



**King County**

**Making Racial Equity Tools Effective**  
**Lessons Learned from the Evolution of**  
**King County's Equity & Social Justice Work**

Governing for Racial Equity Conference

December 14, 2012

The arc of history is long, but it bends  
towards justice.



*Truth Crushed to the Earth Will Rise Again* by Linda Beaumont

Image of the 1963 March on Washington, King County Courthouse lobby floor.

# Foundations & Evolution

1986: Proposal to change the namesake of King County from William de Vane King to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

2005: Washington State legally changes the County's namesake.

2007: King County adopts a policy framework for public health with a strong social justice focus

2008: Launch of Equity & Social Justice Initiative

2009: Development of King County Strategic Plan

# Integrated: King County Strategic Plan

2010: Adoption of the King County Strategic Plan

2010-2014: Working Together for One King County

ESJ Principles are embedded throughout the Plan:

- Vision: A diverse and dynamic community with a healthy economy and environment where all people and businesses have the opportunity to thrive.
- Guiding Principles include “Fair and Just”: We serve all residents of King County by promoting fairness and opportunity and eliminating inequities.

# Intentional: Ordinance 16948

AN ORDINANCE establishing definitions and directing implementation steps related to the fair and just principle of the...countywide strategic plan.

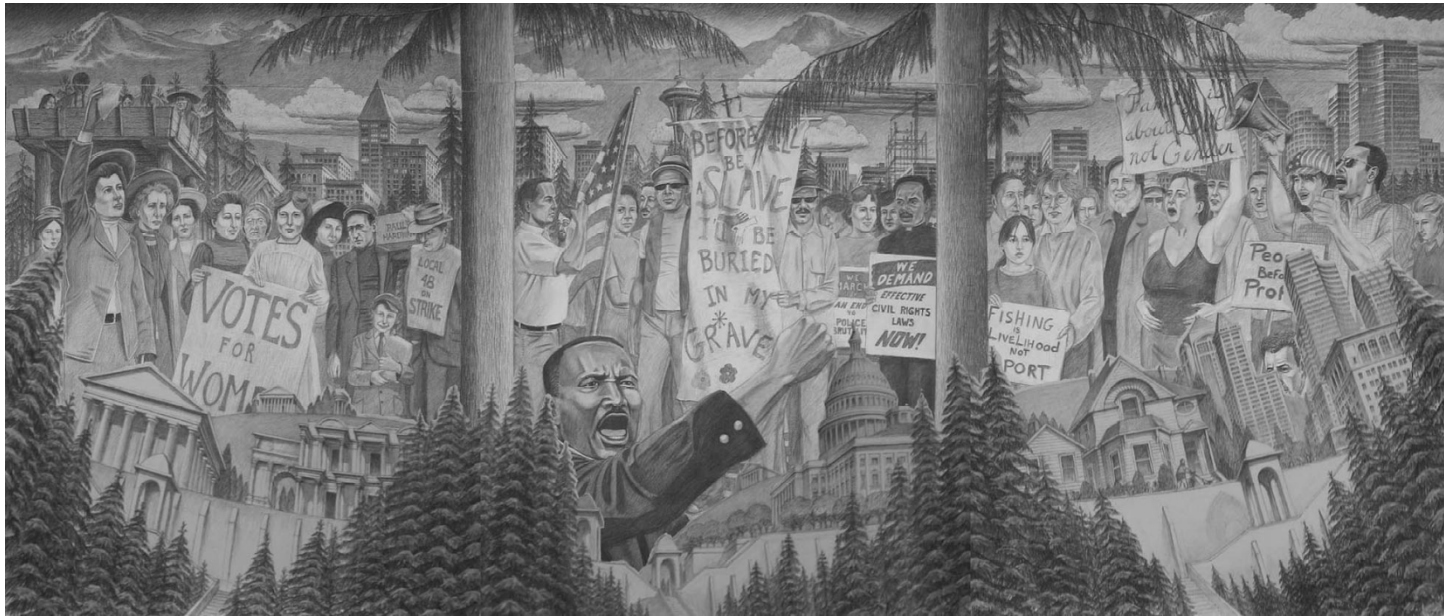
- Integrate ESJ practices into the County's actions, plans, management systems, and budgets.
- Create an inter-branch team to:
  - Facilitate information sharing and accountability for annual agency commitments
  - Improve fairness in countywide practices
  - Develop tools and resources to inform decision-making and community engagement
- Report annually on ESJ measures and results.

# Lessons Learned

## Making Racial Equity Approaches Effective

# Build on Your Unique Strengths

We can't have every county rename themselves in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King.



*Fair Distribution of Wealth* by Douglas Cooper  
King County Courthouse Lobby wall mural

Health → Equity

Language is Important

Health Disparities → Equity & Social Justice

Health Dept → All Departments

Equity & Social Justice → Fairness & Opportunity

Broadens the audience even further

We are still evolving.



Individual → Institutional → Structural

Talking about Race Right\*

Race is a social construct

AND

That social construct has profound impacts on all of our lives.

We must learn how to talk about race.

We have to be more comfortable being uncomfortable.

We need to deepen our understanding of race, racism and racialization at every level.

\*Please read this study by the Center for Social Inclusion

# Policy → Action

How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

Theory → Practice

Feel Good → Do Good

Talking to Ourselves → Working with Others

Even small actions make a difference, if only in your organizational culture.

# Integrated but Intentional

You don't need money, but you do need focus.

One more thing to do → Part of everything you do

Not my job → Everyone's job

Paralysis → Routine

Perception of barriers → Opportunities revealed

Siloed → Collective action

# Visionary but Practical

## Cultivate leadership at all levels.

Political leadership: Articulate values, connect the work to everyone, affirm the importance of the work to other organizational objectives. Plain talk.

Departmental leadership: Relate the work to different fields and work groups.

Employees: Act as champions throughout the organization. Make the work live and discover opportunities.

# Visionary but Practical II

Create a framework that relates your organization to the broader context.

Allows everyone to see where they fit in.

Gives everyone a place to start the work.

Helps to define the role of your organization in broader social change/impact.

Helps explain what you are – and are not – doing.

Helps you define reasonable measures of progress.

# Accountability Produces Results

Let people start where they are, while pushing them forward and acknowledging progress.

Accountability mechanisms can be simple.

Integration of ESJ values into accountability and management systems reinforces intentionality and produces results.

# Fail Forward

We don't have all the answers, but...

We know what result the status quo produces.  
Let's try something different.

King County serves all residents by promoting fairness  
and opportunity and eliminating inequities.

King County Strategic Plan—Fair And Just Guiding Principle



[www.kingcounty.gov/equity](http://www.kingcounty.gov/equity)



# Resources & Contact Information

Carrie S. Cihak

Director of Policy & Strategic Initiatives

Office of King County Executive Dow Constantine

[carrie.cihak@kingcounty.gov](mailto:carrie.cihak@kingcounty.gov)

King County Equity & Social Justice

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