



RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Thurston County commits to pursuing systemic change by promoting equity, inclusion, and diversity in all aspects of county government.

Adopted December 2023

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Introduction

Thurston County humbly recognizes that core to our service is our responsibility to positively impact the territories of many Native and indigenous peoples. As a collective, we recognize that the migratory history of Native peoples has meant life on and stewardship of these lands, air, and waters as site for human activity since time immemorial. We recognize and honor that the County of Thurston rests upon and operates from the historic lands of the Nisqually, Cowlitz, Chehalis, Squaxin Island Peoples, Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla.

Thurston County also acknowledges that systemic racism is institutional and structural. Years of discrimination towards black, indigenous, and other people of color have led to a variety of community groups experiencing oppression and generational trauma which have created disparities that exist by race and ethnicity, income, and geographic area. We have an obligation to identify and eliminate systemic racism throughout county government by working together as a community to address historic wrongs and improve outcomes for all.

Vision

Thurston County is a diverse community where everyone who lives, works, and plays in the county can experience a culture of equity, inclusivity, and belonging and where everyone can thrive.

Purpose

In 2021, the Thurston Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) declared racism a crisis through [Resolution No. 15995](#) and supported the development of a Racial Equity Action Plan to guide the county's efforts in identifying and mitigating inequities and disparities within the community. This plan is a living document that will continue to develop as the county increases its understanding of inequities within existing governance. The success of this plan's evolution will lean on the support and participation of our stakeholders, to include county leadership, employees, residents, and community groups.

Why Race?

Racial inequality is deeply embedded in our nation's policies and practices that now impact not only people of color, but other marginalized groups as well. As people of color sought equal rights, history shows that other victims of oppression benefitted from policy changes rooted in the struggles of the BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) community for example, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. By centering on race and eliminating racial inequities, Thurston County will become equipped to transform its systems, and as racial inequities are addressed, other groups will benefit. This allows us to advance equity for all community members regardless of race, income, age, abilities, and gender.

Messages from County Leadership

Commissioner Carolina Mejia

The Racial Equity Action Plan is a necessary and vital initiative for our region. By supporting this plan, we aim to foster greater diversity, inclusion, and equity. Our community will be stronger and more prosperous when we eliminate racial disparities and ensure that everyone has an equitable chance to thrive.

Commissioner Gary Edwards

The Racial Equity Plan is meant to help us acknowledge that inequities exist in our society. By endorsing this initiative, I am affirming my commitment to equity for everyone. I will continue to strive to build bridges and foster cooperation and respect among all of us, and hope this will encourage others to do the same. Every individual, and the community as a whole can prosper by following the intent of this plan, which aligns with my principles of honesty, fairness, goodwill, and a benefit for all.

Commissioner Tye Menser

Racism has plagued our country's history from its very inception. And although some laws have changed, and some attitudes have changed, extreme racial disparities persist, and systemic inequality and structural racism continue to play a major role in our society. The time to accept these inequities is over, and I stand firmly behind our Board's declaration of racism as a community crisis.

I am proud of Thurston County's effort to prioritize work aimed at the exchange of deeper racial truths, and enhancement of belonging and inclusion for all members of our community. This Action Plan is an important first step. We must learn to recognize and address racism at all levels – personal, institutional, structural, and systemic – and this plan will help us move toward that critical goal.

Operationalizing Racial Equity in Thurston County

Racial equity has become a widespread effort in the United States, and localities throughout the country and the state of Washington are at various stages of conducting this work. Thurston County is undergoing the initiation of change when it comes to creating an equitable community. The first step that Thurston County can take in its pursuit of systemic change and racial equity is to recognize and acknowledge that current practices are not advancing the needs of underserved, underrepresented, and oppressed communities. Since Thurston is in its initial phases of racial equity work, each phase is outlined below to show what our community can expect to see from Thurston County as this work progresses over the next few years.

