

Olympia Strong: A Roadmap for Economic Resiliency

Equity Analysis (a starting point)

An Equity Framework is under development for use in staff reports. The purpose of the Equity Framework is to apply a basic equity lens to a proposed action or project to analyze and summarize its equity impacts. Equity takes into consideration how past or current injustices may have created unequal starting points or differing needs for certain groups of people.

The City of Olympia is kicking off a long-term planning project called *Olympia Strong: A Roadmap for Economic Resiliency*. At this point the action is a public engagement process that will result in goals, policies and actions to shape community and economic development in Olympia. Here, the draft Equity Framework has been applied to the public engagement process. This should be viewed as a starting point rather than a complete analysis of what is inevitably a complicated and nuanced issue.

Summary

Who will benefit from this action?

Resiliency refers to an ability to adapt, recover quickly from challenges and thrive. Through a public process called Olympia Strong the City will identify actions to improve economic resiliency for:

- Olympia residents,
- Businesses,
- The broader community (organizations, schools, etc.), and
- The City of Olympia organization itself.

The outcome of this process will be a strategic framework and specific actions the City and partners can take to achieve community-defined economic goals. Whomever participates in the process will inevitably shape the outcome. To advance equity, the City will make concerted efforts to engage people and groups underrepresented in local decision making or traditionally marginalized from economic opportunity as the result of systemic racism, discrimination and other barriers.

Who will be burdened by this action, and how?

In general, public engagement can be both a benefit and a burden to a person. Beneficial because it is an opportunity to help shape outcomes that affect the community. A burden as it takes time away from other life endeavors.

But the burden of engaging in typical government processes may be greater for those who work long hours, are raising children or caring for loved ones, face disability or personal health issues or do not speak English as a first language. These factors increase for households that are lower income, working class¹ and in poverty. These are the very people who face the steepest barriers to economic resiliency, and for whom the City wishes to reach with the Olympia Strong public process and resulting actions.

¹ Generally, working class refers to people in jobs that provide low pay and have reduced skill or education requirements, like services sector jobs such as clerical, retail sales, and low-skill manual labor vocations.

Another public engagement burden has to do with racism and discrimination, as City staff heard during listening sessions for Reimagining Public Safety, Social Justice & Equity and the Armory Creative Campus. Despite the City's sincere and concerted efforts to engage marginalized populations, for many people who are Black, Indigenous, of color, or from other marginalized groups such as those who are LGBTQ, Disabled or Immigrants, current and historic discrimination make it hard to trust government. Also lack of representation and microaggressions that occur during public meetings can make participation uncomfortable.

The City's goal is to improve economic resiliency and equity as an outcome of this work. Thus, it is especially important to include people most impacted through an intentionally designed process.

How did the demographic data shape the picture of who benefits and who is burdened?

In approaching this work, we recognize the economic burdens of systemic racism and discrimination, as well as being in poverty, working class and low income. The following is by no means a complete picture, but here are some things we know from the data.

Demographic data provided by the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) shape a picture of the economic disparity in Olympia and Thurston County between those who are:

- White vs. Black, Indigenous, Latino/Latina/Latinx, Multiracial or other communities of color
- Disabled vs. not disabled
- Renters vs. homeowners

Data also demonstrate that an approximate third of Olympia residents struggle to make ends meet. These households are below the federal poverty line or below the United Way's ALICE Threshold, meaning Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Approximately one third of Olympia residents are also housing cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Various data also shape a picture of adverse health effects for populations subjected to racism and discrimination as a result, such as for people who are Black, Indigenous, of color, and from other marginalized groups such as those who are Disabled, LGBTQ or Immigrants. The adverse health effects perpetuate negative economic outcomes for these individuals as well as society.

Youth also deserve a special focus. Anecdotally, we know many youths are struggling with lack of hope, lack of support or lack of resources and guidance. ACS data reveals growing rates of disconnected youth in Olympia (youth 16-19 years in age that are not in school, not high school graduates and unemployed.) While not fully understood, this data is concerning and needs to be further explored. National data also reveals high rates of suicide ideation and attempt among LGBTQ youth as a result of discrimination and social isolation. This is concerning for a number of reasons, including the toll poor mental health takes on a young person's trajectory to college and career pathways. Studies also show that young adults from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to achieve employment and economic stability by age 30.

We are still analyzing the data, what it means for Olympia specifically and the limits of the data we have available. At this stage, we generally understand that: 1) certain groups face steep economic burdens as the result of systemic racism and discrimination, as well as being in poverty, working class and low

income, 2) these groups are less likely to have the economic means to weather financial disruption and hardship, and 3) the burden of participating in public engagement may be higher for these same groups.

See appendix for references.

How does the project impact known disparities in our community?

The first step to improving economic resiliency and equity through Olympia Strong is to intentionally design the public process to reach people who face high economic burdens as the result of racism and discrimination, being in poverty, working class and low income. Accordingly, the public participation framework emphasizes the importance of outreach to these groups through:

Listening Sessions

- Including focused conversations with BIPOC populations, people with disabilities, those who are working class, youth and young adults including those who are LGBTQ, and people experiencing homelessness participating in the Journey to Jobs program.
- A session on poverty with subject matter experts to gain a better baseline understanding of barriers, needs and what is currently being done at a statewide and local level.
- In some cases, meals, stipends and childcare will be provided to participants.
- Additional listening sessions may be identified as we learn more.

