

2025 Commissions Roundtable

Summary Report

By the City of Seattle Disability, LGBTQ, Human Rights, and Women's Commissions

Event Overview

On October 25, 2025, commissions from the Seattle Disability Commission (SDC), Seattle Human Rights Commission (SHRC), Seattle LGBTQ Commission (SLGBTQC), and Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) gathered for a Commissions Roundtable at Washington Hall.

Over 45 participants, including commissioners, Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) staff, and City representatives engaged in collaborative discussions to strengthen relationships, explore shared priorities, and identify actionable next steps.

Cross Topic Themes

Across all sessions, five overarching themes emerged:

- 1. Stronger Relationships are needed between Commissions and the City (City Council, Mayor's Office, and City Departments)**

Commissioners expressed a need for consistent two-way communication with elected officials and City departments. This includes structured opportunities for dialogue, regular briefings, and clarity about how commission recommendations inform City action.

- 2. Community Centered Advocacy**

There was consensus that commissions must ground their work in the lived experience of the diverse communities across Seattle. To accomplish this commissions emphasized the need for focus on outreach, collaboration, and shared advocacy that is shaped by community voice.

- 3. Consistency and Clarity in Governance**

Participants identified the need for clear, aligned bylaws, onboarding, and communication structures across commissions to improve collaboration, transparency, and accountability.

- 4. Accessibility and Inclusion are Foundational to Equity**

Commissioners repeatedly emphasized accessibility, not only in physical spaces, but in communication, technology, and engagement as a priority of equitable representation.

- 5. Capacity Building and Compensation**

Sustainable engagement requires recognition of the labor of volunteer commissioners. Interest in developing a data-driven case for stipends and expanding training opportunities for commissioners was strong across discussions.

Round Table Session Summaries

Session 1: Community Centered Engagement and Advocacy

Key Takeaways

- Engagement should be intentional, ongoing, and reciprocal, ensuring communities see tangible results from participation. Ideas shared include volunteering, visiting with community, and supporting community-driven events.
- Commissioners want shared tools and communication channels to align messaging and outreach.
- There's a call for training on equitable engagement, especially around cultural responsiveness and trauma informed practices.
- Data sharing and coordination between commissions could amplify collective impact.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Develop shared outreach calendars and collaborative events. Engage in cross-commission storytelling to highlight impact.
- **SOCR:** Include engagement tools, templates, and success stories on the commissions resource website and City webpages. Offer training on inclusive outreach and community centered communication strategies.

Session 2: Fostering Relationships with Elected Officials

Key Takeaways

- Commissioners seek clear pathways to build trust and visibility with the Mayor, City Council, and City department directors.
- Current engagement is dependent on who is in each seat rather than standard operational practice.
- Commissioners are requesting structured and recurring touchpoints, such as quarterly briefings or joint working sessions.
- All participants agree that relationship building is key to transforming recommendations into policy.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Identify shared legislative priorities and coordinate communication strategies.
- **SOCR:** Develop relationships with elected officials and promote regular touchpoints with commissions. Provide guidance to commissions on effective policy advocacy and legislative process.

Session 3: Commissioner Onboarding and Skill Development

Key Takeaways

- Experiences with onboarding vary between commissions and in the experience of each commissioner. This can create inequities in commissioner readiness and retention.
- Commissioners would like consistent, practical orientation and onboarding materials from SOCR and their commission. They suggest peer mentoring structures as part of the onboarding process.
- There is a desire for skills-based training in the areas of policy field mapping and development, advocacy, meeting facilitation, and equity analysis.
- Regular refreshers of materials and processes would help maintain alignment and institutional memory.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Establish internal onboarding buddies or mentorships and standardize welcome practices.
- **SOCR:** Update onboarding materials annually and offer training throughout the year. Create an online commissioner toolkit with learning opportunities and templates.

Breakout Session Summaries

Accessibility & Inclusion

Key Takeaways

- Accessibility must be a regular practice embedded into all city policies, spaces, and communications.
- Commissioners recommend using universal design principles, consistent accessibility standards, and structured accountability.
- Participants highlighted ongoing barriers and frustration that advocacy isn't enough if the city does not listen and act on the recommendations.
- Cross-commission collaboration is an opportunity to model inclusive and accessible practices.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Form an ad hoc cross-commission accessibility committee to perform accessibility audits of their commission practices, then create and administer solutions.
- **SOCR:** Coordinate accessibility training for commissioners and ensure City-led events model inclusion. Incorporate information on universal design practices in new commissioner orientation.

Civil Rights & Protections

Key Takeaways

- Civil rights issues are deeply intersectional requiring joint advocacy across commissions.
- Commissioners noted a need to coordinate a rapid response within and across commissions when protections are threatened.
- There are concerns about City capacity to enforce civil rights protections as more feel under attack.
- Immigrant and refugee voices are not adequately represented within commissions.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Collaborate on shared advocacy alerts, cross-commission statements, and events on key protections.
- **SOCR:** Support cross-commission communications and provide a platform for shared updates, calls to action, and news across commissions. Provide an overview of the civil rights complaint process, including how commissioners can refer or support community members.

Equitable Housing

Key Takeaways

- Housing inequities, especially affordability and accessibility, pose one of Seattle's most urgent social justice issues.
- Underfunded programs, particularly for LGBTQ+ and youth housing, are major gaps.
- Commissioners noted the importance of listening to and incorporating lived experience when developing housing policy.
- Unified advocacy and policy recommendations will strengthen impact.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Develop a joint equitable housing committee in partnership with community-based housing organizations. Gather and amplify community stories and data.
- **SOCR:** Advocate for participatory policy design processes to ensure they incorporate perspectives from those with lived experiences. Share data and reports with commissions when available.

Governance & Structure

Key Takeaways

- Create consistency across commissions in the Seattle Municipal Code, commission bylaws, workplan and reporting templates, and accessibility standards.
- Clarify and establish a formal relationship between commissions and City Council, Mayor, and City departments.
- Opinions on the topic of stipends varied, but there is support for data collection to justify compensation and clearly track commissioner time.
- To increase effectiveness participants suggested transparency across commissions, shared calendars, and standardized accountability practices.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Track participation time to inform stipend discussions. Align internal processes and regularly practice accountability.
- **SOCR:** Support commissions in developing consistent templates and governing documents.

Health & Health Equity

Key Takeaways

- Lack of access and affordability, especially for mental health, remains a persistent issue.
- Commissioners emphasized the need for culturally competent providers especially for LGBTQIA+ and marginalized communities which would include more representation within healthcare professions.
- Mental health equity connects directly to workforce development and cross-commission collaboration.
- Participants expressed frustration that the city has not adequately responded to advocacy in this area.

Potential Action Items

- **Commissions:** Promote awareness campaigns and advocate for increased accessibility, provider diversity, and programs that help those from underrepresented communities become qualified as healthcare providers.
- **SOCR:** Support health equity focused partnerships across commissions.

Systemwide Next Steps

- Develop an annual joint commission advocacy agenda focused on shared issues across commissions.
- Formalize regular commission engagement with City Council, Mayor, and City departments which could include quarterly briefings and annual reporting.
- Update the existing commissions resource page to include onboarding tools, engagement and workplan templates, and advocacy resources.
- Expand annual training to include curriculum in identified priority areas, including accessibility, community engagement, and equitable practices.
- Gather and analyze data to support a commissioner participation stipend proposal in partnership with SOCR.