



## Equity and Social Justice

---

As an executive priority area, King County's Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) aims to produce equitable outcomes in the communities King County serves. In the last two years, King County has made significant progress in implementing the ESJ Strategic Plan at the countywide and department/agency levels. Yet, inequities persist – and in some cases have worsened – particularly in communities where needs are greatest. King County government faces significant opportunities and challenges as we continue our work to improve outcomes for the residents and employees of King County.

### BACKGROUND

ESJ strategic investments in the 2019-2020 Proposed Budget aim to ensure progress, leverage opportunities, and address major gaps between current performance and full integration of ESJ across King County government. The Proposed Budget balances ESJ investments that advance more immediate external facing, community-based outcomes and deliverables with necessary internal, capacity-building investments. Significantly, there are other Executive priorities – such as homelessness, Zero Youth Detention, and Investing in YOU – that are aligned with the ESJ Strategic Plan; these 2019-2020 Proposed Budget investments reinforce King County's commitment to equity and racial justice at a large scale. This paper includes an overview of these investments.

### PROPOSED INVESTMENT & ANTICIPATED IMPACT

In the 2019-2020 Proposed Budget, the Executive proposes priority investments in four strategies of the ESJ Strategic Plan that promote the County's commitment to lead with racial justice, tackle structural racism, and address root causes of inequities in ways that strengthen implementation of the Plan:

#### INVEST UPSTREAM AND WHERE NEEDS ARE GREATEST

- **Addressing the homelessness crisis:** In King County, communities of color are most negatively affected by homelessness. The Proposed Budget prioritizes helping people transition from homelessness to stable housing while addressing root causes of homelessness. Proposed investments include additional enhanced shelter and housing options, expanding access to behavioral health services, and additional supports for justice-involved individuals.
- **Setting policy direction to address disproportionate negative outcomes for Native American/Alaska Native and African American communities:** Inequities persist and, by some measures, have worsened for King County's Native American/Alaska Native and U.S.-born African American communities. In partnership with the Office of Equity and Social Justice, Executive Constantine will lead the effort to enact policies and support initiatives rooted in a racial justice approach specific to the priorities and needs of these communities.
- **Increasing access to services for limited-English speaking populations:** More than 170 different languages are spoken throughout King County and more than 25 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home. Language access continues to be a barrier in delivering County services equitably. A proposed language access coordinator within the Office of Equity and Social



## King County

2019-2020 Proposed Budget

Justice will ensure that the County meets its mandated obligations for providing language access by acting as a compliance officer and working with agencies to develop sustainable approaches, while maintaining quality control. There will also be investments to expand interpreter services in Superior Court to meet the growing demand.

- ***Moving toward Zero Youth Detention:*** Youth and families of color are at higher risk of becoming involved in the juvenile legal system due in large part to the cumulative disadvantages they experience from systemic racism and bias. Proposed investments focus on offering more evidence-based, culturally responsive, and restorative services for youth before they are involved in the legal system, providing tools and program options to divert youth out of secure detention, and improving family and community-based supports for youth so they are best positioned to not re-engage with the juvenile legal system.
- ***Expanding access to voting and voter registration:*** King County continues to be a leader in increasing access to voting, particularly within communities of color and low-income populations where voter registration and turnout is disproportionately lower. In 2018, the County implemented prepaid postage on returned ballots making it easier for communities to exercise their voting rights. Nearly \$1.7 million is proposed to maintain prepaid postage on returned ballots and expand same-day registration for all elections.
- ***Designing fare options to create equitable access to transportation:*** The ESJ Strategic Plan's priority populations include communities of color, limited-English speaking, and immigrant and refugee communities, who are also disproportionately low-income. Substantial increases in rent and housing costs continue to displace these groups further from economic centers, decreasing their already limited transportation and mobility options. Over \$1.4 million is proposed to better understand mobility barriers and ridership trends, and pilot new fare options for priority populations most in need.
- ***Providing restorative alternative services to incarcerated adults or those facing incarceration:*** Low-income communities of color are most harmed by the criminal justice system, particularly those who are incarcerated. Over \$900,000 is proposed to expand restorative alternative services such as basic education, vocational and apprenticeship training, and employment services.
- ***Repairing sidewalks in historically under-invested urban unincorporated King County:*** North Highline and Skyway in urban unincorporated King County are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities that are also disproportionately low-income. King County is the local government for these communities. Although King County has limited funds, \$900,000 is proposed to repair sidewalks in North Highline and Skyway.
- ***Supporting communities most negatively impacted by gang activities:*** Over \$800,000 in proposed staff investments will focus on gang prevention and diversion efforts within the community, including addressing trends in gang recruitment; educating families, school faculty, and affected communities; and assisting schools in addressing gang activity on their campuses.

### INVEST IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- ***Directing investments to community partnerships with Native American/Alaska Native and U.S.-born African American communities:*** The Executive proposes \$250,000 to establish and maintain community partnerships with Native American/Alaska Native, Tribal and U.S. born African American communities to support development of policy solutions that address their priorities and needs.



