



Meeting Agenda

General Government Committee

City Hall
601 4th Avenue E
Olympia, WA 98501

Information: 360.753.8244

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

5:30 PM

Online and Via Phone

Special Meeting with Founding Member Work Group

Attend: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85650507791?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85650507791?pwd=WHFjUFZCc1loL2pMeWNSWEhxaWdvdz09)

[pwd=WHFjUFZCc1loL2pMeWNSWEhxaWdvdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85650507791?pwd=WHFjUFZCc1loL2pMeWNSWEhxaWdvdz09)

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- 2.A** [21-0845](#) New Social Justice & Equity Commission Development - Discussion with Founding Member Work Group

Attachments: [City Council Referral](#)

[Engage Olympia](#)

[Project Overview](#)

[Community Member Focus Group Sessions Methodology](#)

[Executive Summary of Research Findings](#)

3. ADJOURNMENT

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General Government Committee

New Social Justice & Equity Commission Development - Discussion with Founding Member Work Group

Agenda Date: 8/31/2021
Agenda Item Number: 2.A
File Number: 21-0845

Type: discussion **Version:** 1 **Status:** In Committee

Title

New Social Justice & Equity Commission Development - Discussion with Founding Member Work Group

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Discussion only. No action requested.

City Manager Recommendation:

Discuss with the Founding Member Work Group the development of a new Social Justice & Equity Commission.

Report

Issue:

Whether to discuss with the Founding Member Work Group the development of a new Social Justice & Equity Commission.

Staff Contact:

Stacey Ray, Strategic Planning and Performance Manager, Office of Performance and Innovation,
360.753.8046

Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Strategic Planning and Performance Manager, Office of Performance and Innovation
Meg Winch, Principal, Communications Resources Northwest
Megan Matthews, Founding Member Work Group Member
Anthony Markland, Founding Member Work Group Member
Joslyn Nelson, Founding Member Work Group Member
Rusty Shekha, Founding Member Work Group Member

Background and Analysis:

In June 2020, the City Council (Council) forwarded to the General Government Committee (Committee) a referral to develop a Human Rights Commission to support the City in dismantling institutional racism and all forms of oppression while helping build a more equitable, just and thriving

community.

In November 2020, Council approved a community-based process to establish a commission to address social justice and equity issues, including that it be led by a Founding Member Work Group (Work Group) made up of community members representing marginalized populations, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Information about the current four Work Group members is available on Engage Olympia, including members' photos and descriptions in their own words for why the development of a new commission is important to them.

The Work Group's role was to seek out and elevate the voices of typically underrepresented and marginalized groups and learn about possible options to form a commission that could best represent and respond to the needs of community members. They would use that information to develop a recommendation that would include a new commission's: scope, make-up and terms, name, and first-year priorities. Council also approved the use of "Social Justice & Equity Commission" as a temporary name until completion of the process.

In April and May 2021, the Work Group hosted four small focus group sessions with invitations distributed to specific populations (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+, Immigrant, Disabled and Neurodivergent), and one larger community conversation that was open to all community members. Attached is an overview of the focus group session methodology, and all the input collected from community members in the focus group sessions is available on the *Engage Olympia* project site.

In July 2021, the City contracted with Communication Resources Northwest (CRNW) to research municipal human rights commissions, equity and social justice commissions, and/or similar commissions to better understand and compare their scope, make-up and structure, codes and bylaws, and other applicable information. Attachment 5 is an overview of CRNW's scope, methodology, and research findings.

The purpose of this work session is for the Work Group to provide the Committee an overview of the focus group sessions with community members and research on possible frameworks and discuss the Work Group's preferred options for establishing a new Social Justice & Equity Commission. The discussion will include the commission's purpose, jurisdiction, and scope. The Work Group will also share for discussion with the Committee a recommendation on establishing the commission's first-year work plan and recruitment and appointment of the inaugural membership.

