



King County



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE




APRIL 1, 2025

## Second Follow-up on Clearer Roles, Accountability, and Monitoring Would Support Equity Change

**King County strengthened the Office of Equity, Racial, and Social Justice (OERSJ) with new leadership and clear and fair organizational structures. The office resumed delivering required functions like civil rights investigations while increasing programming to enhance equity change across the County.** Since the last audit follow-up, OERSJ's new leadership focused on defining lines of business, improving culture, and strengthening governance at the office and program levels. Notably, the Civil Rights Program had accumulated a backlog of 173 cases over the previous year because of lack of staffing. As of the time of this report, OERSJ had reduced the backlog to zero cases and responds to new inquiries within two business days.

**Staffing changes extended timelines on key projects like the County's Equity Racial and Social Justice (ERSJ) Strategic Plan refresh and the Equity Impact Review (EIR) tool update, putting more pressure on department staff to guide equity efforts.** OERSJ leaders stated that they are prepared to deliver the next ERSJ Strategic Plan in mid-2025 and will then turn to continuing work on the EIR tool. Budget limitations may hinder progress on some recommendations, and the demands of the new federal administration further complicate implementation.

**Two audit recommendations were completed previously. Of the remaining 14:**

 <span style="float: right;">4</span> <b>DONE</b>	 <span style="float: right;">7</span> <b>PROGRESS</b>	 <span style="float: right;">3</span> <b>OPEN</b>
<b>FULLY IMPLEMENTED</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.	<b>PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.	<b>REMAIN UNRESOLVED</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.

See details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

## Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



**The County Executive should ensure the update to the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan clearly defines and documents roles and responsibilities for the Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice and county agencies.**

STATUS UPDATE: The County Executive is on track to release the updated ERSJ Strategic Plan in mid-2025. Staff are working to ensure that the vision for implementation includes clear descriptions for elements housed in OERSJ (such as County-level community engagement and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance); roles of equity, inclusion, and belonging (EIB) managers working directly within departments, and responsibilities of managers and staff in county agencies. Bringing clarity to OERSJ's role will be important to decision-makers and county agencies in implementing the updated strategic plan.

WHAT REMAINS: The County Executive should complete and release the updated ERSJ Strategic Plan, including documenting roles and responsibilities.

## Recommendation 2

DONE



**The County Executive should identify, document, and communicate a process owner with the authority to monitor and track progress on the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan goals.**

STATUS UPDATE: The County Executive established that the OERSJ director has the responsibility and authority to monitor and track progress on ERSJ Strategic Plan goals. The County Executive communicated this decision verbally to the senior leadership team of department directors and documented it in the ERSJ Strategic Plan update.

IMPACT: By situating oversight responsibility for monitoring progress at the department director level, the County Executive established that OERSJ has the authority to collaborate with agencies in collecting necessary information.

## Recommendation 3

PROGRESS



**The process owner identified in Recommendation 2 should work with agencies to monitor, measure, and report on the goals and objectives identified in the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.**

STATUS UPDATE: OERSJ is exploring the concept of a software solution to facilitate monitoring but staffing and budget limitations are hindering this approach. The OERSJ director will discuss progress on strategic plan implementation at weekly department director meetings and the office plans to publish an annual ERSJ Strategic Plan update report, beginning in 2027.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the OERSJ director should finalize and implement a process monitor, measure, and report on goals and objectives in the updated ERSJ Strategic Plan.

## Recommendation 4

DONE



**The County Executive should incorporate agency feedback on improving goal tracking into the next iteration of the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan to ensure agency staff can implement and track progress on goals.**

STATUS UPDATE: The ERSJ strategic plan update team collected feedback from county departments through early 2024 and identified eight key themes to improve goal tracking. The team applied these themes to develop recommendations for improvements in monitoring progress toward ERSJ Strategic Plan goals that will be incorporated into the final plan.

IMPACT: By implementing this recommendation, the County Executive increased the likelihood that county agencies will be able to successfully track progress toward achieving ERSJ Strategic Plan goals.

## Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice should document and implement the key office-level governance structures, including:**

- **vision, goals, objectives, and strategies**
- **organizational structures**
- **systems for employee competence**
- **methods to measure outputs and outcomes.**

STATUS UPDATE: OERSJ updated and documented its organizational structure to reflect county needs and statutory requirements, such as civil rights investigations. OERSJ leaders established a new job categorization structure that addresses previous issues of unclear divisions between work streams and paths to advancement. Office management holds weekly all-staff meetings to provide direction and coordinate work. Staff have weekly one-on-one meetings with supervisors

and annual performance evaluations. OERSJ documented its vision and mission and uses an annual plan with project objectives and tracking to measure outputs.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should develop and document office-level goals or methods to measure office-level outcomes.

## Recommendation 6

PROGRESS



**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice should develop key governance structures at the program level including documenting goals, objectives, and strategies; methods to measure outputs and outcomes; and policies and procedures.**

STATUS UPDATE: Progress was made with OERSJ programs on documenting governance structures despite reorganization and staffing challenges.

- Two of OERSJ’s five programs developed and documented all the recommended governance structures (language access and civil rights).
- The Outreach and Engagement program documented goals, objectives, strategies, and some procedures. Staff are working on documenting guiding policies and tracking outputs and outcomes.
- The EIB program was a major focus for OERSJ over the past year, including hiring a senior EIB manager and holding several facilitated retreats to foster coordination and collaboration between EIB managers, OERSJ, and the Department of Human Resources (DHR). The EIB program is working on developing and documenting governance structures in 2025.
- Extended staff absences and vacancies hindered the ADA program governance work, but OERSJ plans to support the team in developing governance structures in 2025.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should complete a full set of governance documents for each of its programs, as described in the recommendation.

