



# RACIAL EQUITY

## in SEATTLE



Race and Social Justice Initiative  
Three-Year Plan 2012 - 2014



RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE  
INITIATIVE

**ADVANCE OPPORTUNITY.  
ACHIEVE EQUITY.**



## The Race and Social Justice Initiative is a citywide effort to eliminate racial disparities and achieve racial equity in Seattle...

Should race determine a person's access to housing, jobs or good health? Unfortunately, that is the reality of life in Seattle. Despite Seattle's overall high standard of living, racial disparities exist in every indicator of personal and community well-being. Our history of racism and the current impact of institutional and structural racism combine to restrict opportunities for people of color and immigrant and refugee residents.

The need for change is urgent. By almost any measurement, Seattle is a city divided by race:

- The unemployment rate for African American men in Seattle today matches the unemployment rate across the country during the Great Depression.
- Immigrant and refugee communities experience severe inequities in housing, jobs, education and health.
- Although statistics for Asian-Pacific Islander communities often appear strong, combining these diverse communities into a single category often masks inequities.
- Only about half of Samoan, Native American, Latino and African American students graduate from Seattle Public Schools.
- African Americans without a conviction record have a harder time getting hired than a white person with a conviction record.
- Almost a third of Native Americans live in poverty.

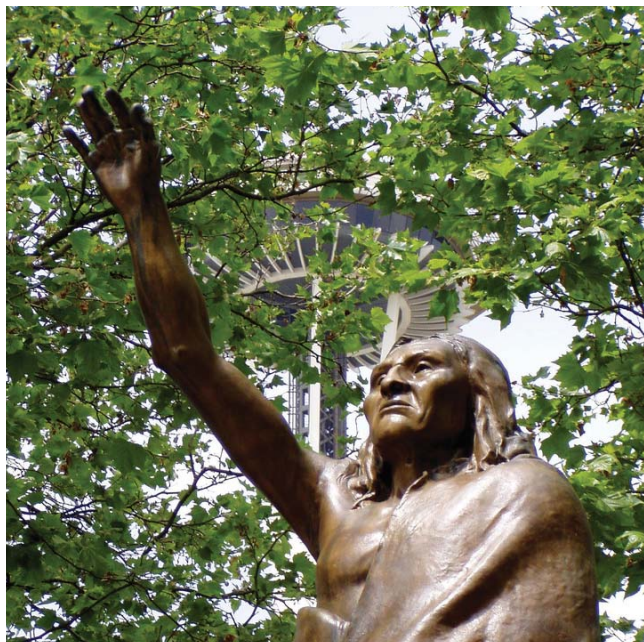
The Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) is working to change this reality. We know racial equity is possible. RSJI is the City of Seattle's commitment to:

- End institutionalized racism in City government.
- Promote inclusion and full participation of all residents in civic life.
- Partner with the community to achieve racial equity across Seattle.

The opportunity for change is now. Community organizations have pressured government to address racial equity for many years. Two decades ago the People's Institute, Western States Center and Crossroads helped the community and government understand the institutional impact of racism and develop approaches to creating change.

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. In the last three years, the City of Seattle has joined with other institutions and community organizations to achieve racial equity. In 2009, RSJI convened the Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable, a group of 25 major institutions and community-based organizations, to work together on eliminating racial inequity in the community.

The Race and Social Justice Initiative completed its three-year plan for 2009-2011. This report provides an assessment of RSJI's accomplishments and challenges during the last three years, and presents a new three-year plan to focus our efforts on achieving racial equity in Seattle.



## DEFINITIONS of RACISM

(Examples – looking at employment)

**INDIVIDUAL RACISM:** Pre-judgment, bias, or discrimination by an individual based on race.

*Example of individual racism:* Individuals acting in a discriminatory manner based on race in the workplace.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM:** Policies, practices and procedures that work to the benefit of white people and to the detriment of people of color, often unintentionally or inadvertently.

*Example of institutional racism:* Job descriptions that put undue emphasis on college degrees over work experience. This may eliminate qualified candidates of color, who face institutional barriers to higher education. This practice can create racial inequity in the job market, even when that is not the intent.

