**City of Seattle**

**Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) Summary Sheet**

**Cover Sheet and Questions**

**Department/Office:** Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE)

**Name of policy, program, etc. analyzed:** Emergency Grocery Voucher - Eligibility and Enrollment

**Names and titles of staff that led this RET process:** Bridget Igoe, Interim Food Policy & Program Mgr.

**Dates of RET process:** 03/2020 - 02/2021

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

The Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE) completed a RET on the eligibility and enrollment strategies used in the Emergency Grocery Voucher (EGV) program. From March 2020 through April 2021, the EGV program provided vouchers to eligible and enrolled households that could be used to purchase food and household items at Safeway stores. The program was launched as part of the City’s emergency food COVID-19 response efforts with a goal of quickly distributing flexible assistance so that households significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis could get the food and supplies needed to meet their needs. The City used two strategies to qualify and enroll people into the program:

1. Automatic enrollment of income-qualified households participating in other City assistance programs; and
2. Partnerships with community-based organizations to qualify and enroll households that experienced income loss or hardship associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This RET focused on the eligibility and enrollment strategies used in the EGV program and was both a *contemporaneous* and *retrospective* analysis of how racial equity was applied to the decisions that defined eligibility and enrollment. It was a *contemporaneous* RET in that OSE and City leadership, working quickly to address a civil emergency, applied a racial equity analysis at the same time the EGV program was being developed and deployed. It was a *retrospective* RET in that it examined the results of the City’s decisions by assessing the demographics of EGV recipients who were ultimately enrolled.

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

The primary racial equity outcome of the EGV program was to prioritize distribution of grocery vouchers to Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrants, refugees, and people with low incomes who were:

* Facing significant COVID-related income loss;
* Experiencing structural or institutional barriers to accessing support from the government (e.g. language barrier, fear of deportation, experienced domestic violence, do not qualify for other benefits); and/or
* Requiring immediate assistance to carry them into receiving other types of support (recently unemployed and not receiving benefits until claims are processed).

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

In addition to leadership and staff at OSE and the Mayor’s Office, the following City stakeholders were engaged in the conversations and decisions about how to center racial equity when defining eligibility and enrollment (i.e.: the contemporaneous RET):

* Leadership and staff at HSD, DEEL and SPR – Helped OSE automatically enroll households from City-subsidized childcare and food assistance programs, based on equity-driven selection criteria.
* Iman Ibrahim (OCR) – Met with OSE to help prioritize which population groups to enroll based on who would be most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the unemployment crisis.
* Jenee Jahn (OLS) – Worked with OSE to help identify and recruit community-based organizations (CBOs) focused on reaching displaced workers who are unable to access other forms of government aid due to systemic racism and institutional barriers, like language barriers, fear of deportation, or experiencing domestic violence.
* Katie Sheehy (OPCD) – Worked with OSE to help identify and recruit CBOs led by and serving the Black/African American community.

In January 2021, nine months into the program, OSE EGV staff hosted two virtual meetings with CBOs that partnered on efforts to qualify and enroll people into the EGV program. Twenty representatives from 18 out of 27 partnering organizations (listed below) participated in the meetings that were facilitated to gather feedback on the benefits and burdens of the eligibility and enrollment strategies.

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| API Chaya  Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)  Atlantic Street Center Black & Tan Hall Byrd Barr Place Casa Latina  CAYA (Central Area Youth Association) Central Area Senior Center Chief Seattle Club Community Passageways Entre Hermanos  Eritrean Association of Greater Seattle Fair Work CenterFEEST | Got GreenIngersoll Gender Center  Lake City Collective  Providence Regina House  Queer the Land Rainier Valley MidwivesRefugee Women's Alliance (ReWA) SouthEast Seattle Senior Center United Indians of All Tribes Foundation Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle UTOPIA Villa Comunitaria  West African Community Council |

**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.**

The EGV enrollment data suggested that both enrollment strategies were effective at reaching people of color. Of 14,037 total EGV enrollees, 27.5% identified as Black/African American, 19.3% identified as Asian, 14.5% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 3.7% identified as multi-racial, 2.4% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.2% identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and 0.7% identified as Middle Eastern or North African. Roughly ten percent (10.7%) of all enrollees identified as white.

