

Workplace Racial Equity Mid-Pandemic:

**Report focused on the Bureau of
Environmental Services (BES) and
the Portland Water Bureau (PWB)**

**A report to PUB submitted by
Karen Y. Spencer and Theresa Huang**

May 31, 2022

*There is a door knob glowing like chance before you.
Grab it, turn and pull, step through, back straight, chin up, eyes open, hearts loud.
Walk through this with me.
Walk through this with me.*

- Anis Mojgani, Oregon Poet Laureate, 'Come Closer'

Introduction

The Portland Utility Board serves as an advisory body to City Council, on behalf of and for the benefit of the people of Portland concerning the Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services. In addition to its financial oversight role, PUB is charged with identifying and reporting on important issues and challenges that these Bureaus face. Addressing the disparities Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) staff experience in hiring, retention, and promotion at the City is a high priority policy item for PUB and is explicitly discussed in [PUB's FY 2021-2022 annual report and work plan](#).

In the summer of 2021, one of the voting members of the Board, Karen Y. Spencer, sent a memo to the Board expressing an interest in taking on a particularly timely issue. In that memo she shared:



PUB Members, as I talk to friends and colleagues of color in Oregon and around the globe, I cannot recall conversing with one person of color who wishes to return to the office as it was constructed before the pandemic. Most seem to be playing along with the idea though, rather than raising their legitimate concerns. Even more troubling, when I talk to leaders and managers, I don't hear an awareness of or an urgency to tackle this issue. While I have not spoken with any Bureau employees on this subject, I am concerned that this workplace concern may not percolate up to Bureau leadership.

Before remote workers return to their in-office environment, there is a golden opportunity to make real progress by hitting a reset button on office culture. If we don't think about it now before everyone is in the office, we will have missed a once in a lifetime opportunity to reduce the impact of racial trauma at a critical moment for our communities of color. I look forward to hearing more about these concerns from the Bureaus. I hope that efforts on tackling microaggressions will improve the work environment for both remote and on-site workers.

Looking beyond the immediate need to reduce potential trauma amid a traumatic pandemic, Oregon's workforce is going to change dramatically over the next ten years, becoming increasingly diverse. The new generation coming into the

workforce will not remain in Portland or this state, if they are not valued and respected and do not have a voice at the table in leadership roles. Taking a golden opportunity to get this right now is a worthwhile long-term investment.

To jump-start this work two Board members, Theresa Huang and Karen Y. Spencer, formed a team to collect available information and summarize findings, remaining questions, and observations into a set of suggestions for the Board's consideration. Unsurprisingly, this work daylighted related workforce issues that impact the opportunities and experiences BIPOC staff have at the City. This is very much a starting-place summary of findings and suggestions. There is much more work to be done.

For purposes of this report, we adopt PWB's definition of Workforce equity from its *Plan to Advance Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*:

Workforce equity: Creating the conditions for all employees to have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive, so their identities do not predict their employment outcomes.

"The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being." - Toni Morrison

This report is written in the context of being in our third year of the coronavirus pandemic with over 1,000,000 deaths nationwide, which will have incalculable and lasting reverberations.¹ The pandemic has not impacted all populations equally. Cumulative data shows disparities in cases and deaths for people of color nationally² and statewide.³ This report is also written against the backdrop that two years after the murder of George Floyd,⁴ our communities of

¹ *What One Million COVID Dead Mean for the U.S.'s Future*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-one-million-covid-dead-mean-for-the-u-s-s-future/>

² *COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by Race/Ethnicity: Current Data and Changes Over Time*, <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-by-race-ethnicity-current-data-and-changes-over-time/>

³ *Oregon COVID-19 Case Demographics and Disease Severity Statewide* (Oregon Health Authority), <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/oregon.health.authority.covid.19/viz/OregonCOVID-19CaseDemographicsandDiseaseSeverityStatewide/SeverityTrendsDeath>

