

City of Seattle

**Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) Summary Sheet**  
**Cover Sheet and Questions**

**Department/Office:**

Office of Sustainability & Environment

**Name of policy, program, etc. analyzed:**

Retrofit Accelerator Technical Support Hub

**Names and titles of key staff that led this RET process:**

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**Dates of RET process:**

1/2021 – 12/2021

## Retrofit Accelerator Technical Support Hub RET Summary Questions

### 1. Describe the project, program, policy, or budgetary decision that you assessed using the Racial Equity Toolkit.

The Retrofit Accelerator (working name: Seattle Clean Buildings Accelerator) is envisioned as a new technical support program for owners\* of nonprofit facilities and other commercial buildings (>50,000 ft<sup>2</sup> in size) with less internal capacity (staffing, financial, etc.) to meet the [State of WA Clean Buildings Act](#) energy efficiency standards and get started on a path to reducing climate polluting emissions. The program will seek to enroll buildings identified as nonprofits and/or serving the BIPOC community or in areas with greater environmental disparities. The program is also intended to help owners better access limited financial incentives offered by the State for early compliance as well as existing utility incentives. If a [Seattle building performance standard](#) (BPS) policy based on carbon emissions is passed by Council, it would also serve owners of buildings >20,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, including multifamily buildings, starting in 2023 and focus more on emissions reduction to help building owners prepare to meet Seattle requirements. A Seattle building performance standard is currently in policy development in 2022 per [Executive Order](#) and a Retrofit Accelerator was identified in the Seattle BPS RET as an action to support equitable BPS implementation. The Mayor's 2022 budget includes \$220,000 to further program development (building on scoping work in 2020/21) and to begin implementation. Of this, \$200K will be used for consultant contract(s), with \$20,000 reserved for assessing language access needs for the Seattle BPS. Existing OSE staff will provide overall contract and program management. *\*Includes building owner staff and property managers who are typically the most likely contacts.*

### 2. List the racial equity outcome(s) that you set in Step 1 of the RET process.

OSE's equity outcome for this project is that communities of color have equitable access to healthy, clean environments, free of pollutants or toxins. Additionally, this work is about service equity with a goal to achieve racial equity in City departments' service delivery and resource allocation. This Retrofit Accelerator concept was also created to address racial equity outcomes identified through the Seattle Building Performance Standards (BPS) RET. These are listed below and those in **bold** will be specifically addressed through the Retrofit Accelerator program.

- BIPOC building owners or owners who serve BIPOC communities:
  - **Manage the financial and capacity burden of meeting both the State's and Seattle's building performance standards (BPS).**
  - **Can easily navigate the City's and State's BPS compliance requirements.**
- Affordable housing operators and non-profit community-based organizations that own commercial buildings:
  - **Are not left out of the audit, incentive, and upgrade process.**
- BIPOC commercial and residential tenants:
  - Are able to live or work in higher-quality, safer, energy-efficient spaces.
  - Are provided pathways that mitigate the risk of temporary or permanent displacement due to building upgrades.
- BIPOC and WMBEs (especially smaller businesses):
  - Will participate in the qualified workforce that conducts building assessments and upgrades. **(Could be a future effort of the Accelerator, beyond 2022)**

**3. Which stakeholders (groups and/or key individuals) did you engage in this RET? In what ways did you engage them?**

OSE was not able to engage community members during 2020/21 due to the timing of the BPS policy and to Covid impacts, so we used the following sources for information that are detailed in a draft Seattle Buildings Accelerator Scoping document:

- Northwest Energy Coalition (NVEC) conducted about 50 interviews of building owners, service providers and others that will need to meet the State standards to ask them about policy impacts. This included some owners of small buildings and nonprofits.
- OSE's experience implementing the Energy Benchmarking and Building Tune-Ups policies were referenced to understand how building owners with less capacity might be impacted.
- OSE, along with staff from City Light, OED and SCDI participated in a workshop with Sylver Consulting funded through the American Cities Climate Challenge to scope a retrofit/BPS technical support hub. This work included nine interviews and Seattle recruitment specifically targeted nonprofits and owners of smaller commercial and multifamily buildings to participate.

