



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](#).