⁴ *Two Years After George Floyd's Murder, Minneapolis Is Still Struggling to Redefine Policing*, <https://time.com/6180605/minneapolis-police-reform-george-floyd-murder/>

color are facing the mainstreaming of racist rhetoric⁵ and a marked rise in hate crimes,⁶ including domestic terrorism.⁷

Pretending this backdrop does not exist without any change in City policies, procedures, or Bureau organizational cultures asks BIPOC employees to be equally productive with their peers in their work for the Bureaus, while carrying the extra burdens of racialized trauma. Both generalized racial trauma and individual experiences with racism thus produces an unlevel competitive field in the workplace. While we cannot immediately level the playing field, acknowledging pain and suffering goes a long way toward identifying the issues and building solutions. Acknowledging pain or suffering in others is humanizing and makes employees feel that they are seen, heard, and valued. Employees that feel valued are more engaged and more productive with their work.⁸ Failing to acknowledge pain or suffering is dehumanizing and renders them invisible.⁹ With a goal of ensuring that BIPOC employees are seen, heard, and valued, we have written this report keeping the PUB's *Beliefs, Values and Anti-Racist Principles* in mind, especially the belief that "A failure to address policies that continue to drive racial inequities is a form of racism."¹⁰

Sources

A variety of resources were consulted in developing this report. The PUB team reached out to neighboring jurisdictions, e.g., City of Seattle, King County, Multnomah County, Washington County, Clackamas County, and Metro. The team reviewed workforce surveys and reports conducted by the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) and the Portland Water Bureau (PWB) as well as some City-wide work in progress and reports related to the workforce and workplace environment. The team also had conversations with City staff, including staff who had been involved in City-wide workforce racial equity efforts convened by the Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR) and the Bureau of Human Resources (BHR); BHR staff; and Equity

⁵ *The 'great replacement' conspiracy theory isn't fringe anymore, it's mainstream*, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/17/1099233034/the-great-replacement-conspiracy-theory-isnt-fringe-anymore-its-mainstream>

⁶ *Report: Hate crimes rose 44% last year in study of major cities*, <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2022/02/14/hate-crime-increase-2021-asian-american->

⁷ *Biden calls Buffalo shooting 'domestic terrorism'*, <https://www.wjbf.com/news/u-s-world-news/biden-to-meet-with-buffalo-mass-shooting-victims-families/>

⁸ Portland Water Bureau, *Engagement Profile*, July 2010 (page 24).

⁹ "I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me." Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952).

¹⁰ *Portland Utility Board Beliefs, Values and Anti-Racist Principles*, <https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2022/pub-values-adopted-2-1-22.pdf>

Managers from BES, PWB, and the Office of Management and Finance (OMF). A list of written resources consulted can be found at the end of the report.

Themes

While the issues intertwine in complex ways, for ease of review, the findings have been organized into the following thematic areas:

- [Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, analyze, and act on it](#)
- [Collect and use qualitative data; Incorporate community knowledge as data](#)
- [Apply an equity lens to the temporary employee experience and act on findings](#)
- [Analyze and address racial disparities in career trajectory](#)
- [Use return to office to level set culture and workforce environment expectations](#)

To navigate, click the links and theme titles to toggle between themes.

As you review this report, we ask you to keep in mind these questions:

- Are our BIPOC employees seen, heard, and valued, especially during times of change or transition?
- Can I add my voice as an amplifier for the needs of our BIPOC employees?
- Is there a suggestion I would add to this list?
- What projects should be appropriately funded to promote workforce racial equity?

Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, analyze, and act on it

Findings

For both Bureaus there was an overwhelming lack of available data disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

BES — The formal reports shared by BES with the PUB team, e.g., the BES employee engagement surveys, exit interviews, and pandemic related surveys, did not include information disaggregated by race and ethnicity. For example, in the BES exit interview summaries (February 2017 to January 2022)¹¹ Eighty-seven of the 122 survey respondents (71.31%) identified as white (pg. 1), four respondents chose not to answer this question. Thus,

¹¹ Likewise, while PWB does offer optional confidential exit surveys, the data is also not disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

at most 25.40% to 28.69% were BIPOC staff. Without data disaggregation, the experiences of exiting BIPOC staffs are overshadowed and we cannot grasp what the true experience is working at the Bureau as a BIPOC staff. We have no idea *who* left to advance their career, *who* left because they feel inequitable treatment from their supervisor, *who* would return to work at BES, or *who* was satisfied or dissatisfied with the work environment and in what ways. Importantly, while a particular response to a question may be a small percentage of the overall responses to that question, that small percentage, if representing largely BIPOC staff, may nonetheless be quite significant. For example, 8% of respondents said they would not recommend employment with BES to a friend or family member with 18% undecided as compared to 75% saying they would. Depending on *who* makes up that 8% and 18% this could be quite significant in terms of illuminating the experience of BIPOC staff in the workplace. (exit interviews pg. 5)

The BES “workforce development and culture” survey shared with the PUB team also did not disaggregate by race and ethnicity the responses to individual questions. As shared with the PUB team, the two BES surveys conducted regarding the pandemic did not include any demographic information about the respondents. It seems the opportunity to identify and address racial disparities in the workplace environment and work experiences, was entirely missed.

Notably, in the recent Columbia Boulevard Wastewater Treatment Plant (CBWTP) Needs Assessment, Stantec identified that “staff believe there is a lack of attentiveness to equity issues and concerns.” One of the short-term calls to action was to “Create process that tracks an issue when it is raised.”¹² (pg. 8)

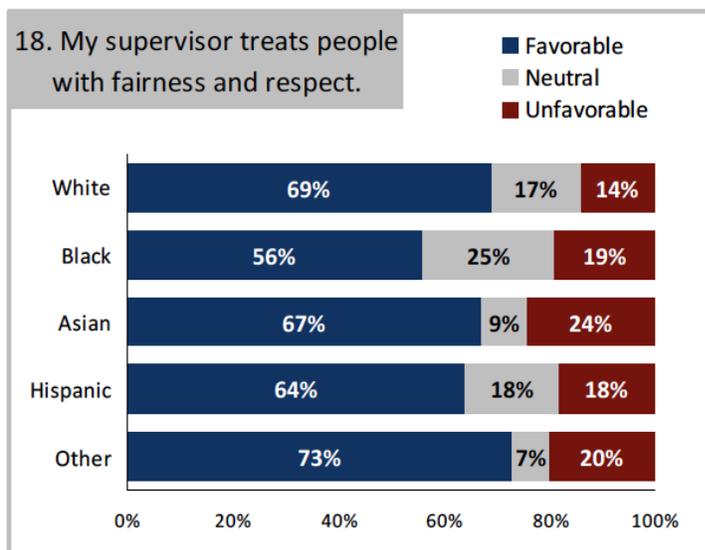


Figure 1 - Engagement Profile, Portland Water Bureau, July 2010 (Page 13)

PWB — PWB survey data was similarly largely not disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Only one engagement survey provided data that was disaggregated by race, the Engagement Profile, July 2010. That study, for instance, showed that the black population gave significantly lower scores in the ‘Supervisor’ dimension (Figure 1).

¹² While outside of the scope of this report, we note our alarm and dismay that one of the first Calls to Action for Equity was to “secure the women's changing rooms/showering facilities.”

Additionally, the smallest minority groups represented by the Hispanic and “Other” populations felt they were not given the necessary level of authority to do their best work. (Figure 2).

Follow-on surveys did not disaggregate the data. So, there is no way of knowing whether these dynamics have been properly addressed over time, and/or whether new issues have cropped up.