The Work Group will use the discussion with the Committee members to guide development of their final recommendation to be brought back to the Committee on October 27. Work Group members can continue to participate in the establishment of the commission; however, delivery of a recommendation to the Committee will conclude the members' commitment and the Work Group will formally sunset.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There is significant interest to address systemic racism and inequality through establishment of a new commission to address social justice and equity issues.

Options:

1. Discuss the development of a new Social Justice & Equity Commission with the Founding

Member Work Group.

2. Do not Discuss the development of a new Social Justice & Equity Commission with the Founding Member Work Group.
3. Discuss the development of a new Social Justice & Equity Commission with the Founding Member Work Group at another time.

Financial Impact:

Council allocated \$60,000 in 2020 Council goal funds which has been used for consultant support, reducing barriers to participation, and paying Work Group members a stipend.

Attachments:

City Council Referral

Engage Olympia

Project Overview

Community Member Focus Group Sessions: Methodology

Executive Summary of Research Findings



Olympia City Council Referral Request

Tracking Number
(Provided by Susan)

Click or tap
here to enter
text.

Date of
Referral

6/9/2020

Requester Lisa Parshley

Referral To ☐ Study Session

☐ Finance Committee

☒ General Government Committee

☐ Land Use & Environment Committee

Problem Statement

A clear concise description of the issue(s) that need(s) to be addressed.

In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal declaration of human rights. In this Declaration the UN recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Further the universal declaration of human rights asserts that all people shall enjoy the freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear. While this declaration was aimed in large part to promote friendly relations between nations through common understanding and groundwork of human rights, it has serves as model and platform for Human Rights Commissions around the world for countries, states, and small jurisdictions.

Today we are facing a human rights crisis caused by centuries of institutional and structural racism in our community and government. This crisis is not unique to Olympia. It is a national crisis impacting communities of color across the United States. Racism is built into our nation's very fabric including its institutions, policies, and practices. We must work to dismantle racist institutions and fight for racial, LGBTQ, religious, disability, and social justice for all our community, and create lasting change.

While federal and state governments must act to rebuild these systems, local jurisdictions must also undertake this important work. In Olympia we must continue the process of learning and action around how to dismantle all forms of oppression within our city government and its operations, including our entire justice system, civilian oversight, and public safety strategies.

To begin this work, we will need the wisdom of those who are most impacted by these systems, which could be achieved through the formation of a Human Rights Commission.

Request

What is being requested to assist in addressing the issue described in the problem statement?

This referral is requesting the development of a Human Rights Commission achieved through inviting members of the community, especially the most impacted by social and institutional injustice, and engaging local and regional experts on human rights and social justice to help scope a work plan and how best to populate the commission, with a near-term focus on civilian oversight of law enforcement and the development of policing reforms. Once scoping and feasibility work including consultation with the finance committee, a proposal will be brought back to Olympia City Council with a recommendation on a resolution and/or ordinance for a Human Rights Commission.

During this scoping, public, private, and non-profit partnerships should be explored and welcomed.

Relationship to City Business or Proposed City Business/Services

Describe how this will enhance what is already offered and/or what it will provide that is not currently available. Why is this the City's issue to address? How will this create a more adaptive and resilient organization?

A Human Rights Commission would begin the process of dismantling institutional racism and all forms of oppression within our city government while helping build a more equitable, just, and thriving community. A human rights commission would review city policy, plans, and operations to incorporate equity and justice principles throughout all city business, departments, the comprehensive plan, and master plans.

Connection to Comprehensive Plan

Choose all that apply.

☒ **Community, Safety and Health**

Inclusive, respectful, civic participation; a safe & prepared community; health and wellness; adequate food and shelter; a quality education

☒ **Downtown**

Vibrant, attractive urban destination; a safe and welcoming downtown for all; a mix of urban housing options; a variety of businesses; connections to our cultural & historic fabric; engaging arts & entertainment experience

☒ **Economy**

Abundant local products and services; a thriving arts and entertainment industry; sustainable quality infrastructure; a stable thriving economy

☒ **Environment**

Clean water & air; a daily connection to nature; preserved quality natural areas; a toxin-free community; a waste free culture

☒ **Neighborhoods**

Distinctive places & gathering spaces; nearby goods & services; neighborhoods that are engaged in community decision making; safe and welcoming places to live

Options

Describe proposed options for moving the idea or issue forward for the meeting body to consider.