Outreach to Ethnic Group Leaders

- Outreach to representatives from various ethnic organizations in an attempt to build and strengthen City relationships and seek help reaching populations.
- Design outreach opportunities based on what we learn. Use translation and interpreters as needed.

Person-on-the-Street Interviews

- For a three-month period, interns and staff will stage at various locations throughout the City to reach people who may not ordinarily get involved in City government. We will intentionally stage at locations where people of all incomes, races and ethnicities are likely to congregate, including bus stops, grocery stores, multifamily apartment complexes, churches, etc.

Share what we learn with the community and partners

- Through conversations with community and economic development partners in the region, City advisory boards and other community groups we will share what we are learning and build ideas and buy-in for action.
- Connect what we learn to partnership actions that lift barriers and increase economic opportunity for marginalized people.

Conclusion

The City of Olympia cannot solve systemic racism and discrimination with one project. Our objective with the public process for Olympia Strong is to improve upon past practice, build new relationships and employ techniques that reach people in our community who have traditionally been marginalized. This is part of an ongoing effort to advance equity in City decision making and outcomes for our community.

Data Sources

Data Profile from U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey

An initial data profile was completed by Jason Robertson & Co. for the City of Olympia, using ACS data averaged over 5 years from 2016-2020. Staff and the consultant are still analyzing this data. Initial findings reveal economic disparity based on housing tenure, gender and disability. Data regarding rising rates of disconnected youth in Olympia needs to be better understood and will be further explored.

Available upon request.

Olympia Economic Ecosystem Study

A 2020 report by Harvey M. Rose and Associates, LLC provided baseline information to assist in the City's policy and decision making. Among other things, the report highlights issues of higher poverty rates and lower earnings in Olympia than in the comparison jurisdictions of Lacey, Tumwater, and Thurston County as a whole.

Report available Upon Request.

Olympia Housing Action Plan (HAP)

The HAP was accepted by City Council in June of 2021. The report includes a section on Equity in Housing Affordability (pages 11-15.) In summary, not all households have access to affordable housing. Across Thurston County, people of color — those identifying as Hispanic or a race other than white alone — tend to have lower incomes, are less likely to own their own home, are more likely to be housing cost-burdened, and are more likely to experience homelessness. Across the United States — including in Olympia — policies such as redlining and inclusionary zoning and covenants have led to and reinforce housing inequities faced by people of color. Lower income households — who are disproportionately headed by people of color — are generally disadvantaged in terms of where and what they can afford. They tend to spend more on their housing, having less income to spend on other life pursuits, such as education, retirement or health care.

Available at: https://www.olympiawa.gov/government/codes,_plans_standards/housing_action_plan.php.

The Brookings Institute

A study titled Diverging Employment Pathways Among Young Adults Martha Ross, Gabriel Piña, Kristin Anderson Moore, Jessica Warren, and Nicole Bateman used trajectory analysis to explore the extent to which young adults from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds achieve employment and economic stability by age 30. The study reveals children born to families with low incomes are disproportionately likely to earn low incomes themselves in adulthood. Children of teen parents and children of parents without postsecondary education also struggle to get a solid foothold in the economy. Additional factors associated with low earning and low upward mobility include gender and race/ethnicity, incarceration, work-limiting health conditions, or prolonged unemployment. The report ends with several policy recommendations.

Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/essay/pathways-to-upward-mobility-overview/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_medium=email&utm_content=217394132&utm_source=hs_email

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is a nonprofit suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth. Their 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health captures the experiences of nearly 34,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24 across the United States, with 45% of respondents being LGBTQ youth of color and 48% being transgender or nonbinary. The survey demonstrates that rates of suicidal thoughts have trended upward among LGBTQ young people over the last three years. 45% of LGBTQ youth said they seriously considered suicide in the last year — including 53% of those who are transgender or nonbinary and 14% who reported they had carried out a suicide attempt. The Trevor Project stresses that poor mental health outcomes are the result of “minority stress” like social stigma and are not the direct result of sexual orientation or gender identity. The report suggests a simple path forward that could shield young people from serious harm: welcoming communities.

Available at: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>

United for ALICE

The United Way’s ALICE reports provide a measure of economic hardship. ALICE is a measure of children growing up in households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level but below the cost of household basics. These households are Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed. According to an ALICE in Focus briefing for Washington in 2019, 34% (12,634) children in Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater were growing up in hardship - in households that do not earn enough to afford the basics needed to live in a modern economy (housing, childcare, food, transportation, a smartphone plan and taxes.) The report reveals some racial/ethnic groups are disproportionately represented among ALICE children. Also, households that include someone who has a disability, or those who are not native to the U.S. or with limited English-speaking ability are also disproportionately likely to be ALICE. A National report, *The Pandemic Divide*, reveals ALICE households were significantly more impacted by the pandemic than non-ALICE households.

Available at: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/>