

Equity Resource Guide

Tools and case studies for Washington cities





Message from AWC President Kent Keel

As AWC's President, I want to commend city officials around the state for making a commitment to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in your cities. As we all know, cities are on the front lines of so many issues and it is up to us to care for our residents – all of our residents – and ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed and feel confident engaging with their government.

While many may say that racism or lack of equity isn't an issue in their communities, I challenge us all to go a little deeper. Unfortunately, we all share a history where racism has played a role in government's policy decisions. But we are not bound by that history, and we shouldn't fear it. Instead, we can embrace our role as city leaders by facing these challenges and uncomfortable conversations. We can work to ensure that all of our community members, especially those who may feel disenfranchised and underrepresented, know that we hear their voices and are committed to working on their behalf.

I am proud to be AWC's President and part of the Board of Directors that has identified and prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion as key aspects of AWC's work. AWC will continue to expand our offerings to highlight and support this important aspect of city leadership. This Equity Resource Guide is an important part of this effort.

I hope that this guide inspires you and other city leaders to think about diversity, equity, and inclusion in your community and to explore ways your city can do more to make sure every resident feels heard, valued, and empowered to participate fully in their community.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "K Keel". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Kent Keel
AWC President
Councilmember, University Place

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Introduction

Cities are the governments closest to the people and are on the front lines of community change. Residents look to their local elected officials to lead community conversations and develop policies that benefit the entire community.

As conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion come to the forefront now and in the years to come, city officials can continue to improve the communities they serve. Many city officials have listened to their communities and agree that more needs to be done to advance racial equity at the local level.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd's death at the hands of law enforcement amplified a national call for change. Cities throughout Washington state listened as their communities publicly shared painful personal stories that highlighted years of systemic racial mistreatment by public institutions.

The message is clear: Change is overdue and city officials around the state are moving their communities forward. Mayors and councilmembers are agents of change – they listen to their residents, work to translate community concerns into actionable policy ideas, then collaborate to find solutions.

Now is the time to look inward at local policies and systems to identify how to reverse the enduring trend of unjust treatment of communities of color. Our city leaders acknowledge that racism and inequity exist in our communities, governments, and institutions. Thus, cities support policy changes that work to eliminate systemic racism, inequity, and other disparities to build stronger and more inclusive communities.

Solutions to inequities can be as unique and diverse as our community members who have been historically excluded from full societal benefits and participation. This resource guide outlines policy opportunities and intentional actions that cities can use to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for all residents.

A diverse community includes a wide variety of perspectives and lived experiences, and those differences enrich the character of the broader community.

What does diversity, equity, and inclusion mean?

Conversations addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion are often emotionally charged. It is important to have a meaningful, shared understanding of each term in the collective phrase of DEI.

Diversity refers to the state of being different. Specifically, how a group of people differ from one another rather than how they are similar to one another. Diverse groups can vary in race, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, socioeconomic status, and more.

It is important to note that an individual person is not diverse, only groups of people can be diverse.

Equity is defined by the Washington State Office of Equity as the process of developing, strengthening, and supporting policies and procedures that distribute and prioritize resources to those who have been historically and currently marginalized.

Equity-centered practices thus give considerable attention and resources to low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.



What is an equity lens?

To look at a policy or program through an equity lens means to closely examine how the entire system might impact different people. An equity lens is used to analyze an existing or proposed policy and then make changes to increase positive outcomes for and inclusion of marginalized people.

Inclusion is the empathetic arm of DEI. Being inclusive means to intentionally collaborate with people from all backgrounds. It means putting aside any biases, learning who is excluded, and proactively reaching out to invite them into the group. It's what we teach kids to do on the playground, and it's relevant for adults interacting in the broader world as well. Inclusive communities create a culture of belonging for all and look for opportunities to invite and welcome everyone. The key to creating a sense of belonging is empathy—it requires desire, work, and a willingness to put yourself in someone else's shoes to understand them.

In short, DEI policies are inclusive of different people and intentionally target attention and solutions to elevate marginalized and underrepresented people and communities.



Equality-centered practices

emphasize equally distributing resources and opportunities.



Equity-centered practices

emphasize fairly distributing resources and opportunities *based on individual needs* to reach an equal outcome.



76% of Washington cities say their city has expressed a commitment to DEI.

Source: 2021 AWC City Conditions Survey, 92 city responses

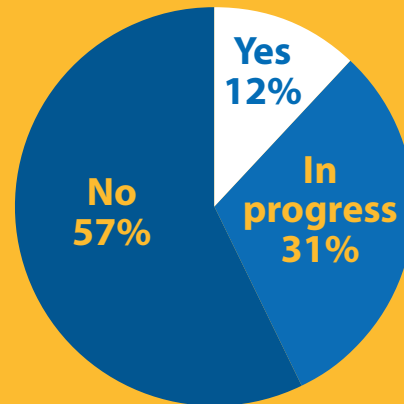
How does this work intersect with cities and towns?

We want to provide tools and resources and inspire all communities—including those that may not otherwise know where to begin. Every community has underrepresented and low-income populations who can be unintentionally left out of policies and practices. The tools and resources within this guide look at local policies through an equity lens to highlight historical disparities and provide ideas for future improvements—no matter your city's size or location.

This resource guide highlights selected policy opportunities to advance equity. It should act as an impetus to spur action under a narrow range of important city policy areas but is certainly not an exhaustive list. **To find more resources, refer to the sources and resources at the end of this publication or visit WAcities.org.**

Almost half of cities are working to develop a DEI plan.

Does your city have a DEI plan?



Source: 2021 AWC City Conditions Survey, 103 city responses

Budgeting

Use the city budget as a tool to meet your community's DEI goals

City officials know that the budget is the most powerful policy document. It outlines how to spend scarce public resources and demonstrates the city's priorities like no other policy document does. The old sayings "put your money where your mouth is" or "follow the money" ring true when it comes to your city's budget. It's always important to ask yourself, "Does this reflect the needs and priorities of our city?"

When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the same holds true. How does your city's budget reflect your community's priorities around diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Many cities have prioritized using an equity lens as part of their budgeting process to ensure community goals are met. This isn't a simple budgeting checklist, but an involved and engaged community process to identify and define what equity means to your community, determine how to measure it, and then make budgeting decisions based on desired outcomes.

This approach can change the way you look at budgeting—instead of budgeting based on departments, you might look at programs and outcomes. Instead of focusing response and spending

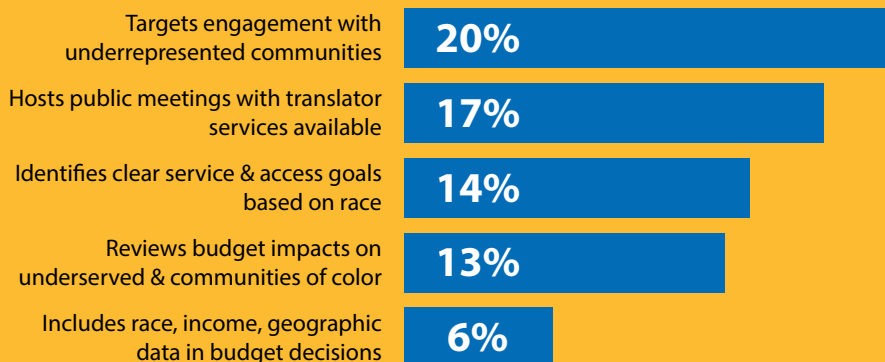
Does your city's budget document reflect the needs and priorities of your city? And how does the budget reflect your community's DEI priorities?

on a strict data set, you might look at neighborhood demographics and discover what individual neighborhoods need instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach.