This referral will be sent to the General Government Committee to be added into 2020 work plan. This committee would develop the best process to scope and populate a human rights commission. It is envisioned this will require engaging the community, especially those most impacted by institutionalized racism and it is envisioned that they will seek private, public, and nonprofit partnerships to achieve these goals.

Timing

Is this issue time sensitive, are there other timing factors to consider?

Development of an advisory board focused on human rights has long been discussed by members of the Olympia City Council. Our community needs and demands action from their city government, especially dealing with police oversight, accountability, and transparency. A human rights commission could provide a solid foundation upon which these issues could be best addressed at the operations, policy, and culture of the department level. Thus, work on a human rights commission needs to start now so we can give thoughtful attention and engage people who are most impacted.

Supporting Documentation

Are there documents that support your request or that should be considered?

Equity and social justice are accepted core values of Olympia, as evidenced by previous council actions and staff commitment (e.g. resolutions honoring black history month, equal pay for equal work and the formation of the staff Committee on Diversity and Equity, <http://olympiawa.gov/community/diversity-equity.aspx>). Clear demonstration of Olympia's need for a human rights commission is the paucity of any reference to social justice, equity, diversity, and restorative justice in our comprehensive plan. Other cities and counties across Washington that have already established Human Rights Commissions, including Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, King County, Snohomish County, Kitsap County. Thurston county has a human rights commission in code that they are not

implementing. Olympia as the capital city of the state of Washington should join these jurisdictions and form human rights commission to ensure our business as a city and as the capital city has a lens of equity and racial justice.

Councilmember Signatures

Two Councilmembers must support the request including the Chair of the Committee of referral. (Cannot be a committee quorum unless discussed at an open public meeting of the committee.)

Lisa Parshley
Sponsoring Councilmember

1. _____
Jessica Bateman
Councilmember

2. _____
Jim Cooper
Councilmember

Staff Supplement

Staff will review the request to generate administrative impacts to be considered as part of proposal (staff to initial after their review):

Budget Impacts: Click or tap here to enter text.

Legal Review (to include regulatory authority): Click or tap here to enter text.