Phase 1: Diagnosis

Phase 1 involves recognizing and acknowledging that current practices and policies do not serve the intersectionality of our community members and particularly communities of color. The BoCC established racial equity as a key priority and is now working to develop a shared understanding of racial equity across the county. This includes laying a foundation for understanding what equity is and what the impact of racism is on our community.

Phase 2: Analysis

Phase 2 involves assessing the readiness of our organization to operationalize equity within our government and community. This requires examining available resources, the capacity of staff to participate in this effort, and the systems available to pursue change. Data and assessments conducted from Phase 1 will be evaluated to determine how best to establish systems and practices in the county to pursue changes in policies and services provided to the community. This phase also determines the willingness of departments and offices to evaluate the efficacy of services as it relates to equity efforts.

Phase 3: Strategic Planning for Infrastructural Change

The results from Phase 2 will be used in the strategic planning effort for the County to begin operationalizing equity within its governance. This phase focuses on the development of an

infrastructure that allows Thurston County to move from pilot efforts into full systemic change across the organization. The strategic planning phase will rely heavily on internal stakeholders and community involvement to include residents, non-profit community organizations, academic institutions, and other local jurisdictions.

Phase 4: Implementation

Phase 4 will include the use of new tools to aide in the decision-making process, access to resources internally and externally to support and fund equity efforts, strong accountability structures and clear communication with internal and external stakeholders. The implementation phase will focus on eliminating racial disparities and removing barriers that have previously been identified. Thurston County will establish new policies and practices that address the needs of our community, both for our workforce and our residents.

Phase 5: Monitoring for Sustainability

Phase 5 will focus on accountability measures to ensure that equity efforts continue, and that any policies, practices, and programs that were implemented in the pursuit of change are found to be effective in advancing equity within our community. In this phase, the county will focus on evaluating the progress of our efforts. The county will cycle back through each phase to regularly diagnose, assess, strategize, and implement changes to continue advancing equity and meeting the various and unique needs of our community.

Racial Equity Action Plan: Phase 1

The goals outlined below are designed to help establish the foundation for employees and the community in understanding how to achieve racial equity. It is important to note in the proposal and approval of this Racial Equity Action Plan: Phase 1 is absent authentic community input. As a result, phase 1 of this plan focuses on collecting and analyzing data, reviewing existing policies and practices to identify barriers, and strengthening partnerships and trust between our local government and our community. Phase 1 of this Plan serves as a model of the ideals and efforts that the BoCC would like to see shared and implemented across county departments. It is the hope that elected officials are eager and willing to participate in this effort and align with the goals and strategies outlined to ensure consistent efforts in pursuing change and creating an equitable community.

All goals identified below as part of phase 1 will be approved by the BoCC in December 2023, with implementation of this plan beginning January 2024. Over the next few years, the remaining phases will focus on implementing new policies, programs, and processes, and will include community participation to aid in the development of these plans.

Goal 1

Increase understanding of institutional and structural racism among people who work for or represent Thurston County, including county staff, commissioners, and volunteers.

Overview:

To successfully pursue systemic change in our government and community, Thurston County must establish a foundation of understanding around equity and why this work is important. We seek to embed concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging throughout employee experiences to improve trust between the government and community members. By increasing awareness and understanding of racism, we will develop a culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Strategies:

- 1a. By March 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and directors will establish equity leads in all county departments and offices.
- 1b. By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will conduct a survey amongst county employees to evaluate understanding of equity, institutional and systemic racism, and bias, with a fifty percent response rate.
- 1c. By December 2024 the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to develop a training plan for all county employees that identifies competencies and criteria to increase understanding of equity, racism, and bias.
- 1d. By June 2025, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will guide each department and office to develop a racial equity action plan unique to that department/office with specific goals to identify inequities in policies, programs, and practices.

Goal 2

Evaluate existing systems, policies, processes, and programs to identify equity impact.

Overview:

Thurston County wants to develop an internal culture in which employees can ensure that decisions, policies, and procedures are informed by data and centered on our values. Reviewing policies and practices that have been established for decades is necessary to ensure the government is regularly considering equity while responding to current events.

