



## Founding Member Work Group Recommendation

November 9, 2021

In response to social justice demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the City of Olympia (City) General Government Committee issued a referral to City staff in the fall of 2020 to use a community-led process to establish a commission to address social justice, human rights, and equity issues.

The City recruited a Founding Member Work Group (FMWG) made up of community members from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. Four members of the FMWG worked through August 2021 to gather community input and conduct extensive research on regional and national commissions. This report summarizes the Work Group's recommendations for how to establish a new Social Justice and Equity and Commission.

Founding Member Work Group Members:

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## Commission Name

### **Social Justice & Equity Commission**

The Founding Member Work Group recommends the Commission be named a Social Justice and Equity Commission. This name communicates the primary purpose of the commission but is not limiting or prescriptive. The Commission may explore a new name in the future that better articulates the goals and purpose of their work.

## Commission Purpose

**The purpose of the Social Justice & Equity Commission is to “eliminate racism and fulfill human rights for a just and equitable Olympia for all people.”**

Many people, especially those who have been disproportionately harmed by inequity in the past, do not trust that they currently have a voice in their community nor that the City's response to residents, particularly as related to public safety and public assembly, is fair and equitable.

Currently, there is no obvious place for residents to file complaints of racism, or raise social justice and equity issues, and there is no centralized vehicle for addressing these issues in the City of Olympia. The

City of Olympia must build a stronger, fairer, and more equitable community for all through the creation of a Social Justice and Equity Commission (Commission).

The future Commission will serve as a welcoming place to file complaints in response to unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, familial status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, disability, or source of income, and where people will be provided transparent investigation and resolution of these complaints.

The Commission will also connect community members to resources and assistance in navigating city or state systems, provide community-wide education on equity and racial justice, and ultimately enable those from historically marginalized communities to have a voice in City government.

## Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of the Commission will be to mediate, conciliate, and investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination, and issues related to racial, social justice, human rights or other forms of discrimination that occur within the municipal boundary of the City of Olympia. The Commission will also be responsible for advising the Olympia City Council, City Leadership, and City staff on issues of equity and social justice.

While the Commission's jurisdiction is within the City limits, the Commission may outreach to and engage with the broader Olympia community and region to build relationships and seek input that will enhance the commission's ability to reduce racism and fulfill human rights for a just and equitable Olympia.

## Scope

We recommend the future Commission provides the following to the City and City residents:

### **Mediation & Investigation:**

- The Commission receives complaints of unlawful discrimination, and issues related to racial, social justice, human rights, or other forms of discrimination
- The Commission receives complaints, investigates community complaints, and/or helps the complainant locate and navigate external commissions or resources (e.g., State Human Rights Commission, Fair Housing Authority, etc.) that may more appropriately or effectively address the complaint
- The Commission provides access to mediation services to support the resolution of complaints/claims outside of a quasi-judicial process
- The Commission will serve in a quasi-judicial capacity by holding hearings and issuing findings of fact on complaints that were not able to be resolved through mediation
- The Commission will identify and recommend issues that arise through complaints that need to be addressed in City policy and/or operations

### **Advisory:**

- The Commission provides regular advice/counsel to the City about racism, equity and social justice policy, issue response, and community needs.

- The Commission advises the City on projects, events, policies, procedures, and other issues to help identify and proactively address potential disproportionate impacts to historically marginalized communities.
- The Commission provides guidance to the City in responding to national events, including in providing education and outreach on topics and/or events.

**Outreach:**

- The Commission sponsors, advises, and may participate in community outreach to build stronger connections, greater understanding and trust amongst the City and the community and community members themselves.
- The Commission will outreach to and engage with the community to support identifying and recruiting a diverse slate of potential future Commissioners.

The recommendation is that commissioners are not charged with all the tasks inherent in each of these scope elements, but the Commission works with trained staff to ensure transparency and fairness in all the education, outreach, investigative, and mediation services.

Commissioners should be heavily engaged with the community to ensure that historically marginalized residents not only have access to City services but can navigate the processes to secure the resources and assistance they require to thrive.

## Mediation and Investigation Services

Ultimately, the trust between government and community, especially with those who have been harmed in the past, is broken, or may never have existed. We also believe that many of the rules and regulations the City creates make it more difficult for marginalized community members to participate and remain informed on decisions and actions taken by the City. Further, we do not feel there is trust among community members that the City’s existing complaint resolution process will result in meaningful or needed change in racism and oppression.