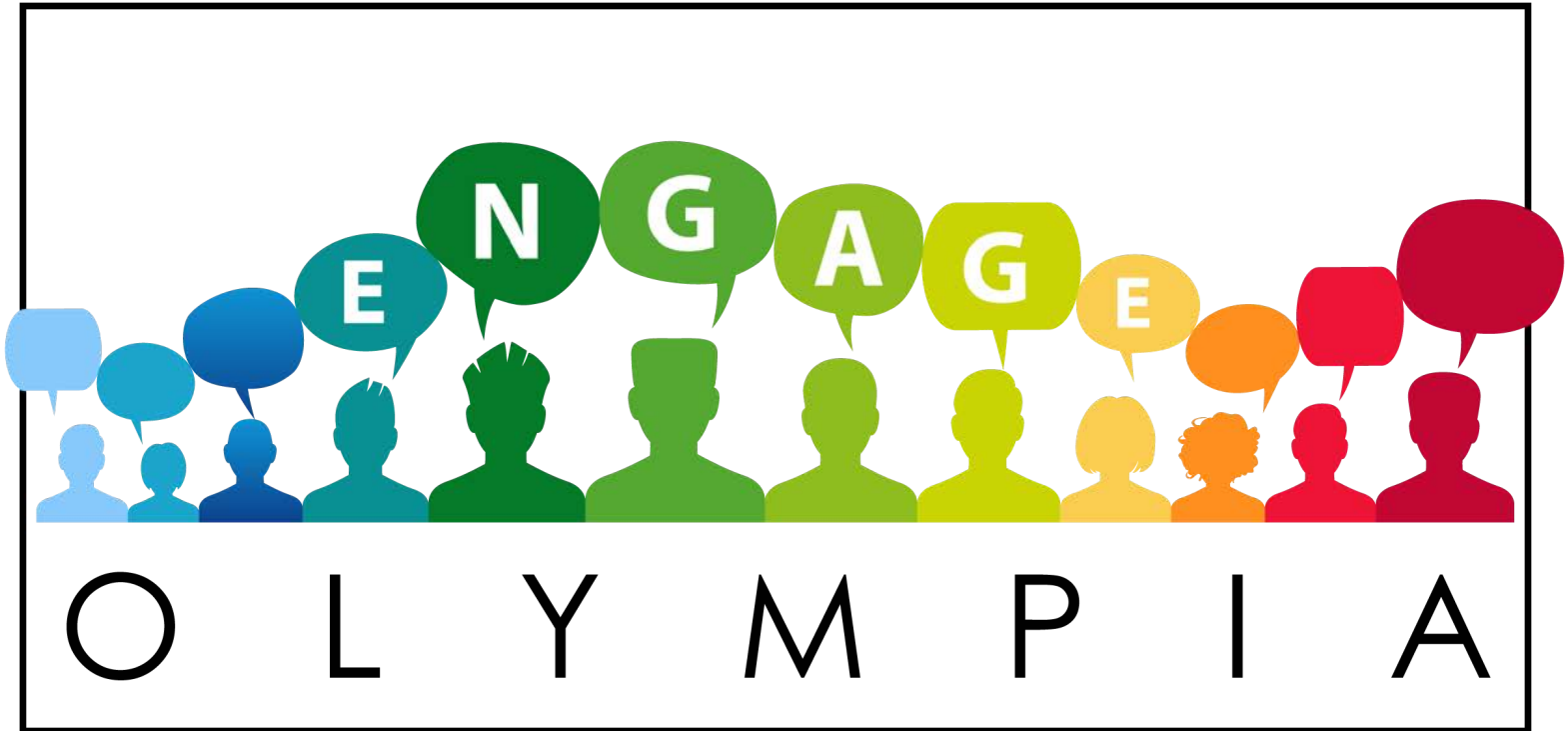
Policy implications: Click or tap here to enter text.

Implementation Considerations: Click or tap here to enter text.

Staff Liaison: Click or tap here to enter text.