Perhaps most importantly, you should address this question: Are you including diverse community voices in your budgeting process? It can be hard to get the public to engage in the budgeting process. Many of us are familiar with the experience of having only a few regulars attend our public meetings on the city budget. That just means city officials need to work a little harder to break outside the usual approach to engage the community—particularly by seeking out those who may historically be disenfranchised and feel like their voice doesn't matter.

Every city adopts a budget, so every city can use their budget as a policy tool to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. It isn't necessarily about spending more money, it's about making sure your spending aligns with your community's priorities and advances your city's equity goals.

Percentage of cities that use racial equity approaches in budgeting



Budgeting equity is an opportunity area where cities can make strides in change. Our 2021 survey found that **20%** and fewer of Washington's cities are using these select equity approaches in city budgeting.

Source: 2021 AWC City Conditions Survey, 109 city responses

Case study



Tacoma's budgeting equity lens

The City of Tacoma has used an equity lens in the budgeting process for several years. A few themes emerged from Tacoma's work:

- **Progress is iterative:** Change can take time and the process won't be perfect, but you can continue to make progress.
- **The process is community-led:** Gather data about your community, ask the community what is important (be sure to seek out diverse voices), and really listen to what they say.
- **Everyone has a role:** Leaders must demonstrate commitment, but everyone has a role in prioritizing anti-racism in the budget development process—so engage your departments and teams.

Tacoma developed an equity index that uses data to measure equity and help address inequity. The equity index is an interactive tool that visually highlights disparities in Tacoma. It uses 29 data points sorted into five categories to identify where community members are unable to access services or where services do not meet community needs. It is one of the primary tools that city staff and other decision-makers use to help ensure they are making data-informed decisions to improve access to opportunity for all community members.

Tacoma identified clear equity goals that influence the city's budgeting process:

- A workforce that reflects the community it serves
- Purposeful community outreach and engagement
- Equitable service delivery to all residents and visitors
- Support for human rights and opportunities for everyone to achieve their full potential
- Commitment to equity in policy decision-making

Budget development process



"Where do we start? Start where you are."

Councilmember Catherine Ushka, Tacoma

Tacoma incorporates some key questions into its budgeting process. Any city can use the adjacent questions as a starting place to take an equity lens to its budgeting process.

Ask intentional questions

- How does this proposal advance the city's equity goals?
- Which geographic areas do these enhancements or reductions impact?
- How will this proposal affect (negatively or positively) historically disadvantaged communities and/or underrepresented groups?
- How have you worked to mitigate negative impacts on those communities?
- Who was engaged in the development of this proposal?

Budgeting approach

Program analysis – current service levels and costs

- What do we do?
- How much does it cost?
- What is the impact of the program on priorities?

Strategic planning & council priorities

- What should we be doing better to meet strategic goals/priorities?
- What do we need to do to meet equity goals?

Proposed changes to budget

- What should we do more of?
- What should we do less of or not at all?
- What is a new program we need to offer?

Biennial budget

Source: 2021-2022 Tacoma Operating & Capital Budget

Case study



San Antonio's budgeting equity tool

The City of San Antonio, Texas, utilizes a budget equity tool to embed equity into its budgeting process.

Budgeting equity tool goals:



Analyze each department's overall approach to funding equity efforts.



Identify which programs help to advance equitable outcomes for residents.



Assess the equity impacts of budget decisions for potential benefits and burdens on communities of color and low-income communities.



Ensure that programs, projects, plans, and investments help to reduce disparities experienced by the city's most marginalized community members.

San Antonio defines key terms for everyone to work off the same understanding. Equity is defined as "fair and just opportunities and outcomes for all people." The tool asks departments to answer four questions:

1. Describe how your budget allocates funds in ways that advance racial and economic equity. Consider a global view (not program-level) in how funds are allocated to reduce or eliminate disparities and improve outcomes for low-income communities and communities of color.
2. Does this program apply an equity matrix or equity lens in the allocation of funds?
3. (If yes): What specific racial and/or economic inequities in San Antonio does this program intend to address/reduce?
4. (If yes): What metrics will the department use to evaluate or assess the program's impact on communities of color and low-income communities?

Conclusion

This section highlights the work of two larger cities that are geographically far apart from one another (Tacoma and San Antonio). But the basic approach, process, questions, and tools they use translate well for any size city anywhere in the country. A city doesn't need a lot of staff and resources to adopt an equity lens for their budget process, just a commitment to make certain that your spending priorities support your community goals for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"Advancing equity is a social and moral imperative that is everyone's job, and we have an ambitious equity initiative that involves the tough, steady work of reflection, policy revision, and universal commitments to a just and equitable future."

City Manager Erik Walsh, San Antonio

Housing

As quoted in the City of Olympia's 2021 Housing Action Plan, during a 2020 speech in Olympia, former Washington Secretary of State Ralph Munro explained that in the 1960s,

"[t]he southern states were the focus of the headlines and the [civil rights] movement... but there were also activities here that played out in a much different way. Racial barriers were high and hard to break down. Forgotten terms like 'red lining' were prevalent in almost every community. Lines drawn on the map where Negroes [sic] could live and where they could not live. The red line in Olympia was basically the city limits."

The American Planning Association's *Planning for Equity Policy Guide* says that "zoning, which is intended to separate incompatible land uses, has also been used to exclude certain population groups from single-family neighborhoods and to exclude multifamily rental housing from neighborhoods with better access to jobs, transit, and amenities." Racial segregation through zoning regulations occurred in cities nationwide from the early 1900s through the 1970s. These regulations could include the following:

- Residential designations (racially segregated zones)
- Exclusively single-family zones
- Minimum lot sizes in residential zones
- Targeted zones to site large, multifamily complexes
- Industrial zone siting

City leaders today bear no personal responsibility for what their town's founders did or did not do to contribute to racial segregation in housing. However, the time is long overdue to confront the truth of our collective past and acknowledge how it has shaped the reality of our present.

"Many of our serious national problems either originate with residential segregation or have become intractable because of it."

Richard Rothstein, author of *The Color of Law*

The first step is a willingness to learn about your city's history—how it started and grew into the neighborhoods and residents you see today. Whether your city was our state's first or last to be incorporated, look at it with fresh eyes through an equity lens.

The second step is to take action to remove and prevent barriers to housing equity.



The homeownership rate for Black Washingtonians is less than half that of whites.

Source: *Snapshot of Race and Home Buying in America*, National Association of Realtors

Policies from the past



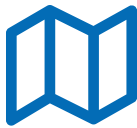
Redlining and exclusionary home mortgages

"Redlining" refers to the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) New Deal-era practice of denying mortgage insurance in areas where African American or other minority group households lived—designated in red on their maps. These areas were deemed risky investments, regardless of income level. According to the Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, in many western states this discrimination "targeted not just African Americans but also Native Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, people of Mexican ancestry, and also, at times, Jews." Effectively, this made it impossible for Black families to purchase homes or, if they attempted to own a home, required risky purchase contracts without protections afforded by conventional mortgages.



