



King County



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE




APRIL 1, 2024

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

**King County has made progress on implementing recommendations, but momentum in furthering equity change has slowed because of lengthy processes and leadership transitions.** The Office of Equity, Social, and Racial Justice (OERSJ) and its partners in the office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget (PSB) have been conducting engagement efforts to inform King County's updated Equity, Racial and Social Justice (ERSJ) Strategic Plan. During 2023, OERSJ leadership transitions delayed the strategic planning process. The strategic plan is a cornerstone for continued progress on many of our audit recommendations, such as clarifying roles and responsibilities for equity work between OERSJ and county agencies and establishing systems for accountability. The updated target completion date is the end of 2024. Stabilizing OERSJ leadership and updating the ERSJ Strategic Plan will propel the County toward equity change.

**OERSJ and partners in PSB and the Department of Human Resources (DHR) have made progress on providing data to inform equity efforts and training employees on racial justice.** The two completed recommendations relate to PSB's launch of the [Determinants of Equity and Data Tool](#), which provides data on community equity indicators that reflect the priorities of King County residents. This information can help agencies target their actions to improve equity and measure population-level changes over time. In addition, DHR trained 72 percent of executive branch employees on how to embed racial justice, anti-racist, and pro-equity values in their work.

Of the 16 audit recommendations:

 <p>2 <b>DONE</b></p>	 <p>9 <b>PROGRESS</b></p>	 <p>5 <b>OPEN</b></p>
<p>FULLY IMPLEMENTED Auditor will no longer monitor.</p>	<p>PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED Auditor will continue to monitor.</p>	<p>REMAIN UNRESOLVED Auditor will continue to monitor.</p>

See details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

## Recommendation 1

OPEN



**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: OERSJ managers indicated that the updated King County Equity, Racial and Social Justice Strategic Plan will begin to define and document the roles and responsibilities for OERSJ and county agencies. They said this work is planned for 2024. Challenges to completing this recommendation include leadership transitions and having an interim OERSJ director since September 2023. A new director began work in March 2024, but information about the transition for other leadership roles was not available at the time of this report. Lack of a fully staffed OERSJ leadership team is a significant risk to the office as well as the County's ability to achieve its equity goals.

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

## Recommendation 2

PROGRESS



**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: In September 2023, OERSJ leadership filled a new position of systems implementation manager and assigned the manager to monitor and track progress on the ERSJ Strategic Plan goals. The manager is currently working in partnership with PSB, DHR, and other county agencies on planning an enterprise-wide approach to implement this directive. It is unclear if the manager will have the authority and capacity to ensure agencies provide information necessary to monitor progress on ERSJ Strategic Plan goals.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the County Executive should ensure the systems implementation manager has the authority and capacity necessary to effectively monitor and track progress across the County.

### 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's systems implementation manager is working with the ERSJ Strategic Plan update team to conduct internal engagement meetings with county employees and department representatives to gather input on how to measure the refreshed ERSJ Strategic Plan goals. OERSJ expects the engagement work to conclude in April 2024. At that point, the systems implementation manager will develop systems to monitor, measure, and report on strategic plan goals and objectives.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the systems implementation manager should complete the process currently underway and launch the new process to monitor, measure, and report on goals and objectives in the refreshed ERSJ Strategic Plan.

### Recommendation 4

PROGRESS



**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: OERSJ's strategic plan refresh team gathered some input on goal tracking as part of its employee engagement efforts. In spring/summer 2024, the team plans to meet with county departments to continue collecting feedback.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the County Executive should collect and analyze feedback from county agencies and document how the updated ERSJ Strategic Plan incorporates the information received.

### Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



**The Office of Equity, Racial and Social Justice should document and implement 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 staff approved an office-level mission, vision, and values statement in November 2023 that clarified the purpose of the office. The team documented goals, objectives, strategies, and anticipated outcomes in an office-wide 2024 annual workplan. The plan includes key output performance measures, milestone achievements, and target dates. OERSJ completed a performance appraisal cycle in December 2023 and plans to engage staff in quarterly conversations about their progress.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, OERSJ should finalize and document its organizational structures and systems for employee competence.

## 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: OERSJ hired a chief of staff in September 2023 to help the office develop governance structures, however leadership transitions have slowed progress. OERSJ's new director began work in March 2024 and will guide the office in next steps. Program governance structures are important to describe scopes of work, define processes to ensure a sustainable level of staff effort, and measure impact.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, OERSJ should finalize its programmatic structures and document its goals, objectives, and strategies, methods to measure outputs and outcomes, and policies and procedures.

## Recommendation 7

DONE



**The Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget should finalize and publish its updates to the County's community indicators based on community input as planned.**

STATUS UPDATE: PSB conducted a comprehensive review of existing community engagement resources including reports from collaboration among departments and community-based organizations. They identified community priorities for each determinant area and verified them through sessions with advisory groups with large representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as well as people with lived experiences in disability, age, gender identity, religion, and migrant communities.