Strategies:

- 2a. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will work with the Criminal Justice Regional Program Manager to develop and implement guidelines for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data to ensure decisions, policies, processes, and procedures are data informed.
- 2b. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will identify and develop tools and resources to aid county employees in considering equity throughout business operations.
- 2c. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with directors to develop and implement guidelines for considering equity impact when establishing, updating, and reviewing policies and procedures.

- 2d. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to assess current conditions and barriers that may prevent potential candidates from applying and competing for employment with the county.
- 2e. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to assess current conditions and barriers that effect retention and to develop recommendations to improve retention and decrease turnover in the county.
- 2f. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will collaborate with each department and office to evaluate access to county programs and services to identify barriers preventing a predictable, transparent, and equitable customer experience.

Goal 3

Use the Thurston County Racial Equity Council to bridge the gap between our government and community by strengthening community engagement with education and communication efforts in ways that are inclusive, culturally informed, and socially responsible.

Overview:

Thurston County relies on the perspectives and support of its community members to ensure services and programs are reaching those in need. Establishing a community-based approach in which the government has regular communication with community members can help increase the visibility and understanding of county initiatives and empower the community to share their thoughts on decisions that affect their lives.

Strategies:

- 3a. By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and the Racial Equity Council will develop an Equity Community Engagement Plan that outlines a standardized engagement approach to solicit feedback and public input on the county's equity initiatives and actions.
- 3b. By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the county Public Information Officer and departments to identify a production and facilitation strategy to ensure county forms and outreach materials are translated into languages commonly spoken in the community and to assess the use and accessibility of translation services for residents.
- 3c. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with each department and office to establish partnerships with county jurisdictions and community organizations and identify events for which the county can participate in that promote diversity and increase cultural awareness.
- 3d. By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and the Racial Equity Council will identify barriers in recruiting community members for serving on county boards, commissions, and working groups where membership realistically reflects the intersectionality of the Thurston County community.

Performance Measures

#	Strategy	Performance Measure
Increase understanding of institutional and structural racism among people who work for or represent Thurston County, including county staff, commissioners, and volunteers.		
1a	By March 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and directors will establish equity leads in all county departments and offices.	1) # of equity leads established throughout County 2) # of departments/offices participating 3) % of County departments/offices with equity leads
1b	By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will conduct a survey amongst county employees to evaluate understanding of equity, institutional and systemic racism, and bias, with a fifty percent response rate.	1) # of department employee participants 2) # of elected office employee participants 3) # of participants from boards/commissions 4) % completion rate 5) % of participants with beginner understanding of equity, racism, and bias 6) % of participants with intermediate understanding of equity, racism, and bias 7) % of participants with advanced understanding of equity, racism, and bias
1c	By December 2024 the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to develop a training plan for all county employees that identifies competencies and criteria to increase understanding of equity, racism, and bias.	1) proposal for training plan reviewed and approved by each department/office 2) # of racial and social equity trainings identified 3) # of racial and social equity trainings planned per year 4) # of unconscious bias trainings planned per year 5) # of resources identified to support development and facilitation of training 6) policy requiring employees to take foundational level trainings reviewed and approved by BoCC
1d	By June 2025, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will guide each department and office to develop a racial equity action plan unique to that department/office with specific goals to identify inequities in policies, programs, and practices.	1) # of departments and offices with reviewed and approved action plans 2) average # of goals and strategies per department and office
Evaluate existing systems, policies, processes, and programs to identify equity impact.		
2a	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will work with the Criminal Justice Regional Program Manager to develop and implement guidelines for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data to ensure decisions, policies, processes, and procedures are data informed.	1) Data guidelines reviewed and approved 2) County policy or procedure developed on data collection, analyzation, and reporting 3) # of variables identified as necessary data to collect throughout Law and Justice department and offices 4) # of variables identified as necessary data to collect throughout County 5) # of variables identified as currently collected throughout the County 6) # of departments/offices collecting data 7) # of departments/offices with internal policy/procedure/guideline on data collection