Restrictive covenants

The FHA also helped finance the construction of new subdivisions and recommended—sometimes even required—that the deeds contain racially restrictive covenants. The covenant prevented the purchase or sale of the home to African Americans and other minority groups. After such restrictions were deemed unconstitutional, the use of private agreements like community covenants continued into the early 1970s, despite their illegality. Many of these racially based covenants still exist on deeds today.



Exclusionary zoning

Throughout the country local zoning laws were used to exclude and segregate. Because a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1917 prohibited express racial segregation through zoning ordinances, Crosscut’s Josh Cohen points out that those with racist intent realized that “dictating the types of housing allowed in certain areas could serve as a stand-in for explicitly racial zoning, especially in tandem with property deeds that banned the sale of housing to non-white buyers.” The pattern of racially segregated development that was created through these past tactics continues to be seen in modern-day demographic maps.



Sundown towns

Sundown towns were all-white communities, neighborhoods, or counties that excluded African Americans and other minorities using discriminatory laws, harassment, and violence. The name derives from the posted and verbal warnings that, although African Americans may have been allowed to work or travel in a community during the daytime, they must leave by dusk. Sundown towns most often referred to the forced exclusion of African Americans; however, BlackPast specifies that the history of its use also included prohibitions against Jews, Native Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and other minority groups.

Modern practices can reinforce racial inequities



Limited housing options

There is a growing belief that expanding access to traditionally single-family neighborhoods will increase equity in housing. Some of these neighborhoods were created by the racist practices described earlier. In other cases, exclusively single-family neighborhoods reinforce inequities because they preserve significant land area for individual families. The impact of this is twofold—it limits and concentrates the options for multifamily housing into less land area, which makes building sufficient, quality multifamily housing more challenging.



Location of large multifamily residences

Another component to historical housing segregation was the common practice of only authorizing multifamily developments in minority or low-income neighborhoods. This perpetuated racial segregation by limiting the location of more cost-effective multifamily housing to certain areas of the city, those that had predominantly minority populations. This practice also continues to reinforce the myth that there is something less desirable about renters versus homeowners.



Location of amenities in relation to types of housing

Recently, experts have focused on the health and well-being benefits derived from access to opportunities—such as good schools, employment, transit, and parks and recreational facilities. Previous development patterns in some communities have fallen along racial lines. This can also be seen in city services like road maintenance and street tree canopy. Cities are working to proactively identify those trends and consider the implications for future investments using an equity lens.



Location of industrial or odorous facilities in relation to types of housing

Regrettably, the siting and location of pollution sources and environmentally unsafe facilities also has racial underpinnings. In 1995, the Washington State Department of Ecology published a study that showed low-

income populations and communities of color are disproportionately burdened by contaminated sites and facilities that are regulated by the government. In 2017, state and environmental justice stakeholders released the Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map to provide data to help inform these siting decisions (see *Sources Chapter 2 – Housing*).

Actions that build toward housing equity



Community land trusts

Community land trusts (CLTs) have their roots in creating racial equity. The first attempt near Albany, Georgia, in 1969 was intended to create a pathway for Black wealth creation and property ownership. Author Tasha Harmon wrote, “Community land trusts can play key roles in integrating strategies for increasing social and economic equity into smart growth efforts. Those roles include the stewardship of land to meet affordable housing and other community needs, the revitalization of economically distressed areas without the displacement of existing residents, the creation of affordable housing in areas where it has traditionally been excluded, and advocacy for public policies that make the creation of diverse, affordable housing central to growth management.”

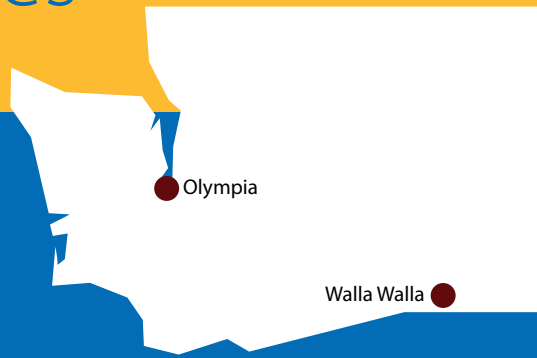


Equity in housing planning

To discover whether your comprehensive plan delivers on housing equity, here are some questions to explore:

- Does your plan acknowledge and address impediments to fair housing?
- How does your housing comprehensive plan acknowledge and address gaps in choice, place, and opportunity?
- Does your plan use a housing cost burden analysis that incorporates cost of transportation to employment opportunities and goods and services?
- How is existing land use categorized? Do people of color and immigrant community stakeholders participate in making those designations?
- Are redevelopment opportunities intended for people who currently live here—or for others?
- Are all cultures accounted for in future density determinations? What are the implications?

Case studies



Olympia's Housing Action Plan

Olympia's approach uses equity as an overarching theme of its Housing Action Plan, rather than breaking out the topic as one discrete element. The city's plan also includes a section that addresses:

- Equity in housing affordability;
- Redlining practices;
- Racial covenants; and
- Discussion of Olympia's history of segregation.

Walla Walla's single-family zoning reforms

In 2018, the City of Walla Walla eliminated single-family only zoning. In its place, the city created a Neighborhood Residential Zone—a low-density zone that allows:

- A wider variety of land uses;
- Reduced parking requirements; and
- More flexible accessory dwelling unit regulations.

Walla Walla's Municipal Code states that the "Neighborhood Residential Zone is intended to provide for a variety of housing types such as single-family residential up to fourplexes, townhomes, cottage housing, and tiny homes that are compatible with the neighborhood characteristic."

Transportation & infrastructure

A robust transportation system is a key economic development tool for cities—it provides access to opportunities such as employment, education, healthcare, and commerce. However, access to public transportation systems is often not equitable for all users. Most transportation systems were designed to be automobile-centric and consequentially, leave low-income individuals, seniors, and people with disabilities behind to walk, bike, rely on public transit systems, or remain stranded in a transit desert.

Economists Pieter A. Gautier and Yves Zenou explain that these inequities can be more disparately seen in communities of color where wealth gaps “between people of color and non-Hispanic whites make it easier for white residents to purchase a car, giving them increased access to jobs and subsequent higher employment rates.”

Transportation inequities are often compounded by cities’ need to balance other competing demands with limited resources. Despite these challenges, several cities have started incorporating transportation equity into their planning—noting that transportation is key in addressing and reducing disparities and building an inclusive economy.



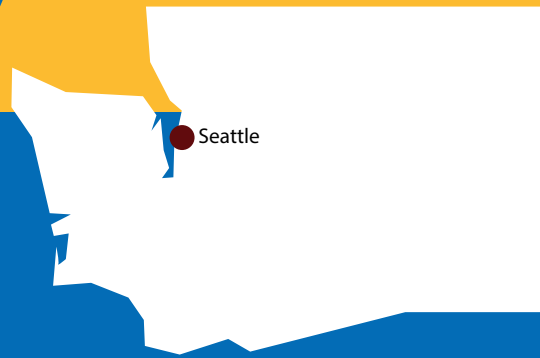
44%
of cities

use or are considering
using an equity lens
on local transportation
policies.