**STRUCTURAL RACISM:** A history and current reality of institutional racism across multiple institutions. This combines to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.

*Example of structural racism:* Racial inequity in employment creates inequity in family wealth. Fewer household resources mean limited housing choices, which often go hand in hand with poorer schools and inadequate health care.

“Those of us who are white often don’t realize the unintended privileges we receive. We often get the “benefit of the doubt,” or the trust and confidence of people who do not yet know us, or other benefits that are invisible to us as white folks. The Race and Social Justice Initiative is designed to help us equalize that trust and confidence for all people.”

– Nancy Locke,  
City of Seattle  
Contracting Services Manager



## WHY FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES?

To achieve long-term, systemic change, RSJI focuses on institutional and structural racism. Civil rights laws and remedies have helped to address individual racism, but they have been less effective on the underlying systems that maintain racial inequity and the denial of equal opportunity.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND AREAS TO STRENGTHEN

RSJI's 2009-2011 strategic plan set forth goals to achieve racial equity in three areas:

1. Internal outcomes in City government.
2. Public engagement and City services.
3. Race-based disparities in the community.

Late last year we began an in-depth assessment of the Initiative's work. RSJI leaders held more than forty meetings with the community and within City government for candid discussions of the Initiative's strengths and challenges.

The assessment showed that the Initiative has made significant progress on all three goals. (For a detailed summary of accomplishments, please see *RSJI Accomplishments 2009-11*.)

A few examples:

In **contracting**, the City of Seattle has more than tripled the amount of purchasing dollars to

women and minority-owned businesses. A 2011 Mayor's Executive Order mandates that general contractors demonstrate efforts to sub-contract with women and minority-owned businesses.

In **public engagement**, the City has dramatically expanded its outreach and engagement to historically under-represented communities. New policies mandate interpretation and translation services so non-English speaking Seattle residents can participate more fully in civic life.

In **the community**, a group of twenty-five organizations and public institutions has joined together as the Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable to work for racial equity across Seattle.

In **training and education**, the City of Seattle has strengthened support from City employees and improved their skills. In an RSJI Employee Survey in October 2010 that assessed employees' understanding of the Initiative, 83% of the 5,200 respondents said they believe it is valuable to examine the impact of race, and over 3,000 employees stated they are actively involved in promoting RSJI changes in their workplace.

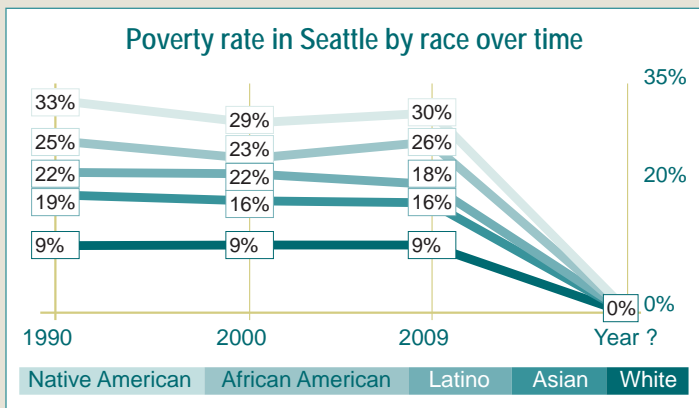
The assessment also revealed areas to strengthen. Three broad challenges emerged:

- RSJI needs to do a better job of tracking the impact of strategies to eliminate racial inequities.
- Within Seattle City government, RSJI must do a better job to improve coordination and linkages among City departments.
- In the community, RSJI must broaden and strengthen its partnerships to tackle the impact of structural racism.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment process produced four recommendations to guide RSJI's work over the next three years.

- 1. Focus on racial inequity in our community.** City government has made some progress in areas such as workforce equity, contracting equity, public engagement and immigrant and refugee access to services. The most meaningful measure of our success, however, will be in the lives of the people of Seattle.
- 2. Use data to measure progress.** For too long, we have measured the extent of the problem without measuring progress toward a solution. We must set goals to achieve equity and use data to assess the impact of those strategies in the community. For example, year after year we report on racial inequity in poverty, but we have yet to take concrete steps to end it. This must change.