**4. Please describe up to five key benefits and/or burdens for people of color of this policy, program, project, or other decision, which the RET process helped you to identify or confirm.**

This program will benefit people of color that may live in areas with greater environmental disparities because the buildings existing in those areas and/or serving BIPOC communities that need to comply will not be left behind. For example:

- Buildings owners with less capacity tend to not have in-house sustainability or energy manager staff to help them understand complex energy-related requirements and comply. This program will offer that type of support as a free external service to help reduce the burden and support more equal opportunities to comply and benefit from the requirements.
- Owners with less capacity will be better able to compete for the limited State incentives and will get help accessing utility programs.
- A risk of WA State energy standards compliance is that building owners could upgrade to efficient, but climate polluting gas equipment. This program will help participants select efficient, lower carbon alternatives such as electric heat pumps.

**5. Please describe up to five key actions – things that you will do differently or begin to do now – of this policy, program, project, or other decision, which will increase opportunity and/or minimize harm for people of color.**

- *RFP Process* - Since an RFP will be issued to select a firm to manage and implement the program, include equity provisions in the RFP. While the program will need implementation by an entity with energy/emissions reduction expertise, which unfortunately limits the number of WMBE firms that might respond, work to engage such firms to apply or allow partnerships of firms and community organizations that might help amplify the outreach.
- *Improved Outreach & Communications* - The City will amplify the limited efforts of the State to connect with building owners at the individual level to demystify this extremely complex State law so that they can begin to figure out how their building can comply and benefit. The program will also create materials to clearly explain the complex requirements and opportunities to reduce climate pollution and decarbonize within the context of what matters to these building

owners. For example, the materials shouldn't just focus on the energy/emissions benefits as value stream, but on ways the upgrades could support organizational stability (e.g., less unplanned equipment failure and costs), occupant comfort (e.g., cooling) or other benefits.

- *Enhanced Support Needs* – Rather than just create outreach materials, this program is envisioned as offering a coaching service with access to small cohort-based trainings and dedicated help desk support designed to provide the type of support that a better resourced building owner might have through a sustainability or energy manager.
- *Building Linkages* – This program will help building owners better assess opportunities so that they can hire contractors, access incentives and even financing. It fills a niche between not knowing how to get started and getting on a path to compliance.

## **6. How will leadership ensure implementation of the actions described in question 4?**

While this program, if designed and implemented well, will ultimately benefit environmental equity access, its 2022 funding enables only a technical support program for a small group of buildings. It does not provide any funding for implementation of energy efficiency or decarbonization measures.

To achieve significant equity outcomes, the Retrofit Accelerator should be funded in 2023 and beyond, which is especially critical if a Seattle BPS is passed. If a BPS is passed, additional funding will be needed to support the multifamily market which would add more eligible building owners. The program should also be paired with other funding and financial support for implementation that significantly reduces project costs for owners. OSE is currently partnering with City Light on other potential incentives that might align, but more impactful work could include grants and low/no-cost City-guaranteed financing or on-bill repayment. This program could be a recruitment means for such other programs.

## **7. How have/will you report back to your stakeholders? (This includes the people who were directly engaged in this RET process, those who will be affected by decisions made, and other departments or divisions impacted by the RET findings and the actions described in question 4.)**

A report back process will be developed as part of the scope of work with the consultant. Likely it will be based on number and type of ownership of buildings enrolled.

## **8. What additional racial equity issues did this RET reveal? Consider how these unresolved issues present opportunities for structural transformation (i.e., working across departments, and with other institutions and sectors to achieve racial equity).**

In addition to cost of implementation concerns noted in question 6, if a BPS is enacted there is likely a need for companion policies to a BPS policy that minimize harm. For example, covenants that stabilize tenant rents for buildings that get financial support to reduce emissions.