Source: 2021 AWC City Conditions
Survey, 81 city responses



Case study

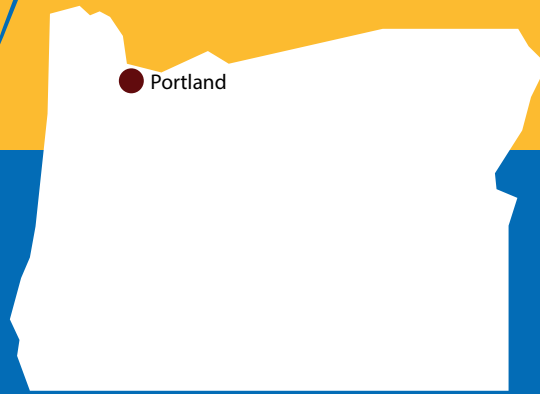


Seattle's Transportation Equity Program

The Seattle Department of Transportation established the Transportation Equity Program (TEP) in 2017 to provide "safe, environmentally sustainable, accessible, and affordable transportation options that support BIPOC and vulnerable populations to thrive in vibrant and healthy communities and mitigate racial disparities and the effects of displacement." The TEP subsequently developed several programs aimed at addressing disparities within the transportation system, including:

- Low-income transit access;
- Youth ORCA (One Regional Card for All), a contactless smart card system for public transit in the Puget Sound region;
- Vehicle license rebate programs;
- Community conversations; and
- An ambassador program.

Case study



Portland's transportation equity model

Portland, Oregon, was early to incorporate transportation equity into its capital improvement projects. The city created an equity matrix using three demographic variables (race, income, and limited English proficiency) to prioritize actions in areas that fall outside the citywide averages for the three demographic variables.

As a result, the city focused extra effort on the Rose Lane Project, which centers BIPOC communities to help ensure they have comparable commute times to white communities. They compared transportation costs with area median income and provided a rapid and reliable choice for daily transportation.

Portland is committed to improving equity using better data collection and system monitoring, as well as investing in long-term partnerships with community-based and BIPOC-focused organizations. Portland's equity matrix and community-centered decisions have become successful models for other cities including Tigard, Oregon.

Measuring transportation equity outcomes

Transportation equity can be difficult to measure, partly because there is no single method for evaluating it. When measuring equity outcomes, cities should consider the area's specific needs and priorities through robust community engagement. According to the Urban Institute's study *Access to Opportunity through Equitable Transportation*, most cities agree that five common areas pose the largest challenges:

1. Equity across modes
2. Quality transportation infrastructure and experience across modes
3. Varied needs across the region
4. Disparities in resident health outcomes
5. Environmental sustainability

The Victoria Transport Policy Institute in British Columbia also developed guidance for incorporating distributional impacts in transportation planning. Its research identified three types of equity:



Horizontal equity: "Also called fairness and egalitarianism. Equal individuals and groups should be treated the same in the distribution of resources/benefits and costs. Meaning that public policies should avoid favoring one individual or group over others."



Vertical equity—Income and social class: "Also called social justice, environmental justice, and social inclusion. Transport policies are equitable if they favor economically and socially disadvantaged groups to account for overall inequities."



Vertical equity—Mobility need and ability: "The distribution of impacts between individuals and groups that differ in mobility ability and need, and therefore the degree to which the transportation system meets the needs of travelers with mobility impairments."

Accordingly, these equity categories often overlap or conflict with one another. Therefore, city leaders need to evaluate the trade-offs between different equity objectives and balance the needs of their community.

Examples of equity outcomes

Horizontal equity	Vertical equity—Income & social class	Vertical equity—Mobility need & ability
All groups receive comparable shares of public investment and resources	Affordable modes are favored over expensive modes	Universal design (transport system accommodates people with disabilities and other special needs)
External costs are minimized and compensated	Low-income residents can access basic services and activities	Basic accessibility (disadvantaged groups can access basic services and activities)
All groups are effectively involved in decision-making	Low-income travelers receive price discounts or exemptions	Special policies and programs support and protect disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, youths, minorities, etc.)

Source: *Evaluating Transportation Equity*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute

Using an equity lens on local transportation policy

As cities begin incorporating equity analysis into their transportation policies and projects, it's important to include an equity lens. Investment in transportation systems can reduce disparities and increase opportunities for job accessibility, healthcare options, education, and more. The Urban Institute recommends six steps to achieve equitable transportation goals:



Metro regions need to define transportation equity in partnership with historically excluded residents.



Transportation departments need dedicated funding sources to allow for equitable and innovative transportation decisions.



Transportation decisions need to include meaningful community engagement with low-income and other historically excluded residents.



Local land use, zoning, and housing agencies must coordinate to ensure that transportation investments increase equity, rather than exacerbate disparities.



Land use planning (particularly relating to housing) must keep equity as a guiding principle to make equitable transportation feasible.



Cities should collect better data to track transportation equity and work with partners to create tools to help them make transportation decisions with equity as a

key consideration.

Approaches to broadband equity—Community broadband & hot spots

After water, gas, and electricity, broadband has quickly become the fourth utility, serving as the backbone of many essential services including healthcare, education, and commerce. However, many city and town residents still struggle to access reliable internet. According to the National League of Cities (NLC), of those households, “low-income residents and residents of color are still less likely to have reliable access to high-quality, in-home connections and enabling technology.”

This digital divide—between low-income residents, residents of color, and white residents—is a problem that persists beyond access to a router or ethernet port. Indeed, the digital divide is an extension of the redlining practice in housing development (see *previous Housing chapter*). Not only were low-income communities and communities of color denied access to home loans, but the neighborhoods in which these residents were sequestered lacked essential facilities—including basic infrastructure.

This practice of redlining has reinvented itself in the digital age: large broadband providers often focus their investments on wealthier parts of cities, in part because the for-profit service providers are looking for a return on their investment. As a result, poorer communities and communities of color are left without basic broadband infrastructure, and consequently, are denied ever-more crucial access to educational services, telehealth care, economic opportunities, and basic public goods and services.

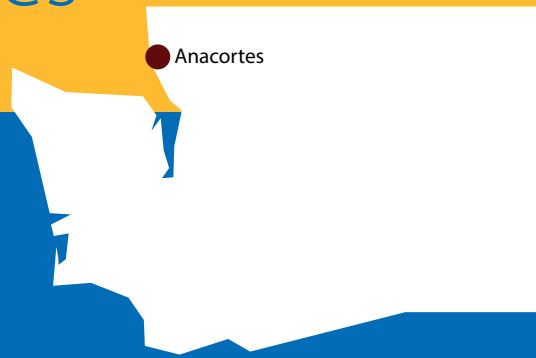
Municipal officials have known for years that addressing the digital divide is imperative to the success of their cities, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need to center broadband as a top priority.

COVID-19 & broadband

Prior to COVID-19, community broadband acted as the tool in several cities to provide reliable, high-speed internet to residents. But community broadband is not the only tool being used by cities. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities began providing vouchers, subsidies, and hot spots for residents with limited or no access to high-speed broadband.