## King County

2019-2020 Proposed Budget

- **Improving mobility options for people with disabilities:** County residents living with disabilities can experience inequitable access to transportation services, which can be a barrier to accessing other basic services such as health care. In response to a King County audit and largely driven by a task force of community advocates in partnership with the County, over \$10 million is proposed to restructure contracts and improve public transportation services that address mobility needs of residents living with disabilities.
- **Increasing community engagement and communications for equitable access to transportation and mobility for King County communities with the greatest needs:** King County is a national leader in reducing barriers to public transportation, such as the ORCA Lift discounted fare for low-income communities. Yet, large gaps exist in accessing equitable mobility options, particularly for priority populations. Over \$2.7 million is proposed for staff investments to develop a partnership strategy that aligns with the ESJ Strategic Plan and to improve community outreach, engagement, and communications, including resources for partners working with communities most negatively affected by transportation inequities.
- **Increasing equitable access to family wage jobs through King County public works construction projects:** Over \$1.6 million is proposed to implement King County's Priority Hire Program (PHP), a workforce and economic development strategy providing training and family wage employment opportunities in the construction industry. The program will apply to King County public works construction projects of \$15 million or more, residents of economically distressed areas of King County, and certain areas of Pierce and Snohomish counties. The PHP supports growing and training a more racially, gender, and culturally diverse workforce that is necessary for our region to continue to prosper.
- **Increasing competitive grant funding for equitable access to youth and amateur sports:** Race, ethnicity, income, and place-based inequities continue to affect equitable access to physical activity, healthy food, and, in turn, obesity rates and health outcomes across King County. A proposed \$1.4 million will be added to King County Youth and Amateur Sports Grants Program, increasing the total to nearly \$4.7 million in competitive funds for 2019-2020. Community-based organizations serving King County's populations and geographies most in need – communities of color, low-income communities, immigrants and refugees, and limited English speaking communities – will be prioritized in accordance with the County's commitment to equity and social justice.

### INVEST IN EMPLOYEES

- **Increasing resiliency and capacity building of Native Americans and People of Color in King County's workforce:** The 2019-2020 Proposed Budget supports capacity-building among employees most negatively affected by structural racism in order to retain high performing, committed People of Color (POC) and Native American employees, to realize the full capacity of our workforce, and to fully implement the ESJ Strategic Plan. King County government remains a majority white institution, primarily in leadership and management. The Office of Equity and Social Justice currently and strategically focuses major in-depth racial equity trainings primarily on hundreds of white managers and leaders. The 2019-2020 Proposed Budget includes \$200,000 to create a sustainable program consisting of workshops, capacity-building, and professional development for the POC/Native American workforce, including support for employee-led affinity groups.



## King County

2019-2020 Proposed Budget

- **Supporting institutionalizing workforce and workplace equity:** Race and place within King County government shape employee experiences including key equity outcomes such as retention and supportive workplace culture, racial diversity in leadership and management, and equitable advancement and access to learning and growth opportunities. The ESJ Strategic Plan has shaped the Executive's employee-centered priority Investing in YOU, the primary vehicle to implement institutional changes that further workplace and workforce equity. Significant proposed staffing investments expand the programs of the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and strengthen its internal partnerships with the Office of Equity and Social Justice to implement ESJ Strategic Plan and Investing in YOU deliverables:
  - Create a new, deployable Organizational Development and Healthy Conflict Engagement team that support workplaces affected by unhealthy conflict and inequities, and focus on developing leadership practices that build racially just workplaces, enabling all employees to do their best work.
  - Centralize human resources manager functions and services to provide consistent quality and equity in human resources practices.
  - Build equitable recruitment practices and employment pipelines to hire a diverse and culturally responsive workforce at all levels.
  - Create a central workforce equity team to provide consultation and oversight to ensure equity is integrated in all HR and workforce development programs.
  - Offer centralized anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, and equity-focused standard organizational training to foster an inclusive workplace culture and advance the County's ESJ goals.
- **Investing in agency capacity and equitable employee development, including ESJ training opportunities:** Some budget-constrained agencies still lack dedicated resources to coordinate and manage their equity efforts, widening gaps in ESJ Strategic Plan implementation. Additionally, employees on the front lines of service delivery, often people of color, are most negatively affected by inequitable access to learning and growth opportunities. These outcomes are often due to a lack of emphasis in providing professional development opportunities for front line employees, reinforced by insufficient budget capacity to pay for their training time. Several departments and agencies are proposing substantial investments that build ESJ capacity within their organizations and prioritize equitable access to learning opportunities for front line employees, particularly on ESJ topics.

### WITH TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP

- **Increasing support for successful implementation of the ESJ Strategic Plan:** Demonstrated progress toward achieving the ESJ Strategic Plan's goals and objectives is evident among some departments and agencies. However, progress among all departments/agencies is inconsistent as some continue to struggle to define, coordinate, implement, and report ESJ work. Proposed central staff investments will support enhanced internal monitoring and reporting for the ESJ Strategic Plan implementation, improved quality of engagement between OESJ and departments and agencies, and completion of ESJ work plan deliverables by departments and agencies.