

City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative

Significant evidence shows that the opportunities a Seattle resident can access, and the quality of life they experience, are both directly related to their race and where they live. People of color and other under-represented groups in the City of Seattle’s workforce face similar issues. To address racial inequities, in 2004 Seattle became the first city in the U.S. to establish a program, the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), to explicitly eliminate institutional racism. Institutional racism exists when an organization’s programs, policies, and spending work to the benefit of white people and to the detriment of people of color, sometimes unintentionally.

The Office for Civil Rights leads the RSJI in the City and provides support for departments and staff. As part of RSJI, the City uses a Racial Equity Toolkit to guide policy, program, and budget decision-making toward options that actively support positive racial equity outcomes. The City also uses a racial equity lens to develop a workforce that is inclusive of people of color and other marginalized or underrepresented groups at all levels of City employment.

Additionally, each City department has a “Change Team” to support internal transformation. The team – consisting of a group of employees who champion RSJI activities and strengthen a department’s capacity to get more employees involved – facilitates and participates in discussions on race, racism, and strategies to overcome institutional barriers to racial and social equity.

Through CBO’s Change Team, a new tool was created to help City staff identify the extent to which a department’s budgeting process and efforts are equitable and reflective of RSJI principles. The City’s 2023-2024 Proposed Mid-Biennial Budget Adjustments includes a process for City departments to evaluate how they incorporate RSJI in their historic budget development and set a goal for their RSJI efforts based on their assessment using this tool.