The pandemic also highlighted significant racial inequities and lack of digital access. Without access to broadband, people are unable to work or attend virtual doctor appointments, and children are unable to attend classes—falling far behind their wealthier white peers.

Case studies



Anacortes explores broadband service options

In 2014, the City of Anacortes began exploring alternate broadband service options after several disappointing conversations with incumbent providers. In 2019, with significant buy-in from residents, the city launched its own broadband network, Access Anacortes Fiber Internet, providing service to more than 500 customers.

Similarly, cities including Denver, Colorado, and Chicago, Illinois, have voted to either allow or pursue community broadband. NLC writes that many cities know “community broadband can ensure coverage in underserved or unserved parts of the community where internet service providers have determined it is not cost-effective to build their networks.”



Sacramento launches digital equity program

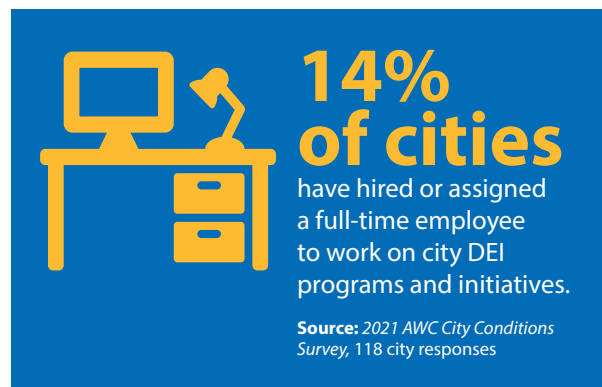
Partnering with United Way California Capital Region, the City of Sacramento launched a Digital Equity Response program to offer free broadband access to 10,000 households and 1,000 individuals and families (with emphasis on low-income households with seniors and children) with computers or hot spots at no cost. The program also provides digital literacy training and community outreach. Sacramento is also working to close the digital divide by partnering with Verizon to offer free internet in 27 city parks so that visitors can access free Wi-Fi during park hours.

Access to reliable broadband is a racial and social justice issue. NLC writes, “Not only does broadband serve as the foundation of the economy, encouraging entrepreneurship and fostering small business growth, but it also increases the quality of life for those with access.” City officials can bridge the digital divide by adopting an equity plan that identifies community needs and uses tools such as community broadband, free Wi-Fi hot spots, and skills training.

Human resources

One important goal of democracy is to have a government that reflects the community it serves. This enables the community's wisdom to make government more effective, more responsive to peoples' needs, and ultimately to closely match services to the people who make up the community. As such, it's important that a city's workforce also reflects the community that lives there.

Beyond promoting equity and inclusion because it's the right thing to do, there are also practical reasons to develop a diverse and inclusive city workforce. Public trust is key among these. The public will have more buy-in on city initiatives and more stake in the city's outcomes if the workforce closely represents them. Diverse workforces can help identify and understand local issues, then implement thoughtful and creative solutions to address those issues. Promoting a diverse workforce also broadens the applicant pool and gives cities a wider range of talent to draw from when filling open positions.

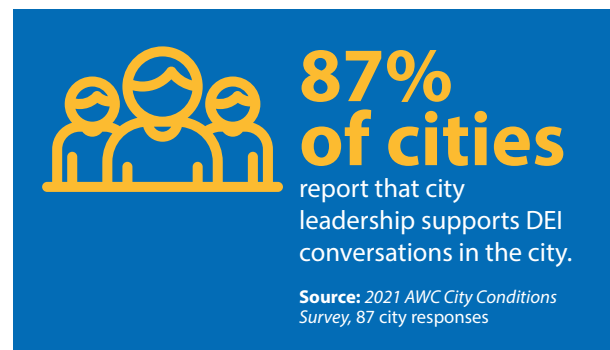


To build a city government that looks more like the community, cities should make a purposeful effort to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for all people who make up its workforce population. For myriad historical, social, and economic reasons, different groups of people have been excluded (both intentionally and unintentionally) from careers in city government. For some, intention to discriminate has been the cause. For others, unconscious bias in recruitment and hiring has been to blame. And in many cases, historical and societal disparities in economic standing, education, and opportunities

to gain skills and experience have exacerbated the systemic exclusion of marginalized groups. As a result, a city's workforce may not be as diverse or inclusive as it could and should be—and it takes deliberate effort on the part of the city and its HR department to make lasting changes.



Every effort to improve diversity in your city workforce takes intentional leadership from the top. Your city's leadership must first take an active role in improving DEI—because leadership sets the city's tone and affirms the commitment to enhance and diversify its workforce. City leaders should look to clearly and specifically define why they want to improve DEI in their workforce and set clear goals and expectations for their DEI efforts. Leaders should be ready to monitor progress so they can continue with efforts that are getting results and make changes where necessary. To succeed, DEI programs require accountability at all levels of an organization.



Ideas to enhance a city's recruitment applicant pool:

- Advertise the open position with specific professional and minority-servicing organizations
- Ask for candidate references from above-mentioned partner organizations
- Include messaging about how the position helps underrepresented populations
- Refer to the city's affirmative action policies in the job posting or advertisement
- Increase city staff outreach and relationship-building in underrepresented communities
- Build and maintain a file of diverse potential candidates, even when not actively recruiting for a specific position

A city can make intentional efforts to increase diversity in its workforce in a variety of ways. One of the most important is changing hiring practices to offer more opportunities to a more diverse pool of applicants. Several cities in Washington are already implementing these types of programs to diversify their hiring.

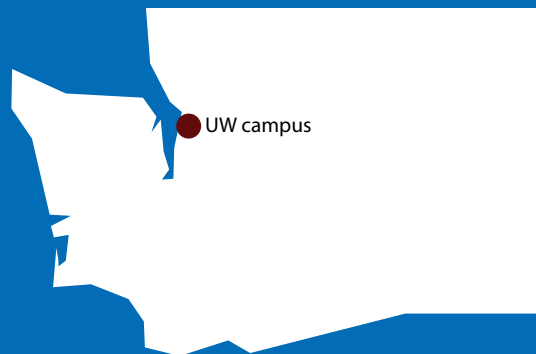


Case studies



Tacoma targets recruitment to underrepresented communities

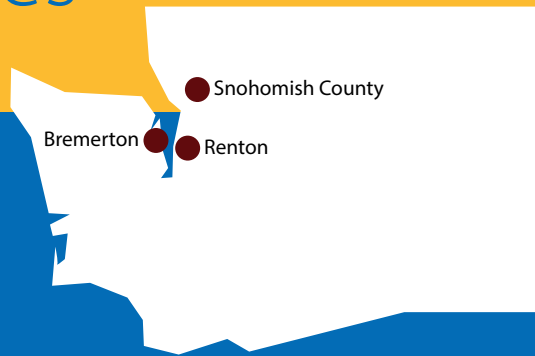
One way to build a diverse city workforce is to intentionally build diverse applicant pools when hiring new employees. The City of Tacoma applies an equity lens throughout its recruitment, hiring, and employee retention process. Tacoma focuses recruitment efforts in communities that are underrepresented in the city's workforce. The city collects representation data through each city department's Equal Employment Opportunity Officers, which is used to determine where recruitment efforts should be targeted. If the applicant pool is not sufficiently diverse, hiring managers consult with Tacoma's HR department and its Equal Employment Opportunity Officers to implement strategies for recruiting a more diverse applicant pool, including reopening recruitment to allow more time for applicants from underrepresented communities. Tacoma's Handbook for Recruitment and Hiring includes checklists for each stage of the hiring process to help hiring managers and staff stay on track and accountable to achieve DEI goals for recruitment across city government.