## Recommendation 7

APRIL 1, 2024

DONE



**Recommendation 8****PROGRESS**

**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice should update the Equity Impact Review tool to improve the tool’s usefulness.**

STATUS UPDATE: OERSJ staff made progress on updating the EIR tool through 2024, but staffing changes and vacancies have temporarily reduced momentum on the project. The EIR tool update is on OERSJ’s 2025 workplan, and managers expect to begin piloting a new tool by the end of the year. They are considering adapting the tool into written and video training options available to county employees on NEOGOV.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should complete its EIR tool update.

**Recommendation 9****OPEN**

**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice should work with the Department of Human Resources to develop and implement a training for agencies on the updated Equity Impact Review process.**

STATUS UPDATE: Since the EIR tool update project is still pending, OERSJ will develop related training following project completion.

WHAT REMAINS: After OERSJ completes the EIR tool (Recommendation 8), OERSJ and DHR should develop and implement a training on its use.

**Recommendation 10****DONE**

**The Department of Human Resources should implement the Racially Just Competency as planned.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR’s Racially Just Competency includes training, information in job postings, and performance management components related to the County Executive’s “We Are Racially Just” True North value.

As of February 2025, 82 percent of county employees had completed the required training course. This includes 92–100 percent of employees in all departments, other than Metro Transit, which has challenges rolling out training to operators whose work is almost entirely away from computers. Fifty-five percent of Metro Transit staff have completed the training. DHR also developed a set of optional three-hour workshops for staff to enhance their ERSJ learning.

While DHR cannot mandate the content of all job postings, especially those in other branches of county government, DHR's job posting template includes the True North values including "We Are Racially Just." DHR staff stated that most postings include the racially just language, and that job postings are the basis for performance evaluations.

DHR staff have begun developing a new performance module that includes evaluation based on "We Are Racially Just" and other True North values. They plan to pilot it with Metro Transit and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention during the merit performance appraisal cycle in late summer to early fall 2025. In addition, DHR plans to update existing performance appraisal tools to incorporate the racially just and other True North values.

IMPACT: By completing this recommendation, DHR expanded on its initial first steps to incorporate racial justice across the arc of county employment, from job postings through performance appraisals. This sets clear expectations for behavior and begins to hold employees accountable for embedding the "We Are Racially Just" value in their work.

## Recommendation 11

PROGRESS



**The County Executive should identify and implement the best approach to facilitate sharing of equity information related to leading practices, insights from data, and lessons learned across King County.**

STATUS UPDATE: OERSJ's new director is working to identify the best way to share equity information and leading practices across all branches of county government. OERSJ strengthened coordination within the executive branch through its EIB network and increased interaction with the legislative branch.

WHAT REMAINS: The County Executive should facilitate sharing of quality equity information across King County.

## Recommendation 12

OPEN



**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice, in collaboration with agencies, should aggregate and maintain agency data on usage of the Equity Impact Review tool.**

STATUS UPDATE: As noted in Recommendation 8, the EIR tool update is on OERSJ's 2025 work plan. OERSJ will consider the best way to collect and maintain usage data on the tool.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should complete the tool and design a process to monitor agency usage. It should then implement the process to gain insight into how agencies use the EIR tool to center equity in their work.

### Recommendation 13

APRIL 1, 2024

**DONE**



### Recommendation 14

**PROGRESS**



**The Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget should develop a platform and use it to regularly report on changes in the community measures.**

STATUS UPDATE: The Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget (PSB) is working on a sustainability plan to update community indicators that measure population-level equity change. There are 49 data sets that make up the web-based “Determinants of Equity” data tool, and PSB relies on subject matter experts throughout various departments to ensure data quality and accuracy of data updates. PSB is working with these partners to establish a cadence for regular updates on the community indicator data. Budget and staffing resources in PSB and King County Department of Information Technology — which manage the technical aspects of the website — are factors in completing this recommendation. PSB is currently considering a two- or three-year cycle for some indicators, and perhaps longer for indicators with source data that updates less frequently. In addition, many community-level data sources are derived from federal data sets that may experience disruption in availability or continuity. This may affect PSB’s ability to update some community indicators.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, PSB should document a plan to update the Determinants of Equity data tool at regular intervals.

### Recommendation 15

**DONE**



**To help agencies make equity-informed decisions, the Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice, in collaboration with other King County agencies, should conduct a needs assessment for equity data.**

STATUS UPDATE: OERSJ’s consultant (PRR) conducted a survey of employees, representing various roles and departments across the County, on equity data needs and the EIR tool process. PRR also held listening sessions and interviews to collect feedback. PRR delivered its report in April 2024.

OERSJ will incorporate the consultant’s recommendations in developing and rolling out the updated EIR tool process.

IMPACT: By completing this recommendation, OERSJ collected key information on what data county agencies need to make equity-informed decisions in their work. This understanding will feed into the development of the updated EIR tool so that it is responsive to agency needs.

## Recommendation 16

OPEN



**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice, in collaboration with other King County agencies, should expand its central map of equity data to include information collected in Recommendation 15.**

STATUS UPDATE: While OERSJ does not have this work on its 2025 plan, managers stated that they may be able to engage with it in 2026. Staff turnover in the team working on the EIR tool has impacted momentum on the EIR tool update and associated projects. OERSJ should consider working with PSB to expand the Determinants of Equity web tool if agencies need additional data.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should expand upon the Determinants of Equity data tool to include any additional agency equity data needs.

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Luc Poon conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor’s Office at [KCAO@KingCounty.gov](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.