Additionally, both enrollment strategies were minimally burdensome to program enrollees. Automatic enrollment by the City required no additional steps by enrollees and the administrative burden was entirely on the City. Enrollment led by community partners was also minimally burdensome to enrollees since the intake process required no documentation of identity, household size, or hardship/loss of income. Community partners also shared that a benefit of working with them on enrollment is that their organizations are deeply connected to priority communities, have trusted relationships with residents, and are best situated to identify and reach people significantly affected by a crisis. At the same time, community-led enrollment did create administrative burdens for the CBOs, as well as other burdens associated with having to make difficult decisions about who to enroll when need in the community greatly exceeded available enrollment slots.

A full summary of benefits and burdens are available in our EGV racial equity report.

**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.**

The following actions are recommended to increase opportunity and minimize harm for people of color in future eligibility and enrollment processes:

1. Create a variety of pathways and opportunities to facilitate program eligibility and enrollment, including:
	1. Automatic enrollment of people based on their eligibility and participation in other City programs that are carefully prioritized and selected for this purpose.
	2. Eligibility and enrollment led by partnering community-based organizations (CBOs).
	3. Open call application with a lottery or needs-based selection process.

1. Partner with CBOs deeply connected to priority communities to facilitate program enrollment. CBOs are vital to reaching specific population groups, have trusted relationships with vulnerable people, and are best situated to identify and reach people significantly impacted by a crisis. Additionally:
	1. Partner with CBOs that are diverse in size, resources, location, and in the populations they serve. Even small entities have creative and effective ways to reach and enroll the people they serve.
	2. Work with CBOs to understand their outreach, prioritization, and enrollment strategies. The purpose here is not to prescribe the strategies CBOs should use but rather to document how CBO enrollment is achieved and identify the potential for duplication or gaps in efforts across all partnering organizations.

1. Appropriately compensate CBOs that lead program enrollment efforts. Due to chronic under-funding and disparate impacts, BIPOC-led organizations and coalitions are stretched thin. Centering and strengthening our relationships with these organizations must include adequately funding them to do the outreach and engagement work the City asks of them, even if this adds to the administrative costs of running a program.

1. If using automatic enrollment based on participation in other City programs, use equity-driven criteria to prioritize and select what programs will be used for this purpose.
2. Collect feedback and lessons learned from other City benefit programs that rely on enrollment activities and open call application processes. For example, OSE’s [Fresh Bucks program](https://www.freshbuckseattle.org/application-information/) uses a variety of different methods to enroll program participants, including a public lottery, and the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs recently used a needs-based application for its [COVID-19 Disaster Relief Fund for Immigrants](https://www.seattle.gov/iandraffairs/programs-and-services/covid-19-disaster-relief-fund-for-immigrants). Compiling information on enrollment activities of City programs can also be used to gauge which programs use inclusive outreach strategies and lead with racial equity into their program designs—important considerations if leveraging existing City programs to auto-enroll people in a new program.

1. Explore policy options and administrative structures for distributing direct cash assistance, rather than food vouchers, for future emergency programs. Assistance in the form of cash could have the following advantages over food vouchers:
	1. Allows beneficiaries to use the cash as they see fit and empower people with choice and autonomy to address their essential and unique needs.
	2. Creates beneficial multiplier effects in the local economy as beneficiaries can use their assistance widely in local markets.
	3. Lower ongoing administrative costs (after initial administrative structures are set up, which include targeted eligibility and enrollment policies to reach only those truly in need).
	4. Less stigma for beneficiaries since cash is less visible compared to vouchers.

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

OSE has compiled a comprehensive report on this RET, to help guide future program design and implementation. This report has been shared with key City departments, staff in the Mayor’s office and City Council, and the community stakeholders involved in this RET and the EGV program. Additionally, OSE program staff and strategic advisors will incorporate these recommendations into future program designs and plans.

**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.)**

OSE has compiled a comprehensive report on this RET and offered several opportunities for community stakeholders and City staff to review and comment. The report was also shared with staff in the Mayor’s office and City Council.

**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).**

Other key features of the EGV program that certainly have racial equity impacts include the duration and dollar amount of grocery assistance provided (up to $1,920 distributed over a maximum of seven months, regardless of household size); how the grocery assistance was delivered (via paper vouchers mailed to recipients); where and how recipients could use their vouchers (only for in-store purchases at Safeway stores); or program policies related to replacing lost or stolen vouchers. Future analyses of food voucher programs should look more closely at how these aspects of program design impact racial equity.