University of Washington removes unnecessary qualifications from job descriptions

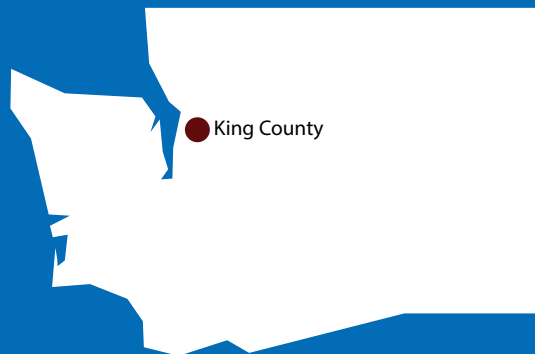
Many employers acknowledge that arbitrarily high credential or experience requirements can discourage otherwise qualified candidates from applying. And in many cases, it does not produce applicants that are more qualified for the position. Such requirements can also narrow an applicant pool and result in a less diverse field of candidates who could otherwise do the job well. The University of Washington implemented a process to discourage listing advanced degrees as a "desired" job requirement unless the extra credential is absolutely necessary to the job. UW also drafts job descriptions to account for alternative "competencies, transferrable skills, and equivalent experience" instead of a narrow and specific set of qualifications. They also discourage basing a job description on the "ideal" (and likely nonexistent) candidate or basing the minimum experience requirements on the previous incumbent, since that type of experience may not be needed to do the job and certain stringent requirements would narrow the applicant pool for no good reason.

Case studies



Local governments review job descriptions for inclusion

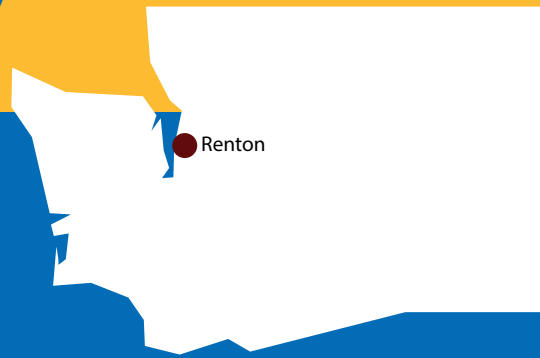
Some local governments like Renton, Bremerton, and Snohomish County regularly review their job classifications and descriptions to set education and experience requirements that are necessary to do the job but not so arbitrarily high that they lock out a diverse pool of applicants.



King County's unconscious bias and inclusion training for HR and hiring staff

Awareness of and adjustment for unconscious bias are critical part of implementing DEI principles in a city's hiring process. One way to ensure a more diverse city workforce is to adequately train hiring managers and other city staff to counteract their own implicit and unconscious bias as they review candidates. King County's Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Plan requires that county staff involved in hiring processes receive "countering bias" training to help identify and eliminate their own biases as they prepare job descriptions, review applications, and interview candidates. The county's Department of Public Health requires every interview panelist to complete a short countering bias training prior to conducting a job interview. Hiring managers develop diverse interview panels and wait to discuss candidates until all interviews are completed. This helps the department avoid drawing conclusions about the candidates until they have given all candidates a fair chance to interview.

Case study



City of Renton

Anonymous application review

Some cities have adopted anonymous application reviews to avoid unintentional implicit bias in the candidate screening process. Renton collects and analyzes data on applicants as they move through the process and removes a candidate's name (replaced by a number), gender, and ethnicity before screening and scheduling for department interviews. The hiring manager can then screen applicants based solely on their qualifications and avoid ruling out applications due to implicit bias that might unintentionally occur if personal information was included. Renton's 2021 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tactical Plan found a 133% increase in the number of interviews granted to African American job candidates from 2017-2019 using this method.

Renton's 2021 Tactical Plan does say that the city saw a decrease in applicants from some other ethnic groups and genders after implementing this screening method during the 2017-19 period, but the city thinks these are short-term aberrations likely caused by other factors not related to the new screening process. The city's preliminary data from 2020 suggests an increase in applicants of all ethnic backgrounds making it through screening, and the city expects this to be the long-term trend.

Transparency in hiring process

Another way to help diversity in hiring is to include more process transparency for prospective job candidates. This can give candidates an upfront understanding of what will be required of them so they have the best opportunity to advance in the recruitment process. It can help more applicants get job consideration based on their credentials, experience, and fit for the job, rather than on more subjective measures like inexperience in interviews.

Renton's 2021 Tactical Plan says the city has added information to job recruitments about the application and interview process. That way applicants know up front what is required of them and how the hiring process works from start to finish. Renton's Career Center page includes specific information on how to submit an application, where to reach out for questions, how applications are reviewed, how the interview process works, interview tips, and where and why background checks fit into the process.

Criminal justice

The death of George Floyd galvanized communities across the country and renewed focus on the role of racism in policing and our criminal justice systems.

According to the NAACP's criminal justice fact sheet:

65%
of Black adults
have felt targeted because of their race.

35%
of Latino and Asian adults
have felt targeted because of their race.

This feeling is reflected in state and federal incarceration rates. While the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics shows an overall decrease in the incarceration rate of Black and Latino individuals, in 2018:



Black males were imprisoned at rates
5.8 times
higher than white males.



Black females were imprisoned at rates
1.8 times
higher than white females.

Perception is important when it comes to public trust in the criminal justice system. According to a Pew Research Center 2019 survey:

- **84% of Black adults** say police treat white people better than Black people;
 - **63% of white adults** agree.
- **87% of Black adults** say the U.S. criminal justice system is more unjust towards Black people;
 - **61% of white adults** agree.

Criminal justice and cities

The criminal justice system intersects with cities in various ways. Many cities oversee police departments, operate jail facilities, and handle court proceedings. As with other city operations, racial discrimination is evident throughout the criminal justice system.

While the protests during the summer of 2020 spurred further community action, many communities had already been working to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in their policing programs and criminal justice systems. City leaders can learn from the cities that have already taken important steps, including using an equity lens to examine their local criminal justice systems.

A recent article in *Police Chief Magazine* stated that more transparency and accountability in policing directly impacts the community-police relationship. The article highlighted recommendations to implement change including:

- Conduct an internal climate assessment to determine the status of agency and organizational climate.
- Conduct audits on police reports, incident reports, and other documentation to ensure compliance with department standards and policies.
- Evaluate, revise, improve, and update existing department use-of-force models and ensure officers are receiving the best training possible.
- Update de-escalation training.
- Enforce zero-tolerance plans for those who do not follow updated policies.
- Properly train leadership on equity, inclusion, and diversity and updated policies.
- Enhance officer training on diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Many local police departments have long valued community engagement because they understand it is crucial to building a positive and trusting relationship. Listening to residents and engaging with community members—especially those from underrepresented communities and people of color—is the foundation of successful policing. Cities frequently adopt a community advisory board model to help with those efforts. Read the next chapter on community engagement for more ideas.

