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2026 Commissions Roundtable Summary Report

Event Overview

On September 26, 2026, commissioners from the Seattle Disability Commission (SDC), Seattle Human Rights Commission (SHRC), Seattle LGBTQ Commission (SLGBTQC), and Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) gathered for the 2nd Annual SOCR Commissions Roundtable at Washington Hall.

35 participants, including commissioners and SOCR staff engaged in collaborative discussions to strengthen relationships, explore shared priorities, find opportunities for joint advocacy, and identify actionable next steps together.

Purpose

The purpose of this summary is to provide SOCR commissioners and staff with a clear and accessible understanding of what emerged during the roundtable conversations. Each section includes three to five key takeaways and a set of possible action items. These summaries are designed to support ongoing planning, inform annual workplans, and strengthen coordination across commissions.

Cross Topic Themes

Across all discussions, five overarching themes emerged:

1. **Community Rooted Decision Making**

   Commissioners emphasized that policy must begin with stories and experiences gathered directly from communities. Especially those historically marginalized.

2. **Accessibility, Language Equity, and Clarity of Information**

   No matter which topic was discussed, barriers to understanding one's rights persist due to inaccessible formats, lack of translation, and insufficient plain language communication.

3. **Cross-Commission Collaboration for Structural Change**

   The most complex issues span multiple identities and systems making it imperative that commissions work together and advocate jointly.

4. **Trust Building as the Foundation to Effective Systems**

   Whether working with elected officials, providers, residents, and fellow commissioners trust must be developed through meaningful interactions and consistent follow through.

5. **Equitable Access to Services, Resources, and Power**

   Commissioners recognized that inequity appears repeatedly through barriers of affordability, unequal enforcement, discriminatory practices, or gaps in legal and healthcare protections.

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Panel Notes – Fostering Relationships with Elected Officials

(Synthesized from SWC Panelist Emily Rose Barr Notes)

- **Lead with genuine curiosity when engaging elected officials**, seeking first to understand their constraints, priorities, and decision-making processes rather than assuming resistance or disagreement.
- **Build trust by identifying shared goals**; framing community needs in terms of outcomes both the commission and the official value, such as safety, equity, or effective service delivery.
- **Strengthen communication through thoughtful, open-ended questions** that uncover information gaps, clarify concerns, and guide collaborative problem solving.
- **Show consistency and reliability**, engaging with officials regularly, not only when an urgent decision is pending, to build credibility over time.
- **Use staff as essential partners,** recognizing that aides manage schedules, track issues, and often determine how and when information reaches the elected official.
- **Adapt outreach to the official's preferred communication style and capacity**, offering concise materials, flexible meeting formats, and persistent but respectful follow-up.
- **Foster continuity by engaging candidates, newly elected officials, and former officials**, ensuring long-term relationships that transcend political turnover and support sustained policy progress.

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Breakout Discussion Notes

Equitable Housing

Key Takeaways

- Cross-commission collaboration is a major opportunity for unified advocacy efforts.
- Commissioners emphasized the importance of community-informed housing policy through culturally competent outreach.
- Accessibility in housing design and enforcement remains a priority.
- Barriers to participation persist and highlight the need for accessible community engagement.
- There is a strong desire for clearer pathways to affordable housing, including zoning reforms and tenant protections.

Action Items

Commissions:

- Develop intentional community outreach methods with organizations rooted in the community.
- Create communication channels to coordinate cross-commission housing advocacy.
- Recommend updates to tenant screening criteria and accessibility standards.

SOCR:

- Support commissions with training on fair housing laws and city processes.
- Improve public-facing housing information with translated, plain-language materials.

Commissioner Onboarding & Skill Development

Key Takeaways

- New commissioners need a clearer and more unified onboarding experience.
- Mentorship and buddy systems strengthen commissioner engagement and confidence.
- Organized tools and resources improve commissioner readiness.
- Cross-commission social opportunities support deeper collaboration.
- A structured partnership with SOCR is needed to strengthen onboarding.

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Action Items

Commissions:

- Develop and refine commission-specific handbooks for new members.
- Establish mentorship or buddy systems for onboarding.
- Organize informal gatherings to strengthen commissioner community.

SOCR:

- Coordinate a 30-60-90 day onboarding structure with commissions and support implementation.
- Maintain an updated online resource hub for new commissioners.

Health & Health Equity

Key Takeaways

- Commissioners identified gaps in crisis care, reproductive access, and disability-inclusive systems.
- Trust-building and community engagement are essential for health equity.
- Improving accessibility requires ADA compliance and plain-language communication.
- Greater accountability is needed for biased or discriminatory healthcare practices.
- Affordability remains a major barrier, including Medicaid loss for refugees.

Action Items

Commissions:

- Gather community input through listening sessions and partnerships.
- Recommend policies that strengthen crisis care and reproductive access.
- Partner with health organizations to elevate policy recommendations.

SOCR:

- If available through Enforcement investigation data, provide data and reports on inequities and accountability gaps.

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Immigrant & Refugee Rights

Key Takeaways

- Multilingual resources are essential for immigrants and refugees to understand their rights.
- Human trafficking awareness requires stronger outreach and safe reporting pathways.
- Legal assistance gaps persist and require clearer access to resources.
- Cultural respect and immigrant-led advocacy should be uplifted.
- Medicaid loss for refugees highlights the need for coordinated policy recommendations.

Action Items

Commissions:

- Partner with immigrant community organizations to co-design outreach.
- Recommend improvements to legal assistance access and language accessibility.
- Gather community perspectives on healthcare and Medicaid loss.

SOCR:

- Maintain updated directories of immigrant-serving organizations.
- Support media campaigns promoting safe reporting and cultural respect.

Criminal Legal System Reform

Key Takeaways

- Commissioners emphasized transparency and community-driven restorative justice.
- Police accountability and support for families remain urgent issues.
- Civil rights protections during SPD interactions require stronger awareness.
- Community voices and narratives should shape public safety approaches.
- Employment barriers for formerly incarcerated residents remain a significant obstacle.

Action Items

Commissions:

- Develop policy recommendations strengthening police accountability.
- Collect and elevate restorative justice stories and perspectives.
- Advocate for fair chance hiring practices and reentry supports.

SOCR:

- Expand civil rights training related to SPD and federal enforcement.
- Disseminate multilingual public safety and Know Your Rights resources.