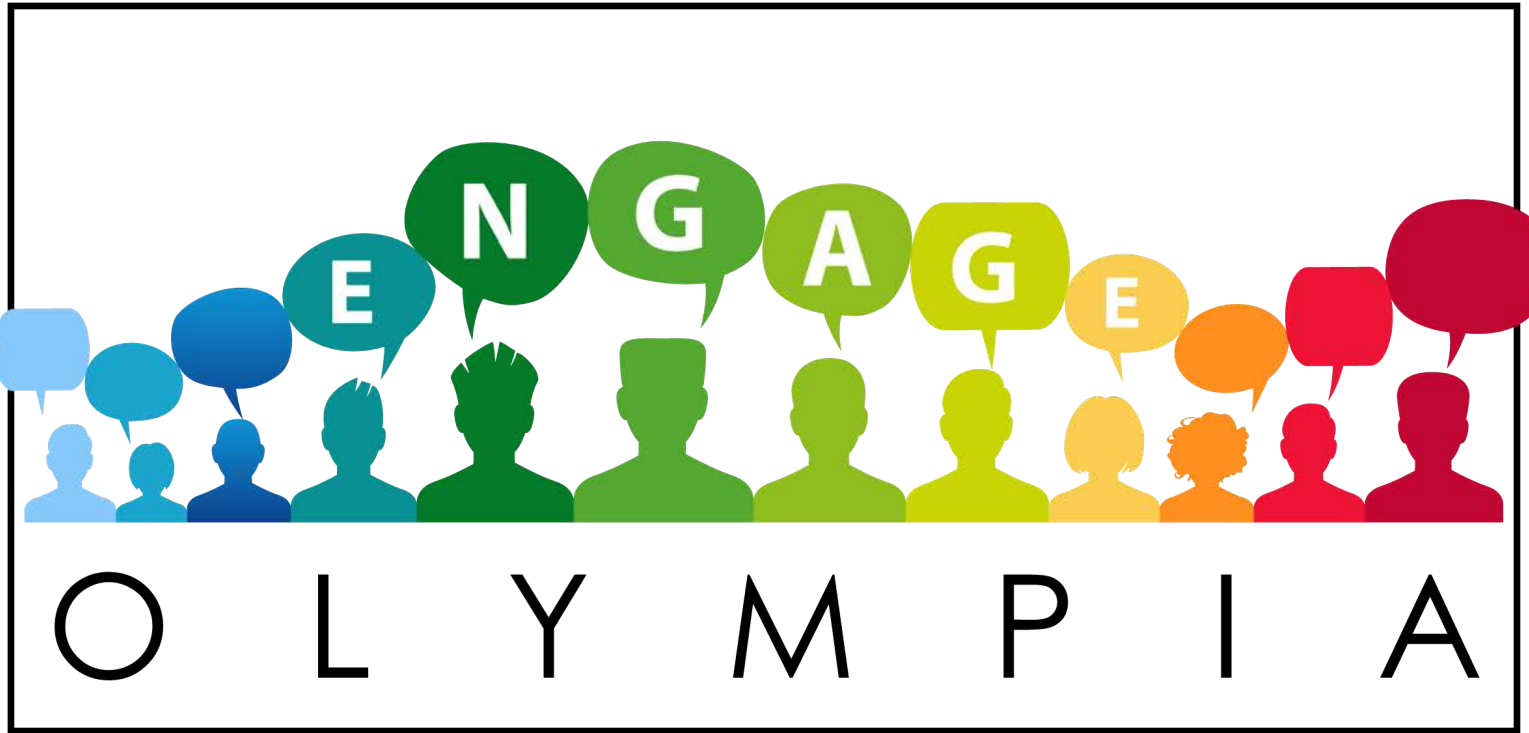
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Social Justice and Equity Commission



Journey Towards Equity Inclusion and Social Justice



Help us create a new Commission to build a more equitable, just and thriving community

We want Olympia to be a place where we all belong. We know that the people most impacted by institutional racism and oppression have had the least decision-making power. This needs to change, and we are starting today. We will follow the lead of those who have been harmed, especially the youth, while acting now to protect Black lives.

Help us build a commission of accountability, to create a more equitable, just and thriving community in Olympia.

We will gather and compile the information we receive to present a . nal recommendation to City Council about the new Commission's formal name, make-up and terms, scope of work, and first year work plan.

Be part of the change!

We want this commission to reflect the voices in our community. We are trying to capture the untold stories of our most invisible and marginalized people in our communities. More opportunities to share your insight will be added soon.

[NEWS FEED](#)[IDEAS](#)[SURVEYS](#)

Founding Members Work Group profiles

26 Jul 2021



We are entering a more public phase of the process to form a Social Justice and Equity Commission, and the Founding Member Work Group are pleased to introduce themselves to the Olympia community.

- [View their profiles](#)

Actions that are underway

12 Jul 2021



In April and May this year, the Founding Member Work Group hosted five community listening sessions with Black, Indigenous, People of Color and intersecting marginalized groups (LGBTQ+, immigrants, disabled and unstably housed).

Out of these sessions came input on different areas and ways in which the City can contribute to addressing inequities and bias for marginalized community members. The Founding Member Work Group and conversation participants have asked: *What's currently being done at the City in response to what was heard in the sessions?*

While the Founding Member Work Group and staff are continuing to review the input

Continue reading...

Notes from Community Conversations

15 Jun 2021



The Work Group held four sessions centering the voices of marginalized groups (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, People with Disabilities and Neurodivergent) and one open to the community at large.