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing created 2015 recommendations to improve engagement and trust between the community and police:

- Create listening opportunities with the community
- Review and update policies
- Collect data and begin trainings on use of force
- Engage community members and police labor unions in the process
- Increase transparency with the community
- Examine hiring practices and ways to involve the community in recruiting
- Recognize and holistically address the root causes of crime
- Allocate resources for implementation

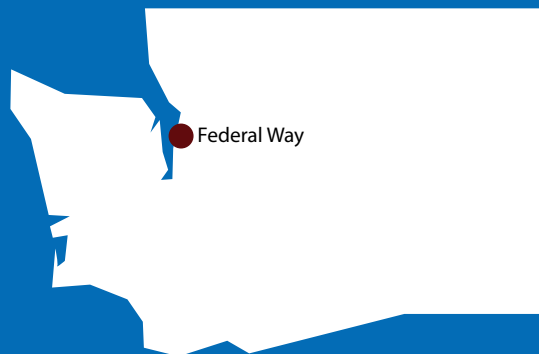
Case studies



Spokane's community outreach between youth and police

If you visit a Spokane park, you might spot some of Spokane's police officers playing basketball or soccer with local youth. Since 2013, the Spokane Police Department has partnered with Spokane Public Schools and the Spokane Parks Department to host the Police Activities League (PAL). Each summer, police officers take part in fun, structured activities with youth from all backgrounds and parts of the community with the goals of preventing crime, reducing drug and gang involvement, and helping youth make positive decisions. The program focuses on five core values: honesty, integrity, leadership, sportsmanship, and respect.

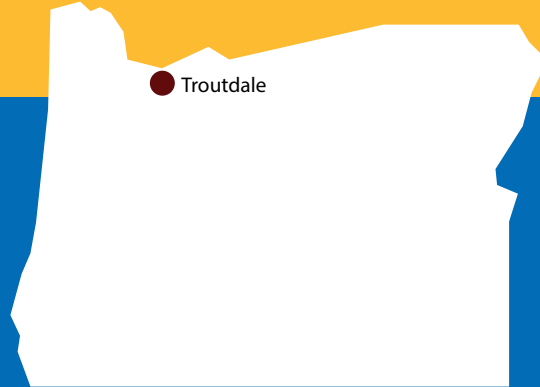
In addition to the PAL program, in 2015 the Spokane Police Department adopted a community outreach strategy. The document outlines a comprehensive plan for identifying and partnering with a variety of community groups, as well as increasing transparency and reducing recidivism. The success of the program has earned Spokane national acclaim, including being asked to speak at the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.



Federal Way's community-led police advisory group

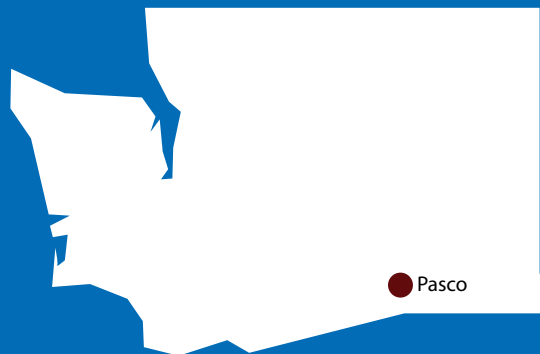
In 2005, a group of community members met with the Federal Way Police Chief to discuss issues impacting the community and policing. Together they announced that they would form a citizen's advisory group called "Chief's Call." The group meets quarterly at the police department to express concerns, give opinions about emerging national issues, speak to department training and policies, and provide insights into the Federal Way community. As needed, this group provides recommendations and suggestions to the Federal Way Police Chief.

Case studies



Troutdale's Public Safety and Equity Advisory Committee

The City of Troutdale, Oregon, contracts with Multnomah County for its police services. The city's Public Safety and Equity Advisory Committee (PSEAC) makes public safety recommendations to the city's elected and appointed officials to inform policies around law enforcement, fire, and medical services. The committee helps ensure that provided public services account for equity, regardless of a person's race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age, disability, and other classes protected under Oregon statutes. The PSEAC is not charged with reviewing use-of-force complaints or resident complaints against public safety personnel.



Pasco's Citizen Advisory Committee

Pasco's advisory committee meets monthly to review police policies and provide input regarding police services, training for officers and civilians, and educating residents about their role in a community-based philosophy. This committee reports to the Chief of Police and is advisory only. Pasco's police department also has a Citizen Academy that introduces community members to the department. They were one of the first departments to offer a citizen academy in Spanish.

DEI in courts

When using the term *criminal justice*, many people think first of law enforcement and policing; however, the court system plays a major role in the criminal justice system in our communities. Many cities are responsible for prosecution and funding municipal courts that adjudicate misdemeanor level crimes.

It is critical that courts aren't overlooked when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. The Washington Supreme Court created the Washington State Minority and Justice Commission in 1990, acknowledging the continuing need to identify and eradicate the effects of racial, ethnic, and cultural bias in our state court system.

Conclusion

During the 2021 legislative session, the Legislature passed a variety of new laws impacting policing, including limiting some tactics and military-style equipment and redefining police use of force. These laws significantly change how policing is conducted in Washington. Law enforcement departments and personnel should continue training and support as they work to adopt and implement new practices and policies. City leaders are crucial partners in this process, providing support and being a key conduit in community engagement efforts.



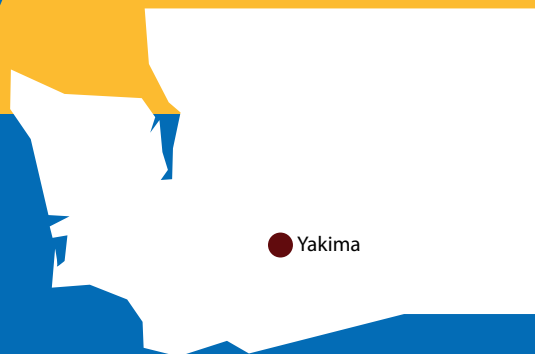
Access to democracy

The Washington Voting Rights Act

The Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA) was introduced and passed during the 2018 legislative session. The goal of the law is to ensure that members of a protected class have equal access or opportunity to elect their candidates of choice when their vote is diluted into an at-large or district-based election system. The WVRA provides members of a protected class a way to bring legal action against a jurisdiction that may be in violation of the law.

Per the WVRA, a protected class includes voters who are members of a race, color, or language minority group. Only cities and towns with fewer than 1,000 residents are exempt from being sued for violations of the WVRA.

Case study



Yakima's district-based elections increase demographic representation

The City of Yakima has a Latino population of more than 40%. However, as of 2014, no Latino person had ever been elected to the city council. In 2014, Yakima switched from an at-large election system to district-based elections. These districts were chosen to reflect the demographics of the city as a whole. In 2015, the first year the city voted under the new district model, three Latinas were elected to the city council.

How it works

Under the WVRA, a resident may approach the city to notify them of an intent to challenge the current election system. Residents who approach the city are required to describe the alleged violations of the WVRA and present possible remedies. Once the allegations are brought forward, the city and residents bringing forward the violation must work in good faith to implement a remedy that addresses the violation. As the city crafts a remedy, it must consider electoral data, demographic data, and any other relevant data.

