

Race & Social Justice



INITIATIVE

Imagine a city where ...

- Race does not predict the quality of education you receive, or whether you will graduate from high school.
- Race does not predict your likelihood of going to prison.
- Race does not predict your likelihood of being homeless.
- Race does not predict how long you will live.
- Race does not predict the survival of your baby.
- Race does not shape your career opportunities or predict how much you earn.

The Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) envisions a city where racial disparities have been eliminated and racial equity achieved.

The mission of the Race and Social Justice Initiative is to end institutionalized racism in City government and promote multiculturalism and full participation by all residents.

RSJI is committed to meaningful change. We all need to work to end racism in Seattle.

Overview

The RSJ Initiative builds on the work of the civil rights movement and the ongoing efforts of individuals and groups in Seattle to confront racism. The Initiative's long-term goal is to change the underlying system that creates race-based disparities in our community and to achieve racial equity.

This document is a brief summary of the City of Seattle's efforts over the last four years within City government, and provides an overview of the Initiative's work for the next three years.



A national model

When Seattle began the Race and Social Justice Initiative, no other city in the United States had ever created an initiative that focuses on institutional racism. There was no roadmap for this new work. The Initiative has made use of organizing tools, resources and experts both in Seattle and across the country to develop our approach.

After Mayor Greg Nickels took office in January 2002, he called for a Citywide Race and Social Justice Initiative that would build on the previous work of a few departments to address racial disparities. Mayor Nickels directed all City departments to address those concerns.

Since 2005, the Initiative has focused on the City's own programs and services. This was an important first step before engaging the greater community more broadly.

“ In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. ”

– Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun

Why focus on institutional racism?

When it comes to race, Seattle is no different than any other city in the United States. Race influences where we live, where we work, how well we do in school, how long we will live, and the likelihood of our involvement in the criminal justice system. To eliminate these inequities we must focus on the root of the problem: institutional racism.

Institutional racism is when organizational programs or policies work to the benefit of white people and to the detriment of people of color, usually unintentionally or inadvertently. For example, job requirements that put undue emphasis on college degrees over work experience may eliminate qualified candidates of color, who face institutional barriers to higher education.

To challenge institutional racism, we have to look beyond individual acts of prejudice to the systemic biases that are built into our institutions. None of us are to blame for what happened in the past, but we all are responsible for eliminating racism and its legacy today.



Our work so far

Since 2005, the Mayor has required City departments to implement RSJI work plans. Key elements of the plans also are part of department directors' annual Accountability Agreements with the Mayor.

City departments work together on common areas, including:

- Workforce equity (fair hiring and promotion).
- Contracting equity.
- Improved immigrant and refugee access to services.
- Inclusive outreach and public engagement.
- Capacity building (training and education for City employees).

The Initiative has resulted in significant policy and program changes within the City of Seattle, including:

Translation and interpretation policy: To ensure broader access to City services, City departments now provide translation and interpretation services for non-English speaking customers.

Outreach and public engagement policy: To improve civic participation, departments are working together on new inclusive outreach and public engagement strategies.

Contracting Equity: To provide more contracting opportunities for communities of color, the City has improved its process, increasing opportunities to compete and doubling the percentage of contracting for non-construction goods and services with women and minority-owned businesses.

RSJI Budget and Policy Analysis: To build awareness and ensure equitable policies, City departments use this new tool to analyze the Race and Social Justice implications of all budget and policy proposals.

Moving forward

The next phase of the RSJ Initiative will focus on three goals. First, the Initiative will continue to address racial disparities internally within City government as an organization. Second, we will strengthen the way City government engages the community and provides services. Finally, we will begin to address race-based disparities in our community.

Goal 1 – End racial disparities internal to the City

Improve workforce equity: Ensure that the City's workforce diversity reflects the diversity of the Seattle community, and increase upward mobility opportunities for employees.

Increase City employees' knowledge and tools: Continue to build the capacity of City employees to understand institutional racism and to learn to analyze policies, practices and procedures from a racial justice perspective.

Increase contracting equity: Continue to improve access to contracts for Minority Business Enterprises.

Goal 2 – Strengthen the way the City engages the community and provides services

Improve outreach and public engagement: Work to address race-based inequities in access and influence, and to meet the needs of all communities within the City.

Improve existing services using Race and Social Justice best practices: Improve departments' programs and services so they result in greater equity.

Improve immigrants' and refugees' access to City services: Ensure that the City recognizes immigrant and refugee communities' unique circumstances when providing City services.



Goal 3 – Eliminate race-based disparities in our communities

The Race and Social Justice Initiative will begin to address race-based disparities in our community by working in partnership with community members and stakeholders.

Too often when cities have worked to address racial disparities, attention has focused on identifying the symptoms and not the cause. Sometimes this has resulted in superficial responses, other times in viewing people of color as a "problem to be fixed." RSJI shifts the focus to examine the policies and programs of our own organization.

To address these disparities the Initiative will focus on the following key impact areas:

- Economic equity
- Environmental justice
- Criminal justice
- Health
- Education

Within each of these impact areas, City staff will initially focus on analyzing our own institutions to determine the ways in which we are contributing to disparity. This analysis will be conducted across City departments.

We recognize that there are many other institutions and organizations – private and public, large and small – that can play important roles to eliminate racial disparities. The City will work externally with community members, organizations, businesses, and public and private institutions to develop a shared vision and a collaborative action plan to achieve greater racial equity.



Conclusion

A fundamental question remains: What difference will the Race and Social Justice Initiative make in the lives of Seattle residents and businesses, as well as in City of Seattle government?

From the beginning of the Race and Social Justice Initiative, the City has stressed the importance of the City's actions matching its rhetoric in both commitment and responsibility. At every stage of this undertaking, we have worked to ensure that the steps we take will lead the City of Seattle to achieve tangible results.

In the next phase of the Race and Social Justice Initiative, the City will begin to address race-based disparities in our community by focusing on key impact areas and developing working relationships with community stakeholders. Creating a shared vision and active commitment to Race and Social Justice is critical to achieving social change across our region. We will measure our success using what counts most: racial equity in the lives of the people who live and work in Seattle.

As we move forward on our long-term commitment to end racism, we recognize both the heroes who came before us and the leaders who will follow. The work we do is not just for now. It represents our contribution to those in the future – some of them children, some not yet born – who will admire our spirit, who will learn from our mistakes, and who will build on our accomplishments.

“ It is time for all of us to have an honest conversation about race, and to take steps to eliminate institutional racism. ”

– Mayor Greg Nickels

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Information available on request to accommodate people with disabilities.

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Thank you to all who have worked on the Race and Social Justice Initiative
- together we are making a difference.

What you can do

The City of Seattle is not the only institution addressing racism. Many other organizations and individuals have committed themselves to this work. We invite you to join with all of us:

- Deepen your understanding of racism. Read books and discuss issues of race with your family, friends and neighbors.
- Coordinate dialogues or anti-racism training at your workplace, in your neighborhood or at your place of worship.
- Develop strategies to eliminate institutionalized racism within your own organization.
- Research your community's history of involvement in struggles for civil and human rights.
- Work with the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative to develop a collaborative plan for community action.

Together we can achieve racial justice in Seattle.

Looking for resources to fund your community efforts?

The Department of Neighborhoods provides funding for Race and Social Justice projects through the Neighborhood Matching Fund. For more information visit: www.seattle.gov/neighborhood/nmf

Want to learn more about the Race and Social Justice Initiative? Visit www.seattle.gov/rsji