

Update to LVPC Equity Data Makes Analysis Easier

When the LVPC first released its Equity Analysis in 2018, it was one of the first in the nation, and when all that data showing who does and doesn't have access to a high quality of life in neighborhoods across the Lehigh Valley was updated in June, it drew the attention of people inside and outside of the region.

But it also raised a seemingly simple question.

"This data is important, but how can we make it usable for everyone?" said LVPC Executive Becky Bradley.

Now, just a few months after the 2020 Equity Analysis was released, it has been updated again to make it easier for government agencies, non-profit providers and even private residents to gauge which demographic groups have access to education, housing, transportation and employment in communities across the region – and perhaps more importantly, which do not have access.

"It is now an analysis tool that's a lot more user-friendly because it helps anyone who wants to use it to visualize what's happening in every neighborhood," said LVPC Senior Community Planner Jill Seitz, who authored the 2018 Equity Analysis and co-authored its two 2020 updates with Chief Community Planner Samantha Smith.

The analysis uses US Census data to look at 14 key data points that help give a picture of who has access to the important factors that lead to a high quality of life in the region's 144 Census tracts. Using scores for each of those data points, it evaluates the access to opportunity, assigning scores ranging from very low to very high access for every demographic in every neighborhood.

The latest update still uses the same data, and it's online presence still includes the charts and graphics that, for example, clearly show that Blacks and Hispanics or Latinos in the Lehigh Valley have far less access to wealth, housing, transportation and education than White residents.

What's new are colored population layers on a searchable Geographic Information System (GIS) map that enables the user to gauge the access to opportunity for any, or all, of more than a dozen demographics – from race to age to income to language -- for every Census tract. The greater the population size of a selected demographic, the darker the color on the map.

And the user can now turn each demographic dataset on or off, when looking at the map, enabling them to differentiate between the needs of different populations.

Therefore, a county agency trying to determine where poverty is in greatest concentration, or a school official trying to see where pockets of families of Spanish speakers or a non-profit trying to determine which neighborhoods have high concentrations of senior citizens with low access to opportunity can use the map to determine how to direct resources.

The added search by geography function was developed after LVPC staff delivered the original analysis to interested non-profit, government and private agency stakeholders, who suggested ways they'd like to use it.

The latest update also includes the ability to search the map by address.

“The intention was that this could be used by agencies that provide services, but it’s also useable by residents who want to have a greater understanding of their community,” Smith said.

One thing that became clear during this process is that while the LVPC Equity page remains one of the few searchable analyses in the nation, it’s far from a finished product.

“This isn’t something we did, it’s something we’re doing,” Seitz said. “This is a living analysis that will evolve and become more and more useful as we add more data.”

The Equity Analysis has been shared, and in some cases discussed in depth, with school districts and municipalities across the region.

The full Equity Analysis can be found at <https://lvpc.org/datalv.html#equity>