- [Read the combined input from all five sessions](#)

Reflections on the Process to Create a New Equity Commission

27 May 2021



By Olivia Salazar de Breaux, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator

It has been quite a journey for the Founding Members Work Group and I as we have embarked on the extremely daunting, high profile and emotionally taxing work of building a new equity commission that will ultimately help the City of Olympia become the anti-racist, affirming organization and City we want it to be.

The truth is this: racial justice work is unlike anything we have ever done as a City organization. This isn't just a typical advisory commission we are putting together. It is about human rights and livelihood. This work is deeply personal for all of us and it

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Fifth Focus Group Canceled

20 May 2021



Our original plan was to hold a fifth focus group session centering members of Olympia's unstably housed community. The Work Group sought out guidance from community advocates and subject matter experts to ensure that we structure the conversation thoughtfully and in a trauma-informed way. We learned that - before asking for their input - we need to invest in long-term relationship building with this community and have resources available to respond to immediate support requests. Realizing that this was beyond the scope of work for the Founding Members Work Group, because of the limited time and resources available, we decided to cancel the fifth focus group.

[Continue reading...](#)

Who's Listening

Olivia Salazar de Breaux



Equity & Inclusion Coordinator



Phone 360-753-8343

Email osalazar@ci.olympia.wa.us

Timeline



Phase 1: Founding work group

December 2020-February 2021

Founding Members Work Group formed and consultant team hired.



Phase 2: Community outreach

April-May 2021

Engage Olympia, targeted focus groups and city-wide community conversation



Phase 3: Data analysis and research

May-July 2021

Founding Member Work Group analyzes community input, researches different kinds of commissions and drafts recommendation.



Phase 4: Recommendation to City Council's General Government Committee

August 2021

Documents

 [Social Justice & Equity Commission Flyer \(444 KB\) \(pdf\)](#)

 [Notes from Community Conversations \(623 KB\) \(pdf\)](#)

 [Founding members work group profiles \(664 KB\) \(pdf\)](#)

FAQs

[Who are considered marginalized groups?](#)

What can other people - everyone not in marginalized groups - do to support the process?

Why are the focus groups invitation-only?

Why aren't we recording focus groups?

Who is observing the focus groups and why?

What are we doing with the information gathered from focus groups?

What is Council's role? How are they supporting the process?

Will the Founding Members automatically be appointed to the Commission?

How are we keeping people informed?

How do I share my ideas if I can't attend the focus groups?

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Forming a New **Social Justice & Equity Commission**

To create a more equitable, just and thriving community, the City of Olympia is forming a Social Justice and Equity Commission. Community members who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color are leading the community conversations to shape the Commission's formal name, membership, terms, priorities and first-year work plan.

Community involvement lays the groundwork for a successful Commission

The future Commission will take on a heavy load; countering oppression to create an anti-racist government is a formidable challenge. To succeed, the Commission must be built on solid relationships and well-informed plans for action. Olympia's community members are leading this foundational work. We are grateful to Olympia's residents who have offered their trust and optimism to engage in the process. City of Olympia council, leadership and staff are committed to making good on their investment.

The process centers community members who have been left at the margins

The process to form the Commission focuses on the people who usually don't engage with the City. To start building better relationships with these community members, creating the Commission centers their ideas and interests. The Founding Members Work Group provides the leadership to make this possible. With their support, we are learning from Olympia's communities most impacted by injustice and oppression, the same communities the future Commission will represent.

Creating a more equitable, just and thriving community

Standing up an equity commission is part of a larger effort to create a city where all residents can thrive. A more diverse, inclusive city will better reflect and respond to the needs of all community members. At the same time, inclusion will bring new perspectives and ideas, generating creative and innovative solutions.

Overall, removing oppression and injustice will eliminate stressors and hardships for both marginalized and majority community members and create new opportunity and productivity for our city.