If the city fails to adopt a remedy within 90 days of receiving the resident's notice, the resident may file action against the city.

What is key under WVRA is that a protected class does not have to be geographically compact or concentrated to constitute a majority within a city. Additionally, intent to discriminate against a protected class is not required to show a violation of the act. Depending on the outcome of the case, a city may be required to implement a court-ordered remedy. If the local jurisdiction adopts a court-approved remedy, no legal action may be brought against the local jurisdiction for four years.

Additionally, under the WVRA, cities that conduct district-based elections are required to prepare a redistricting plan within eight months of receiving federal census data. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the passage of **SB 5013** in 2021, cities will have additional time to prepare their redistricting plans for the 2023 elections.

Community engagement

Community engagement is an important initial step to help achieve more equitable results in city policies and programs.

Cities should:

- Engage with impacted communities and underrepresented groups
- Identify and reduce barriers to engagement
- Create deliberate plans for outreach

Where to begin?

Many cities seek guidance on where and how to begin important community conversations about creating greater diversity and equity in city services. We encourage cities to ponder the following questions and considerations as a starting place while you navigate the emotional—and at times uncomfortable—topics.

Notice

- By voter in jurisdiction
- Identify protected class
- Violation due to polarized voting and vote dilution or limiting of voting rights
- Propose type of remedy

Remedy

- 180 days (then voter can file suit)
- 90 days after July 2021
- Promptly make notice public
- Work in good faith
- Adopted

Court

- Court ordered approval
- Facts and inferences favorable to voter
- Rebuttable presumption of invalid remedy

Key questions about community engagement

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) says that community engagement is a key component in addressing local equity issues in city policies.

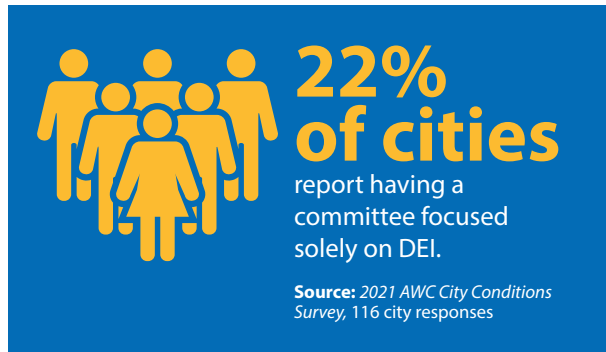
“Involving communities impacted by a topic, engaging the community throughout all phases of a project, and maintaining clear and transparent communication as the policy or program is implemented will help produce more racially equitable results.”

GARE recommends involving stakeholders in the process and starting with these key questions about community engagement:

- Who are the most affected community members who are concerned with or have experience related to this proposal?
- How have you involved these community members in the development of this proposal?
- What has your engagement process told you about the burdens or benefits for different groups?
- What has your engagement process told you about the factors that produce or perpetuate racial inequity related to this proposal?

The report recommends engagement strategies that go beyond the traditional methods for public outreach. Use the following strategies to help increase trust in the process and reduce participation barriers:

- Use some small-group processes in outreach.
- Find a transparent way of incorporating results.
- Vary methods of feedback in large groups beyond public comments to include handheld devices, surveys, appropriate language materials, and translation.
- Use trusted advocates and community leaders as liaisons to collect information from communities that you know are typically underrepresented in public processes.



Who should be at the table?

One way to inform your conversations and provide credibility to your efforts is to include community stakeholders at your table—including people who have lived experiences as people of color. The most well-meaning and empathetic perspectives cannot make up for the *lived experiences* of members of communities of color.

If this statement causes doubt, ask yourself a simple question: Could you truly comprehend the experience of becoming a parent? If you are a parent, could you have been told what that experience would mean to you and your life? It's likely that you had to live it to fully understand and experience it. Thus, how can we truly discuss racism and equity without hearing from the people who have lived it?

The lived experience of people of color brings awareness and accountability that your conversations and work will not otherwise have. Your community conversations should include:

- A collaborative approach including many voices with varied lived experiences
- Community leaders holding broad discussions
- Community-led direction
- A knowledgeable facilitator
- A narrow range of topics per conversation
- Breakout groups

Decide what you believe in as a group

Start with a group conversation to identify your shared values—and build from that to develop a racial equity approach. Any tools can be customized if there is prior agreement on shared values. If a group starts to lose its way or the conversation becomes contentious, you can always refer back to your shared values.

Shared values will anchor any discussion about strategies, services, or business models. As a group, does everyone agree that a particular value is shared, or should it be removed from the list? Ask people in the group to describe what each value looks like and means to them. Set agreed-upon terms. For example:

- Equity means fairness.
- Diversity means accepting differences.
- Inclusion means a voice for all.

The goal is to create fairness while respecting differences and providing a voice for all. You as a city leader are trying to create a platform for cities to launch from. Conversations about approach, needs, objectives, and deliverables may be different, but the values are agreed on by everyone in attendance.

Facing resistance – Why do we need to do this? Our community is fine!

A city or county may appear homogenous, but Washington state is not. This conversation needs to happen in every community, in every organization, at every level. Start with internal staff, then move to your council, then your community. Cities are agents of change and are often the first stop for new policies and approaches to governing. Mayors and city councilmembers are leaders who can effect real change with impacts across the state and nation.

As your conversations progress about how to build greater equity and diversity, it is important to build in measures for accountability. If you are addressing court access, you will want to ask the court user. If you are addressing law enforcement engagement with people of color, ask members of that community for their perspective.

How can we turn a conversation into action?

Your city should continue to welcome open dialogue and promote shared interests in creating equity. But you should also demonstrate that your city is invested in change beyond conversations. Try these actionable ideas:



Use your city's podcast or engage with popular local podcasts to spotlight experiences from real people on an ongoing basis.



Set up quarterly meetings with mayors and leaders of minority communities.



Show buy-in. This is not meant to be a single report or just a conversation, this is change. You need to show ongoing commitment. Real change does not come from a one-and-done project.

Cities are powerful agents of change. Mayors and councilmembers should embrace their power and take responsibility for educating themselves first, then work with the community. Gain confidence through education and conversation and begin to personally connect and increase your credibility with communities of color.

Community engagement checklist

- ✓ **Start internally.**
 - ✓ Ask: What are we trying to accomplish?
 - ✓ Ask: Where are we trying to go?
 - ✓ Ask: What does a diverse and inclusive community look like?
- ✓ **Consider hosting a smaller internal conversation or workshop with a facilitator first. Then apply lessons learned going forward externally.**
- ✓ **Move the conversation externally.**
 - ✓ Ask: What does a more diverse workplace, community, city, and state look like?
- ✓ **Look for people who can help communicate with community members who may resist change or feel unsure of how to move forward.**
- ✓ **Take a step back and gain perspective before taking targeted steps forward.**
- ✓ **Don't go alone—partner with other city organizations that are more diverse and have worked on enhancing racial diversity, equity, and inclusion.**
- ✓ **Pool resources and hire a facilitator to host several smaller cities at once.**
- ✓ **Do what you need to—offer incentives to get people to the table.**

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