- 3. Align strategies across City departments.** We must think and work strategically across departments to break down department silos. RSJI should focus on building racial equity into all City programs, projects and policies. All departments should view racial equity as part of their mission within their lines of business.
- 4. Strengthen partnerships across institutions and community.** Even if Seattle City government were doing everything it could to achieve racial equity, we would not be able to achieve results on our own. All institutions and the community must work together and share a similar sense of urgency. Only by joining together in a broad partnership with common goals and strategies can we hope to achieve racial equity in key areas such as jobs, health, education and criminal justice.

## WHY LEAD WITH RACE?

The City of Seattle is committed to challenging all forms of oppression, including sexism, heterosexism, and ableism, and its actions demonstrate that commitment. In 2010, the City of Seattle created a new Commission for People with disAbilities to advise the Mayor, City Council and departments on disability issues. In 2011, the City released a comprehensive needs assessment for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, and ended transgender exclusions in all health care plans offered to City employees. The Seattle Women's Commission played a key role in working with the community to create the City of Seattle's new Paid Sick Leave Ordinance.

Yet the Race and Social Justice Initiative leads with race. Why?

- The pervasive and deep disparities faced by people of color – disparities that cannot be explained by other factors. Addressing institutional and structural racism is essential if we are to create a just and equitable society;
- The many years of community organizing that challenged the City to address racial inequity;
- The need to focus our work. By being specific about the disparities we are targeting, we achieve more effective results. We also create the conditions for broader change. Many of the same tools and skills we use to end racial inequity apply to sexism, heterosexism, ableism and other oppressions.

Though RSJI focuses on race, we believe collaborating across issues will strengthen equity for all of us.

“RSJI is part of the City of Seattle’s broad commitment to work for social justice for all communities, and our strategies are connected. To end any form of injustice calls for a dedicated, focused effort.”

– Darryl Smith, Seattle Deputy Mayor

## ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY IN OUR COMMUNITY

We know what it takes for communities to achieve a good quality of life: living-wage jobs, stable and affordable housing, education, access to health care, safe neighborhoods and a healthy environment. These key indicators are the social and economic cornerstones of individual success and strong communities.

Racial inequity impacts people in multiple ways. A person's health is directly influenced by jobs, affordable transportation and safe neighborhoods. Finding a good job can determine a family's health care coverage, including critical preventative services. An educational system that fails to meet the needs of youth of color impacts the criminal justice system, creating a "school to prison pipeline." Racial inequities in one area have a compounding effect on all other areas.

### WHY DO RACIAL INEQUITIES PERSIST?

The outcome gaps we see in health, education, unemployment, poverty rates and the criminal justice system cannot be explained away as the result of decisions and actions of individuals. The lack of opportunity based on race emerges from inequity of access and the effects of institutional racism.

For too long our society has relied on trickle-down equity. We assume that job creation programs automatically result in jobs for everyone, regardless of race. The data, however, draws a different picture. The economic collapse that began in 2008 has impacted all communities, but it has devastated communities of color both nationally and locally. When we leave race out of the equation, we miss the chance to develop more effective institutions and create equity for all. When we include race in our analysis, however, we can develop smarter strategies that truly benefit everyone, and create systemic change.



## THE VISION OF SEATTLE’S RACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Government, institutions, businesses and community must work together to ensure every person in our city – regardless of race – has access to a living-wage job, quality education, affordable housing, health care and a safe neighborhood.

The vision of the Race and Social Justice Initiative is simple but profound: racial equity in the lives of the individuals and families who live and work in Seattle. Our goal is to achieve measurable progress eliminating racial inequity in seven key equity opportunity areas: housing, jobs, education, health, criminal justice and public safety, community development, and the environment.

Over the next three years the Race and Social Justice Initiative will use three equity strategies to address the root of racial disparities in our communities.

**EQUITY STRATEGY #1: Apply racial equity tools to our programs and projects.** City departments will expand their use of the Racial Equity Toolkit to ensure that racial equity is part of the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and projects. Over the next three years, departments also will link their strategies to metrics to measure our progress. City staff will use inclusive outreach and public engagement strategies to ensure that racial equity is part of the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and projects.