Community Member Focus Group Sessions: Methodology

In November 2020, the Olympia City Council approved a community-based process to establish a commission to address social justice and equity issues. The process is being led by a Founding Member Work Group (Work Group) made up of community members representing marginalized populations, with an emphasis on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

The Work Group's role was to seek out and elevate the voices of typically underrepresented and marginalized groups and learn about possible options to form a commission that could best represent and respond to the needs of community members.

In April and May 2021, the Work Group hosted four small focus group sessions with invitations distributed to specific populations (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+, Immigrant, Disabled and Neurodivergent), and one larger community conversation that was open to all community members.

Steps were taken to ensure all the sessions were safe, welcoming, and accessible for participants. All sessions were done virtually using a "racial healing circles" format, with shared expectations about allowing space for strong emotions, personal experiences, and respectful engagement. When possible, session hosts were representative of the participants. Invitation materials were translated into various languages and interpretation services were used to reduce language barriers. Materials and sessions were also intentionally designed to be accessible for participants who are visually and/or hearing impaired.

Work Group Members, along with staff and facilitators, captured input focused on inclusivity and equity within the City of Olympia. The questions posed to participants were what the City could start, stop, and continue doing to contribute to an inclusive and equitable place for marginalized community members to live, work, play, and thrive. Responses were captured in real-time so participants could see their comments reflected accurately. Councilmembers were invited to attend as listeners.

Community input was also gathered using a voluntary survey hosted on *Engage Olympia*. The survey questions the same as what was asked in the focus group sessions and included an open-ended request for ideas. The experiences and responses captured reflect input from over 170 community members representing a diversity of marginalized groups.

Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have a safe space in which to share personal experiences and feel heard. In addition to expressing a desire for the

City to continue to hold conversations with marginalized community members, significant themes from the focus group sessions included: calls for increasing trust, transparency, and accountability; moving away from traditional police and law enforcement responses; and maximizing the City's ability to influence equity in other systems that impact quality of life, such as housing and education.

All community member input collected from the focus group sessions and surveys is available on the [Engage Olympia project site](#).



Executive Summary: Research on Commissions

The City of Olympia contracted with Communication Resources Northwest (CRNW) to research potential commission models to support a process to establish a new commission to address social justice and equity issues. In July and August 2021, CRNW researched 58 cities, counties, and/or states/provinces with populations between 50,000 and 150,000. Of the 58 municipalities researched, 32 have an existing body dedicated to human rights and/or ESJ engagement, such as a commission, task force, or board, and two are in the process of forming one. One community has a civil rights task force that is unaffiliated with the municipality.

Methodology

For each of the 32 existing commissions, CRNW conducted through web-based data gathering and 11 phone or in-person interviews to seek information about several key service capacity and organizational attributes, including:

- Capacity in which the commission serves (e.g., advisory, education/outreach, investigative, and enforcing)
- Functional aspects of the service capacity (e.g., power and authority, duties and responsibilities, kinds of outreach conducted, complaint submittal and processing procedures, etc.)
- Commission organizational makeup and structure (e.g., number of members, term lengths, compensation, staff support, etc.)
- Similarities in codes and bylaws

Scope of Work/Authority

The work of commissions range across a continuum from advisory to enforcement.

- **Advocacy:** The commission provides advice to Council and staff on policy and the response to current events; it also ‘daylights’ issues and pushes government to consider the needs of a diversity of stakeholders, particularly those who have the least positive connection with government.
- **Education and Outreach:** The commission engages with the community to build a stronger understanding of rights and the needs of a diverse suite of stakeholders and to reduce discrimination in all forms through increased awareness and visibility.
- **Investigation:** The commission receives complaints and oversees staff that conduct investigations and determine whether a claim has merit and fits within its jurisdictional limitations.
- **Enforcement:** The commission renders judgements and finds defendants guilty or innocent of rights violations; it also has the authority to impose fines or sanctions.

Peer interviews support the importance of commissions having a clear mandate from the governing body and agreement among commissioners and government as to the commission’s scope of work.

