Social justice issues have become an increased focus for many of Washington’s cities and towns.

These topics are too complex to cover adequately in one edition of Cityvision, so this edition will focus on economic issues, and the next edition will discuss race and diversity.

Last month I was one of many city leaders who traveled to Washington, DC, to participate in the National League of Cities Conference, where I had the opportunity to hear President Obama speak. In his speech, the president emphasized that social justice is not about equal outcomes, but about equal opportunity. Within the framework of social justice, we cannot ensure, nor is it realistic to try to ensure, that equal outcomes are achieved. We can, however, work to make sure everyone has equal opportunity. The challenge is that it is often easier to measure “outcomes” than “opportunity.” Moreover, the demarcation between governmental and private-sector responsibilities in this arena is not always clear.

Individual expectations further complicate the issues. Individual perspectives related to social justice and trust are often formed early in life and can last a lifetime, and past experiences sometimes override new additional information. Each one of us has experienced situations of disappointment, hurt, pain, and distrust. Since hurt is unique to the individual, it isn’t productive for society to try to determine who is hurt more. Changing a person’s perspective requires first taking away the power of original experiences, which can only be accomplished on a foundation of trust. It starts with city leaders envisioning the other person’s perspective and asking, “What would trust look like?”

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My town of Pullman is a college town with a population turnover of at least 10 percent every year. We are constantly cultivating new community members’ trust. As leaders, I challenge you to establish and maintain a long-term vision of growing trust. This requires an understanding that we are in this together, a willingness to take the other person’s perspective, and a commitment to sacrifice for the good of our communities.