#	Strategy	Performance Measure
2b	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will identify and develop tools and resources to aid county employees in considering equity throughout business operations.	1) # of tools developed County-wide 2) # of tools developed for specific departments/offices 3) list of resources developed and shared with employees and on REI webpage 4) # of meetings held per department/office to discuss and educate on use of equity tools 5) process developed to support use of tools and assess challenges and successes
2c	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with directors to develop and implement guidelines for considering equity impact when establishing, updating, and reviewing policies and procedures.	1) process developed to assess equity impact during initial creation of new policies and procedures 2) # of policies established in County 3) # of policies with scheduled review date 4) # of policies identified as needing equity review within the next calendar year
2d	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to assess current conditions and barriers that may prevent potential candidates from applying and competing for employment with the county.	1) # of sources identified for job postings and advertisement 2) % of identified sources focused on BIPOC 3) # of sources used to post job advertisements 4) % of sources used focused on BIPOC 5) # of barriers identified potentially preventing BIPOC and other marginalized candidates from applying 6) offer acceptance rate county-wide 7) # of employees participating in panel member training prior to serving on a panel 8) # of job descriptions reviewed to identify potential barriers to people applying 9) # of career fairs hosted/participated in annually
2e	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the Department of Human Resources to assess current conditions and barriers that effect retention and to develop recommendations to improve retention and decrease turnover in the county.	1) % turnover rate county-wide 2) % turnover rate by department/office 3) list of reasons reported by employees for leaving the county 4) # of exit interviews conducted 5) # of barriers identified leading to lower retention 6) # of strategies developed to retain employees county-wide 7) # of strategies developed to retain employees in critical/hard to fill positions 8) advancement rate in county (how often, and who is getting promoted)
2f	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and equity leads will collaborate with each department and office to evaluate access to county programs and services to identify barriers preventing a predictable, transparent, and equitable customer experience.	1) # of customer satisfaction surveys conducted by department/office 2) % satisfaction rate reported from conducted surveys 3) % of front-line employees that feel they have necessary skills and support to provide high level of customer service 4) List of barriers identified to preventing predictable,

#	Strategy	Performance Measure
		transparent, and equitable customer experience 5) # of complaints received by department/offices related to customer service experience
Use the Thurston County Racial Equity Council to bridge the gap between our government and community by strengthening community engagement with education and communication efforts in ways that are inclusive, culturally informed, and socially responsible.		
3a	By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and the Racial Equity Council will develop an Equity Community Engagement Plan that outlines a standardized engagement approach to solicit feedback and public input on the county's equity initiatives and actions	1) list of variables to consider when engaging with diverse communities 2) list of various types of communities within the county and where/how to reach them 3) list of trusted community partners with whom the county can collaborate 4) # of community organizations identified with whom the county can partner 5) # of community engagement efforts currently conducted annually throughout county 6) list of spaces within community where the county can host town halls and community engagement events 7) # of community surveys conducted currently and assessment of impact 8) community engagement plan developed
3b	By September 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with the county Public Information Officer and departments to identify a production and facilitation strategy to ensure county forms and outreach materials are translated into languages commonly spoken in the community and to assess the use and accessibility of translation services for residents.	1) # of documents/forms/outreach materials shared to the public 2) % of existing documents currently translated into other languages 3) BoCC reviewed and approved policy on language translation and interpretation services 4) list of barriers identified that impact level of service received by customer when interacting with county, related to language interpretation and translation 5) # of encounters with customers/community members that involve language barrier
3c	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager will collaborate with each department and office to establish partnerships with county jurisdictions and community organizations and identify events for which the county can participate in that promote diversity and increase cultural awareness.	1) # of existing community events (with focus on diversity/culture) held by Thurston County 2) # of community events (with focus on diversity/culture) held throughout the county 3) % of community events (with focus on diversity/culture) held sponsored by a local government 4) % of community events (with focus on diversity/culture) held sponsored by community organization 5) # of events identified that the county could host/participate in
3d	By December 2024, the Racial Equity Program Manager and the Racial Equity Council will identify barriers in recruiting community	1) list of barriers identified preventing applicants from various communities within the county 2) list of strategies developed to increase applications