In our work with community members during our listening and learning sessions, we learned that:

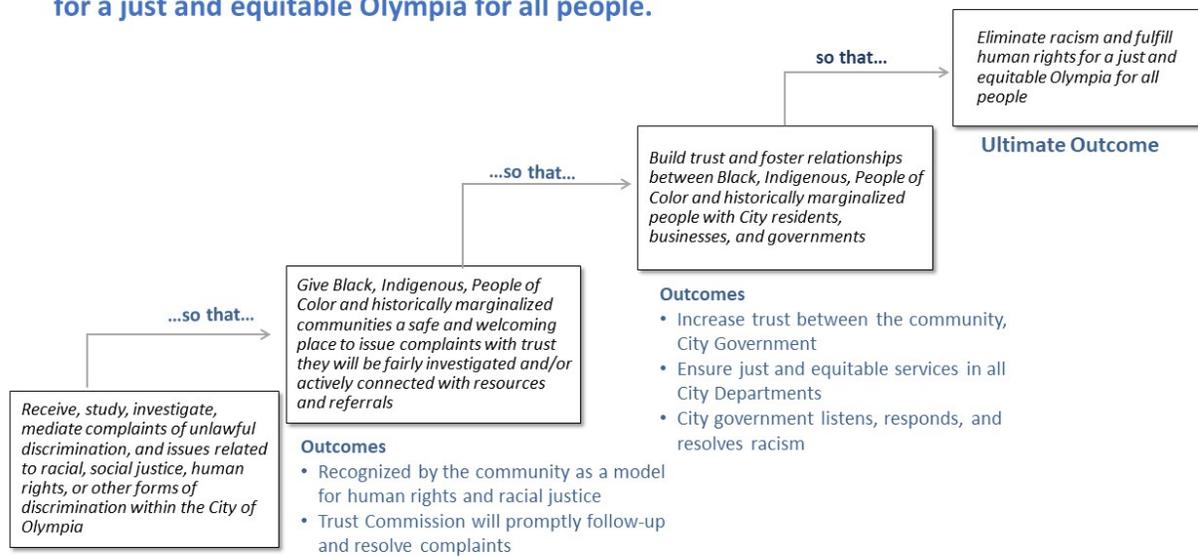
- People experience negative interactions that are rooted in racism, are unjust and treated inequitably within the Olympia community
- There are too many negative interactions between the City and marginalized community members
- We need to establish trust between the community and City government by being more responsive to complaints of racism and oppression or historically marginalized communities
- Marginalized community members do not feel their experiences are being heard nor acted on by City government
- Community members want the ability to be connected directly to the help they need
- The makeup of City leadership is not representative of historically marginalized communities

As a result, we recommend the future Commission should have the following **Mediation and Investigative** services as integral to its scope:

- Receive complaints within the Commission’s jurisdiction
- Mediate, conciliate, and investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination, and issues related to racial, social justice, human rights, or other forms of discrimination
- Connect people directly to the appropriate entity to address the complaint and/or receive additional resources
- Review the findings of an investigation, determine whether to conduct a hearing, and issue a decision as needed

As illustrated in a focused Results Map, we believe that providing investigation and mediation services to the community will lead to significant reduction in racism, fulfillment of human rights, and a just and equitable Olympia for all. This results map provides the activities, outputs, and outcomes regarding the investigation and mediation aspect of the Commissions duties.

**Our Goal: Eliminate racism and fulfill human rights for a just and equitable Olympia for all people.**



Taking in to account the extensive scope we recommend for the Commission and in response to specific input we heard in our listening sessions, we also support the establishment of a separate board or commission to independently oversee and review complaints or concerns against the police department. We support the City’s intent to work with the new Commission and engage community members in determining the best model.

**Advisory Services**

We believe government decisions should be made *in collaboration with* the community as equal partners and not made *for* the community. Once our decision-making processes are truly representative,



## Community Outreach

We believe that for government decisions to be made *in collaboration with* the community as equal partners, more community members who have been historically marginalized need to know about the Commission, its purpose and members' duties, and how to effectively participate or use its services.

We believe that the Commission should:

- Recruit members who are representative of a reasonably broad cross-section of the residents of the community, including education, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, religion, and geographic identification
- Actively seek to listen to community members who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised in government planning and decision-making
- Receive input regularly from community members to stay focused on the highest priority and most impactful issues that need to be addressed
- Keep community members who engage with the City and Commission informed in how their voice has impact and results in changes in the City

Serving in an outreach role ensures that community members have a safe space in which to share their concerns and can trust that they are heard by someone who looks like them or has similar lived experiences. The future Commission has an opportunity to bring new voices and perspectives into local government and continue to build trust between the City and historically marginalized community members.