PSB “soft launched” its website of data on population-level indicators, the Determinants of Equity and Data Tool, with a subset of indicators in June 2023. It completed the full launch of all 15 indicators in September 2023. PSB’s project manager will train staff on using the tool and incorporating equity analyses in budgeting, management, and planning through 2024.

IMPACT: The published data on community indicators will help county agencies better understand disparities and identify opportunities to improve people’s lives through county actions and programs. The King County Council also plans to use this tool as part of its Equity and Social Justice Legislative Analysis Methodology to conduct equity analyses on proposed legislation.

## 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 contracted a vendor to provide recommendations for updating the Equity Impact Review (EIR) tool and its usefulness, uptake, and countywide adoption and expects to receive deliverables from the vendor in spring 2024. OERSJ has been working with an informal interdepartmental steering committee to guide the vendor’s analyses toward user needs and priorities.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should use the deliverables from the vendor and agency input to complete the 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: DHR has not yet begun developing a training for agencies on the updated EIR process because the EIR tool is still undergoing revisions. DHR’s Learning & Development team is participating in the EIR Review Committee and will begin planning for development and implementation of the associated training when the tool is closer to completion.

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

## Recommendation 10

PROGRESS



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

STATUS UPDATE: In August 2023, DHR launched a required training for all executive branch staff called “We Are Racially Just: Our King County Values at Work” to improve employees’ understanding of how to incorporate racial justice, anti-racist, and pro-equity values in their work.<sup>1</sup> As of February 2024, 75 percent of all current employees had completed the training. DHR indicated that departments with larger populations of remote staff have created specific plans for their staff to complete the training by September 2024. In addition, as of fall 2023, DHR modified onboarding requirements so that all employees new to King County complete the training within their first 90 days.

At the time of the audit, DHR had planned to conduct a broader effort to educate staff on expectations for racially just behavior in job descriptions and hold them accountable in performance evaluations. DHR managers indicated that current plans do not include these elements.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, DHR should continue to increase employee compliance with the required training “We Are Racially Just: Our King County Values at Work,” and develop, document, and implement a plan to expand the Racially Just Competency in line with the refreshed ERSJ Strategic Plan.

## Recommendation 11

OPEN



### **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 leaders stated that work on this recommendation has been on hold during the pending appointment of a new director for the office. OERSJ’s systems Implementation manager is developing a proposal for how to refresh the Inter-Branch Team, which was the County’s previous method of sharing equity information across all branches of government until 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> The completion deadline for employees to have access to technology as part of their jobs was December 2023. Those who do not have technology access or who are part of the Supported Employee Program (and may need additional coaching to complete the course) have until September 2024.

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: OERSJ is waiting on vendor work to complete the EIR tool. Managers indicated that suggested data collection methodology is part of the scope of work for the vendor they contracted to help design the new tool.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should complete the tool (Recommendation 8) including designing a process to aggregate and maintain data on 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

DONE



**The Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget should update community equity indicators in time to inform updates to the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.**

STATUS UPDATE: PSB launched the Determinants of Equity and Data tool in September 2023, and the ERSJ Strategic Plan project team indicated that it is using the content in the plan updates. The data visualizations and narratives help focus the County's strategies on community priorities and inform the "Current Context" section of the plan.

IMPACT: According to the Government Alliance on Race & Equity, community indicators are powerful measures that focus and hold government efforts accountable to population-level changes over time. King County has baseline data from the 2015 Determinants of Equity report. The 2023 update created another set of data points that the County can now use to identify trends. As the county implements its refreshed ERSJ Strategic Plan, it will be able to assess how its efforts have impacted equity conditions.

## 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 equity measures.**

STATUS UPDATE: PSB indicated that its project manager will work with King County Information Technology to update the Determinants of Equity Data web tool (the chosen platform) with additional years of indicator data where new data are available. As part of the project, PSB will identify resources and a plan to maintain the data tool.

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

## Recommendation 15

PROGRESS



**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: The vendor OERSJ hired to assist in developing the EIR tool (Recommendation 8) is also conducting a needs assessment of equity data based on collaboration with agencies. OERSJ expects to receive the deliverables from that contract in spring 2024. Leading practices indicate that having access to equity data is important to help agencies identify how their programs or policies may impact specific communities.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, OERSJ should collect and analyze agency equity data 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: The Determinants of Equity and Data tool includes interactive maps for some elements. OERSJ managers stated that when they complete the equity data needs assessment (Recommendation 15), they will begin work on expanding the repository of equity data available for agencies to use in targeting their programs and actions.

WHAT REMAINS: OERSJ should expand upon the Determinants of Equity and 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.





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