

PORTLAND CITY AUDITOR

OCTOBER 2020

RACIAL EQUITY PLAN

YEAR 3 REPORT



PORTLAND
CITY AUDITOR
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INTRODUCTION

As the following division updates will show, the Auditor's Office made real progress on our Equity Plan from July 2019 to June 2020. However, we also experienced unique and unexpected challenges stemming from the shut-down of in-person services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly all Auditor's Office employees started working remotely in March 2020. Most divisions had to postpone or cancel community outreach events. Divisions that receive complaints from the community saw large increases in workload.

Now that we understand remote work to be a longer-term prospect, we are looking to adapt and develop new approaches to meeting our Equity Plan objectives. At the same time, the renewed strength behind social justice movements and widespread recognition of government's role in perpetuating inequity have instilled in us a sense of urgency to think more ambitiously.

In the coming year, we will engage in rigorous employee training, devote significant human and financial resources to advancing our Equity Plan, and center our accountability work around disrupting inequitable systems and advancing a more equitable City of Portland government.



RESULTS

ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Archives and Records Management supported its Racial Equity Plan goals by engaging with the community and increasing representation in our records. We conducted outreach and education events at five libraries in historically underserved communities that are far from the physical archives. We also began meeting with groups that represent historically underserved communities and worked with organizations to share our records in support of their projects.

We identified ways we can improve representation of historically underrepresented communities in our services, such as engaging the African-American community with our Artist-in-Residence project and increasing our online content related to Portland's Native American and Chinese communities. We are also improving online access to our services so people don't have to make a trip to the archives.



AUDIT SERVICES

The Audit Services Division continued to advance our Racial Equity Plan goals. Last year, we incorporated the perspectives of community members in the planning and fieldwork of nearly 70 percent of audits. We also assessed City programs for inequitable outcomes in more than half of our audits.

The public's suggestions informed more than 40 percent of the audits we plan to perform in 2021. We will continue to develop reciprocal relationships in the community and involve the public in audits so that more of our work reflects what the community cares about.

OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

The newly formed Operations Management Division's Racial Equity Plan includes a wide spectrum of goals emphasizing racial equity in areas, such as Council Clerk outreach, elections access, business operations, and hiring practices.

Operations Management began data collection in 2019 on officewide recruitments and procurements to better identify and understand disparities in the processes. We also added zip codes to council testimony sign-up to analyze which populations engage with City Council in public meetings. We will use the data collected to identify ways to better reach and serve underrepresented populations.

RESULTS

OMBUDSMAN

The Ombudsman's Racial Equity plan seeks to provide racially equitable access to our services and racially equitable treatment of those we assist with complaint resolution.

To understand who we serve, we asked people who sought our assistance to self-report their race. In our first year of collecting this information, nearly a quarter declined to provide their race. Of those who did provide it, 78 percent identified as white and 22 percent identified as non-white, which mirrors the population of Portland.

We also analyzed our case handling decisions to see if there was any apparent racial disparity in how we investigated and resolved complaints. Based on one year of data, we did not find racial disparity in the type of assistance we provided to people seeking our assistance or in the outcome of the complaints.

Although we did not identify any disparities, the large number of people we assisted who did not identify their race gives us low confidence in the reliability of that conclusion. To improve data collection going forward, we are trying other ways of asking for the racial identity of people who use our services.

IPR

The Independent Police Review (IPR) has focused our racial equity efforts on ensuring communities have equitable access to submitting police misconduct complaints.

We used complaint data to identify underrepresented populations. We also joined community groups holding virtual meetings to connect with complainants from underserved populations. These events gave us the opportunity to explain our services and discuss possible barriers to accessing them.

We are translating our online complaint form into two of the most commonly used Non-English languages to address language barriers.

We also successfully recruited new diverse applicants and volunteers to the Citizen Review Committee and Police Review Board.





CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO INEQUITIES

When inequities are uncovered, staff in the Auditor's Office must be able to respond with strategies and methods to redress the inequities. To prepare our staff for this challenge, the Auditor's Office is offering Results-Based Accountability training. The training provides a disciplined way to identify institutional inequities, pinpoint the root causes of those inequities, and give staff practical tools to develop strategies that will result in more equitable outcomes.

STAFF DEVOTED TO EQUITY AND OUTREACH

Through trial and error, we have learned that dedicated staffing and resources are essential to achieving meaningful and lasting progress on the Auditor's Racial Equity Plan. Because advancing racial equity is a key pillar of our mission, we are hiring a Communications and Outreach Coordinator in 2020. The Coordinator will engage in community outreach, develop reciprocal relationships with traditionally underserved communities, expand our social media presence, and generally help ensure that our work addresses community concerns and inequities.

LACK OF DATA HINDERS IDENTIFICATION OF INEQUITIES

Data collection is one of the first steps toward assessing underrepresentation and disparate outcomes of City services. We routinely recommend in our audits that City bureaus do a better job of collecting data; the same holds for our own data collection efforts. Community members are often reluctant to share demographic information if they do not know how it will be used or if they have distrust of government. Divisions within the Auditor's Office are continually working to capture more complete demographic data by adapting our approaches, finding creative workarounds, and sharing successes and failure so that we may better serve the community.