#	Strategy	Performance Measure
	members for serving on county boards, commissions, and working groups where membership realistically reflects the intersectionality of the Thurston County community.	3) list of recruitment strategies 4) review of current board application and questions asked 5) develop method to capture demographics of applicants and appointees

Accountability and Monitoring

The BoCC is responsible for adopting the goals and strategies outlined in this plan, and the Racial Equity Program Manager is responsible for compliance and maintenance of the plan. Progress will be reported by the established Equity Leads in each department and office, and the Racial Equity Program Manager for the county's overall efforts, with opportunities for amendments to the plan to reflect changes in circumstances and community desires. Many of the strategies in this plan can and will be pursued with current levels of resourcing and by re-prioritizing. Elements of this plan may also be contingent on appropriate resourcing, including in the biennial budgets, based on proposed system, practice, and policy changes that are new and significant.

Elevate Thurston

Thurston County rises to the opportunity to advance racial equity by pursuing systemic change in our government and community. When we remove racial inequities, all groups of people will benefit. Thurston County asks businesses, non-profits, academia, large institutions, faith-based organizations, service clubs, and residents to also rise in the commitment to helping eliminate systemic racism. We need your support and help to see success in ending racial inequities in our county. Ways in which you can support this plan and Thurston County's efforts include partnering with the county in community engagement efforts, helping the county establish and maintain trust with the community, helping to promote and advocate for community events that help inform the public, and connecting with the Racial Equity Council to establish ongoing conversations around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, to help inform the county on how to move in the right direction.

Letter to Community

To the residents and members of the Thurston County community,

We are writing as a collective of county directors and elected officials who are deeply committed to advancing equity and social justice in our community. We recognize that our community, like many others, face persistent disparities in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, housing, and criminal justice. We believe it is our duty to address these disparities and take proactive steps to create an equitable community. As county directors and elected officials, we are dedicated to providing the leadership, support, and advocacy necessary to see this plan through for successful implementation. It is only through this collective effort that we can create positive change.


Carolina Mejia, Commissioner


Tye Menser, Commissioner


Gary Edwards, Commissioner


Emily Clouse, Commissioner


Wayne Fournier, Commissioner


Robin Campbell, Interim County Manager


Rob Gelder, Assistant County Manager


Jon Tunheim, Prosecutor


Judge Mary Sue Wilson, Superior Court


Judge Brett Buckley, District Court


Derek Sanders, Sheriff


Linda Enlow, Clerk


Mary Hall, Auditor


Steven Grey, Assessor


Jeff Gadman, Treasurer


Gary Warnock, Coroner


David Bayne, Public Health and Social Services


Joshua Cummings, Community Planning Economic Development


Ben Miller-Todd, Emergency Services


Jennifer D. Walker, Public Works


Carrie Hennen, Pretrial Services


Maria Aponte, Human Resources


Nicole Martinez, Budget Manager


Patrick O'Connor, Public Defense


Sherrie Ilg, Information Technology


Meghan Porter, Public Information Officer


Leah Landon, Criminal Justice Regional Program Manager


Jennica Machado, Economic Development Program Manager


Rebecca Harvey, Climate Mitigation Program Manager


Devi Ogden, Racial Equity Program Manager

Additional Resources

Resolution No. 15995

A Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners declaring racism a crisis in Thurston County, Washington: [Resolution No. 15995](#)

Thurston County Board of Health Proclamation

A proclamation adopted in 2021 declaring racism a public health crisis in Thurston County: [Racism is a Public Health Crisis](#)

Resolution No. 16097

A Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners establishing the Thurston County Council on Racial Equity and Inclusion: [Racial Equity Council](#)

Black Americans and the Law

Berkeley Law provides a timeline that focuses on key legal events and actions that have structured and systematized racism in America. <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/legal-research/black-americans-and-the-law/>