**EQUITY STRATEGY #2: Build racial equity into policies and Citywide initiatives.** To create change on a broader scale, racial equity also will be integrated into the foundation of Citywide policies and initiatives.

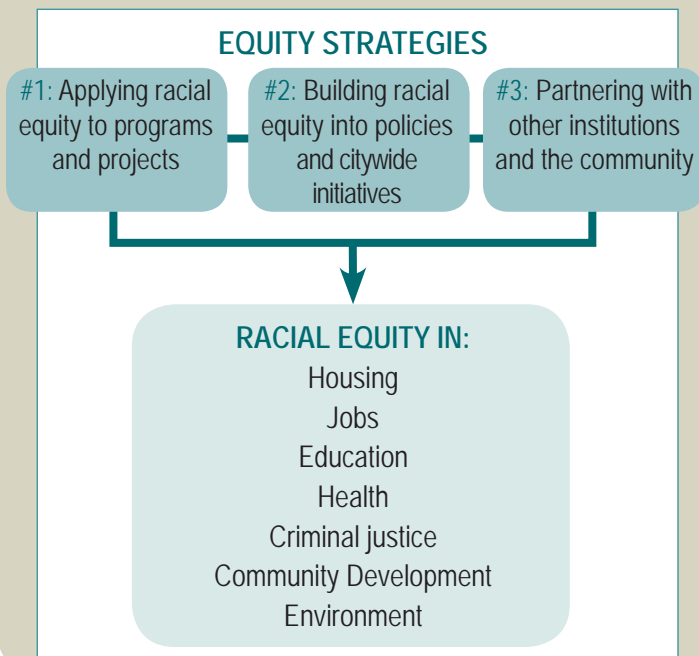
**EQUITY STRATEGY #3: Partner with other institutions and the community.** Government cannot achieve racial equity on its own. Over the next three years, the City of Seattle will create working partnerships with key institutions, organizations and the community to tackle racial inequity. As partners, we will adopt a shared analysis, use coordinated strategies and develop consistent ways to measure our progress. In addition, City departments will work with communities to increase opportunities for collaboration.

“Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative is an important model for the country because it involves community in fostering change in government.”

*Gary Delgado, Founder,  
Applied Research Center & Center for  
Third World Organizing*

Across all three strategies, City departments will utilize four common approaches:

- We will measure the outcomes of RSJI work and report this information to the community. We will set goals to end racial inequity and measure the success of our strategies in terms of their actual impact in the community.
- We will use inclusive outreach and public engagement to involve the community, including specific efforts for immigrant and refugee communities.
- We will work with partners to create greater public will to achieve racial equity.
- We will align strategies across City departments and continue internal efforts to achieve workforce equity and contracting equity in Seattle City government.





## HOW RSJI STRATEGIES WILL WORK TO ACHIEVE GREATER RACIAL EQUITY

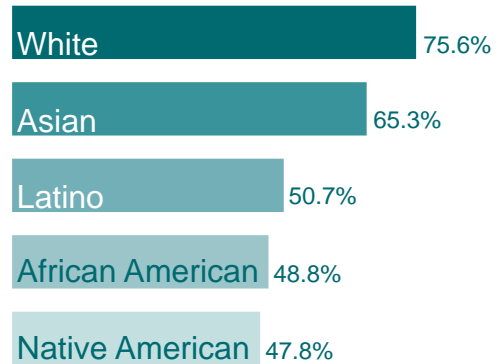
RSJI's new strategies and approaches represent a dramatic shift in the Initiative's direction. Until now, RSJI has focused almost exclusively on those responsibilities that Seattle City government controls. As a City, we pledged to put our house in order. We are proud of the progress we have made, but there is much more work to do both within and beyond City government.

Much of that work involves breaking down the silos that often structure our efforts to end racial inequity. We cannot do this work alone or apart. Even within a single area such as education, achieving racial equity will require coordinated efforts. The following section highlights an example of this direction.