As a result, we recommend the future Commission should conduct **outreach** to support the following:

- Recruit a diverse pool of potential appointees for vacant Commission positions
- Elevate the voices, perspectives and needs of marginalized community members through annual listening sessions
- Align their annual work plan with the highest and most impactful needs of the community
- Ensure community members not as familiar with the City or who feel distrust towards the City know what the Commission is, their role and services

## Establishment of the New Social Justice and Equity Commission

### Recruitment/Selection of New Commissioners

Given the City's current schedule, we anticipate that commissioners may be recruited as early as November and December 2021. Given the FMWG members' leadership role and commitment to this process, including outreach to the community, we recommend the FMWG participate in the development of the member application, recruitment of potential commissioners and in an initial review of applicants. This will add credibility to the process in the community and ensure new commissioners reflect the intent of this extensive preparation and outreach effort.

## Size of the Commission

Commissions come in various sizes and compositions, both nationally and regionally. Most commissions, however, have an odd number of members to enable easier decision-making and have seven or nine members. We recommend an eleven-member commission for the first round of selections; this will enable the City to focus the work of the commission through the first several years of further developing the support structure, a first-year work plan, and regular routines. Additional commissioners can be added later to broaden the pool of commissioners and spread the work across more people.

## Membership

We recommend that the membership for the Commission is intentionally broad and inclusive, so as not to inadvertently create barriers for candidates with a range of experiences. We also don't want to discourage a community member with an interest in serving but little or no experience in city government. For that reason, we are recommending that members should:

- Reside or work within the city limits of Olympia

We also recommend that a qualification be that members can commit to regular attendance at Commission meetings and to fulfilling the additional duties that may require time outside of meetings.

## What We Look for in a Social Justice & Equity Commissioner

While the following characteristics or abilities are not requirements for service, we recommend they guide the selection process to ensure that Commission will be representative of a diversity of community members and can address the purpose and scope of work outlined in this recommendation.

- The full Commission membership is representative of a reasonably broad cross-section of the residents of the community including education, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, religion, and geographic identification
- Commissioners can commit to serving with integrity and honesty
- Commissioners must understand, have experience in, or a strong desire and willingness to learn about discrimination, and issues related to racial, social justice, human rights, or other forms of discrimination
- Commissioners can effectively participate on a diverse team to independently investigate claims of racial discrimination, social justice, or human rights violations within the City of Olympia

## City Staff Support & Budget

Trained staff will support the Commission in all three areas of the Commission's recommended scope:

- **Mediation and Investigation.** The Commission will have support in the intake of claims, researching and conducting fact-finding, issuing referrals, and helping complainants navigate other entities as needed. Mediation services may be provided as a first step to seeking resolution in response to a complaint. For complaints that move forward to the Commission for a hearing, staff will support the

Commission in maintaining separation from the investigation and fulfilling their duties to review the facts and issue a finding or decision.

- **Advocacy and Policy Analysis.** Senior level staff will support the Commission in conducting research and policy work as identified in the Commission's annual work plan and will help to shepherd project or policy questions through the Commission for review and recommendation to City staff and/or City Council. Staff doing this work will have experience in managing complex inter-department and inter-agency projects, conducting research and policy analysis, and in diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Outreach & Community Relations.** Staff will receive guidance from the Commission in conducting community outreach, education, and events to build stronger connections and greater understanding and trust amongst the City and the community and community members themselves.

In addition to dedicated staff, the Commission will also need an annual budget to be able to effectively carry out their scope. The budget will need to cover outreach to the community, including addressing potential barriers to participation, such as language and accessibility, and support providing access to mediation as a first step in resolving complaints.

## Phasing

We acknowledge that this is a large body of work, and that it is important that the new Commission and its processes be established in a well thought out and intentional way. Subsequently, we recommend the new Commissioners help develop and carry out a phased approach to implementing the entirety of their scope. For example, the phasing could look like:

**Phase 1.** Establish the Social Justice & Equity Commission as a new Commission, recruit and appoint all eleven recommended members. Conduct community outreach and engagement to communicate what the Commission is and its duties, build trust with marginalized community groups, and get input on community members' priorities.

**Phase 2.** Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and methods for accountability between the Commission, City Council, and City staff. And establish process and procedures for receiving complaints, investigation, and mediation.

**Phase 3.** Begin providing the full scope of services recommended by the FMWG and conduct outreach to community groups so they know how to access the services available. Establish an annual work plan with input from phase I and guidance from the FMWG recommendation.