Advisory/Education and Outreach

Most researched commissions serve in an advisory role to municipal government and/or have an education and outreach function. Twenty-eight of 32 serve in an advisory capacity, and 23 also perform education/outreach to the community

Capacity to Receive Complaints

Nineteen of 32 commissions have a way to file complaints. Most of these funnel complaints to other entities such as a state human rights/equity commission, but don't handle the complaints themselves.

Entities with Investigative and/or Enforcement Service

Just under 15% of researched commissions have investigative authority and only 7% are empowered to engage in enforcement activities. Of the four commissions with enforcement authority, the only commission of similar size to Olympia, Harrisburg, PA, has not used its quasi-judicial authority, seeking to resolve complaints through mediation.

Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of a commission is traditionally only within the geographic boundaries of the municipality. While education and outreach can reach beyond those boundaries, any investigation or enforcement authority ends at the geographic boundary, and advisory services only apply to the entity that appoints the commission as in the council or municipal departments.

Commission Name

The name of the commission matters a great deal to commissioners, stakeholders, and municipalities as it is a public announcement of what the commission does.

- A human rights commission, the most common from the research, focuses on broad constructs of human experience and the preservation of basic human rights to all people, addressing system issues such as homelessness, income inequity, incarceration, free speech, etc.
- A human relations commission, as is the case in Harrisburg, PA, focuses on cases of discrimination in employment, housing, healthcare, policing/public safety, and human services. It is not concerned with broader issues such as homelessness or income disparity.
- An equity and social justice commission focuses its attention primarily on the rights and voice of historically marginalized communities and seeks to eliminate bias in all its forms.

Staffing

Almost 60% of researched commissions have dedicated part- or full-time staff to support normal commission functions and to coordinate education/outreach. Key roles include a director for larger commissions or those with investigative authority and support staff to support day-to-day activities.

Those commissions with investigative authority have trained staff to conduct investigations and, in some cases, provide mediation support to resolve complaints. Staff size ranges from one to 13, depending on the size of the commission and its scope of work.

Makeup

All the researched commissions are made up of an odd number of commissioners for voting reasons, with most commissions having between seven and nine members. For all the commissions researched, commissioners are appointed by an elected body, with applicants recruited from the community by either electeds or the seated commission.

Compensation

Commissioners are generally not compensated for their time, but some are compensated for their expenses. Most commissions have a yearly budget for educational/outreach programs and initiatives, and the city employees who work with the commissions are paid. Commissions with investigative authority all have paid staff to research claims and conduct investigations.

Commissioner Perceptions

Across all cities interviewed, commissioners think their work is important and meaningful, but many report confusion from their communities and sometimes the commission itself around their responsibilities and limitations. Almost all the interviews indicated that commissions have either taken steps to refine their codes over time to improve clarity or are actively working towards that refinement.

Recommendations for City of Olympia

Respondents shared their experiences and provided numerous recommendations:

Structure and City Support

- Establish a reasonable budget for at least five to seven years.
- Ensure a common understanding of terms such as equity, inclusion, diversity, etc. with the goal of determining how a committee can help the Council conduct work with regard to these factors.
- Ensure access to and regular engagement with top-level City leadership.

Organizational Clarity

- From the outset, provide very clear commission roles and responsibilities and scope of authority.
- Clearly and specifically define the committee role and function and establish practical and tangible tasks that make up a set of core responsibilities.
- Ensure a clean mandate; broad mandates do not offer enough direction for the creation of actionable commission goals.

Staffing

- Support the commission with someone who has the capacity and knowledge to respond to the group's needs and provide guidance and education about the background of topics or initiatives.
- Ensure DEI staff have a breadth and depth of expertise and technical knowledge in building community engagement.

Outreach

- Listen to the community, especially those that don't often have a voice.
- Identify community partners to support culture changes; the City can't carry the whole burden.
- Develop community relationships first to achieve diversity in the commission.
- Seek opportunities to work together with other cities/organizations that may be having similar startup experiences; many initiatives are forming in response to 2020's events.