### EDUCATION: THE FUTURE IN OUR HANDS

Young people are not only our future, they are our present. And at present it is clear Seattle fails to make the grade for its youth, especially youth of color. Seattle has one of the highest percentages of college-educated residents in the United States. At the same time, about half of Samoan American, Latino, African American and Native American seniors graduate on time in Seattle Public Schools. Third grade reading levels are a critical determinant of how well students will do as they progress through high school. In the 2010-2011 school year 43% of African American and half of Native American third graders did not meet the standard for reading.

Percentage of On-Time Graduates by Race/Ethnicity in Seattle Public Schools - Class of 2008





The Race and Social Justice Initiative's equity strategies already include a number of programs to end racial inequity in education, for example:

**EQUITY STRATEGY 1: Applying racial equity tools to our programs and projects.**

Through the Youth and Families Initiative (YFI), the City has realigned spending to meet families' priorities, and has designed the new Families and Education Levy around YFI's recommendations. The new Levy, which Seattle voters passed in November of 2011, targets schools with the greatest needs, often meaning significant populations of students of color, for programs aimed at closing the achievement gap.

**EQUITY STRATEGY 2: Building racial equity into citywide policies and initiatives.**

School discipline policies such as out-of-school suspensions result in students' missing classroom experiences for extended periods of time. This directly impacts their ability to progress and graduate on time. The Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable has named education as its lead issue and is working with the Seattle School District to revise its policies on school discipline rates.

**EQUITY STRATEGY 3: Partnering with community.**

The Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable is partnering with Washington Community Action Network and other Roundtable members to promote a statewide legislative agenda on racial equity in education, and to develop strategies to eliminate disproportionality in school discipline rates

“RSJI is a great example of City government seeking concrete, measurable reductions of racial disparities for the greater good of all. It is rare to see government take on – and stick with – an initiative that emerged from strong community leadership and engagement.”

*Lori Villarosa, Executive Director,  
Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity*





## MOVING FORWARD

What is RSJI's plan to end racism and achieve racial equity? Specific, measurable goals to address all key community indicators: education, jobs, housing, health, criminal justice, community development and the environment. Through our public planning process, community members identified education, health and community development as top priorities for action.

We will begin by:

- Selecting measures within each indicator.
- Developing equity strategies.
- Setting specific goals to assess progress.

We have no illusions regarding the enormity of the challenge. Over the next three years, however, we will show results:

- We will develop meaningful measures for our racial equity work and set specific, measurable targets for eliminating racial inequity. We will measure our progress with the same dedication as we measure our problems.
- We will develop and implement programs and policy strategies to achieve racial equity.
- We will use inclusive outreach and public engagement strategies to involve the community. We will apply our racial equity toolkit across our work.
- And we will develop partnerships with other institutions and the community. We will increase the public will to achieve racial equity.

Since the beginning of Seattle's history, racism has existed even as many worked to put an end to it. As a community we have made it to this point thanks to the efforts of those who came before us. We believe that Seattle residents have had enough of the status quo, and that we are ready to end the effects of racism in our city. The current state of affairs is not carved in stone; it is something we can change. The time has arrived to speak openly and to work urgently for racial equity.



# Summary

## GET INVOLVED!

Many organizations and individuals have committed themselves to this work. Join us!

- Develop conversation or training on racism at your workplace, in your community or at your place of worship.
- Develop strategies to eliminate institutionalized racism within your own organization.
- Work with the Race and Social Justice Initiative to develop a collaborative plan for community action.

### Resources and funding for your community:

The Department of Neighborhoods funds racial justice projects. Visit [seattle.gov/neighborhood/nmf](http://seattle.gov/neighborhood/nmf).

Learn more about RSJI: Visit [seattle.gov/rsji](http://seattle.gov/rsji) or call the Seattle Office for Civil Rights at 206-684-4507.

Together we can achieve racial equity in Seattle.



**ADVANCE OPPORTUNITY.  
ACHIEVE EQUITY.**



Thank you to the members of the Three-year Plan Steering Committee:

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Councilmember Bruce Harrell  
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The development of our new Three Year Plan was made possible through the broad participation of departmental Change Teams, the Race and Social Justice Sub-Cabinet, the Race and Social Justice Initiative Core Team, the Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable and participants in the community engagement process. Thank you!

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