may never know how broken the existing work pattern has gotten.

At scheduled points, your organization should take time away from the never-ending work cycle. A time to retreat a bit and look at the organization's processes or progress from another perspective — the team members' perspective. Are the team members satisfied with how things work? Do they still feel that sense of belonging within the workspace, or do they take each day as it comes while looking forward to their paycheck or the day they get to call it quits? Taking time out to have team members discuss and understand varying perspectives can help team members understand diversity and how it can help your organization's processes become more effective (D5 Coalition, 2015).

DIE is a continuous process that lasts through the existence of organizations. It does not end when the team members and leadership leave the table of discourse, nor does it end the week after the discourse when energetic attempts were made at integrating the outcomes of the DIE discourse. Team members should always feel the impacts of conscious inclusion and equity practices in the workplace. And it is part of the management's tasks to ensure that the team members are satisfied with the course of direction, and one way to do that is by slowing down from work every other time to ascertain that all members are still onboard and in good spirits.

Develop business cases that demonstrate the diversity, inclusion and equity that is right for your organization and reasons for investing in it.

The diversity, inclusion, and equity strategy that is right for your organization is probably unique in some or most of its detail and, in that case, does not exist somewhere. Therefore, it may be crucial to develop business cases for it - thinking about it in advance to make it ready for when needed, say, in a business development conversation. Also, from a public

perspective, it shows how your organization intends to or has been able to tackle DIE issues effectively and significantly. Donors are more willing to put in their money in organizations with plans that have been pressure tested and deemed workable or have in their track records some verifiable pointers of past successful deliveries. These business cases should outline very clear lines of actions that go beyond theories to indicate steps being taken to ensure the realization of speculated goals. In so doing, the seriousness of the organization and the importance of the process may also be ascertained by prospective donors.

Advocate for funders to put money directly towards diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Recent social events and movements have helped amplify and make DIE conversations more prominent. Yet, it is not an area where organizations are readily receiving funding to do better work. The advocacy work to help funders recognize and increasingly allocate resources towards DIE works needs to be done by civic tech organizations and civil societies. Similar to how advocacy for core funding has now started yielding results, advocating for resources to be set aside for DIE can toe the same path. It is not enough to set up teams or officers that will enforce DIE in the organization; funding should be allocated to back up the process. Otherwise, those assigned to oversee DIE in the organization may create policies and strategies, but due to the lack of financial investment, they feel too powerless to act on them.

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