

**RSJI: Our Approach**

**Vision, Goals and Strategies of RSJI**

***A vision of Race and Social Justice***: Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) is a citywide effort to realize the vision of racial equity. The Initiative works within City government and with the community to get to the root cause of racial inequity: **institutional racism**. RSJI is led by the Seattle Office for Civil Rights and an interdepartmental team of City staff. All elected officials in the City of Seattle have endorsed and promote RSJI.

***RSJI’s initial goals***: When the City of Seattle introduced the Race and Social Justice Initiative in 2005, no U.S. city had ever undertaken an effort that focused explicitly on institutional racism. RSJI began as the City’s attempt to “get our own house in order” by focusing on internal programs and operations. Over the last three years, the City of Seattle has joined with other institutions and community organizations. In 2009, RSJI convened the **Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable**, a group of 25 major institutions and community-based organizations working together to achieve racial equity in the community.

***RSJI’s new three-year plan***: In 2011 the Race and Social Justice Initiative finished implementing its first three-year plan. In 2012, RSJI will introduce a new three-year plan that advances the vision of Race and Social Justice beyond Seattle City government to achieve racial equity across Seattle. This plan calls on government, institutions, businesses and the community to work together to achieve racial equity, using **three** **Equity Strategies**.

***Equity Strategies***: Over the next three years, the Race and Social Justice Initiative will use three specific strategies:

1. Apply racial equity tools to the City of Seattle’s own programs and projects.
2. Build racial equity into City policies and Citywide initiatives.
3. Partner with other institutions and the community to achieve racial equity in key areas such as housing, jobs, education, health, criminal justice, community development and the environment.

***Common approaches***: All three strategies will use a set of common approaches:

* Develop meaningful measures and set specific targets for eliminating racial equity. We will measure our progress with the same dedication as we measure our problems.
* Use inclusive outreach and public engagement strategies to involve the community.
* Increase the public will to achieve racial equity.

As a community we have made it to this point thanks to the work of those who came before us. We believe that Seattle residents have had enough of the current status quo, and that we are ready to end racial inequity. We must work urgently for racial equity.

**How the Race and Social Justice Initiative has evolved**

The movement to end racism in Seattle is not new. Since the beginning of white settlement in the region, racial inequity has been part of our reality. At the same time however, organizations and individuals have used legal, legislative and social pressures to fight racial inequity. Local efforts to achieve race and social justice have been an important part of our region’s history.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Citywide diversity and cultural competency training created a relatively diverse workplace, but they did little to address the underlying systemic issue: institutional racism. In 2005, Seattle implemented the Race and Social Justice Initiative to address institutional racism throughout City government.

RSJI formulated a new approach that includes:

* Focusing explicitly on race and institutional racism.
* Beginning with ourselves – in other words, “get our own house in order” as a necessary first step before engaging the community more broadly.
* Prioritizing achieving real results in the community.
* Commiting to long-term sustainability.
* Using an organizing model to move the work forward, both within City government and in the community.

The Initiative developed an organizational structure to support departments’ RSJ responsibilities within their own lines of business, as well as the City’s overall commitment:

* Annual RSJI work plans developed and implemented by individual departments.
* Departmental Change Teams to guide departments’ work plan implementation.
* A set of issues that cut across all City departments: workforce equity, contracting equity, inclusive outreach and public engagement, immigrant and refugee access to services, and training and education. Departments incorporated these five “Central Concerns” as part of their work plans.
* A Citywide Core Team of 20-30 people representing most City departments, who work with Change Teams, departments, and interdepartmental teams to implement the Initiative.
* The RSJI Sub-cabinet, consisting of department leadership and the Mayor’s Office, which develops proposals to address systemic issues, and serves as a forum for sharing RSJI best practices.
* Formal support from elected officials.
* Coordinated training for all City of Seattle employees. All employees participate in a one-day training curriculum based on the PBS series, “*Race: the Power of an Illusion.*” Change Team, Core Team and other key leaders receive additional in-depth training.

**Why lead with race?**

The RSJ Initiative leads with racism because race has shaped our institutions and policies in the United States in ways that have prevented us from achieving equity. Until now, government typically has responded to inequities – when it has responded at all – by developing programs and services to lessen its effects. To achieve equity, however, we must focus on root causes. Ending institutional racism involves more than simply developing programs to help people of color. RSJI is Seattle’s effort to change the underlying system that perpetuates racial and social inequities.

To challenge racism, we have to look beyond individual acts of prejudice to the systematic biases that are built into our institutions and our society. We are not to blame for what happened in the past, but we are responsible – both personally and institutionally – for eliminating racism and its legacy today.