A survey was conducted in 2021, but we were not made privy to the complete results. We were provided with these pieces of information:

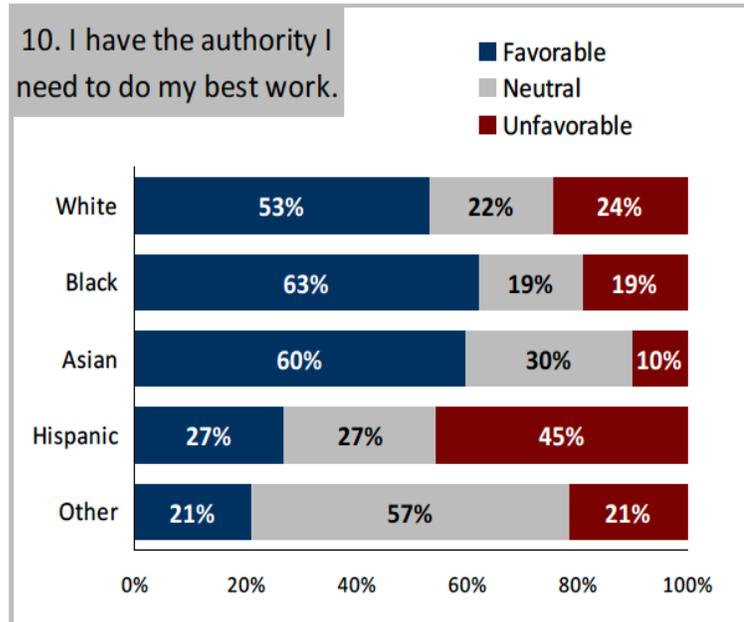


Figure 2- Engagement Profile, Portland Water Bureau, July 2010 (Page 13)

- Seventy-three percent of employees, regardless of race, gender, ability and sexual orientation, said they were satisfied with and engaged with their jobs. The disaggregated details are:

	All	White	BIPOC	Women	Sexual Orientation	TNGC	Ability Status
Overall, I am satisfied with my job	73%	75%	72%	70%	60%	80%	61%

- 80% BIPOC feel work is engaging, but 56% say it isn’t valued.
- 73% employees say their work is engaging to them most of the time, and 73% of workforce is satisfied with their job.
- 36% of employees with disabilities are satisfied with their jobs.¹³

56% of BIPOC employees feeling that their work is undervalued is a shocking data point. It would be helpful to understand whether this is felt by all racial group populations or concentrated among certain populations. Nonetheless, it does signal the need for action on workplace culture.

¹³ While outside of the scope of this report, we do wish to acknowledge the extremely low satisfaction rate for employees with disabilities which should be investigated and addressed by PWB.

Summary, both Bureaus — This data raises more questions than it resolves. The lack of disaggregated racial and ethnic data made it impossible for the PUB team to analyze survey results through a lens of racial equity. If that disaggregation and analysis has happened within the Bureaus, the PUB team was not made aware of it. When data is lumped together, it can make the experiences of certain populations invisible. This invisibility has impacts. For leaders, it creates blind spots and prevents them from addressing the needs and opportunities of those populations. Employees may not feel seen or heard, especially those whose day-to-day work experience significantly differs from the norm or average of all employees. It may also send a signal that the organization does not care about that employee population, leading to disengagement and potential difficulties in recruitment and retention.

Collection and analysis of workforce survey data disaggregated by race and ethnicity must happen. This allows the Bureaus to directly incorporate the experiences and expertise of BIPOC staff into efforts to improve workforce culture and career opportunities for BIPOC staff. Finally, by failing to disaggregate racial and ethnic data and report on it, these survey summaries replicate the all-too-common lived experience of BIPOC people — being made invisible by the white experience, thereby, continuing the harm of erasure.

“I don’t study to know more, but to ignore less.”

– Juana Inés de la Cruz

Suggestions

- **Need for Creativity.** The PUB team understands the need to protect individuals’ identities and that, given the overall small percentage of BIPOC staff, disaggregating the data by race and ethnicity in workforce surveys and exit interviews can run the risk of individuals becoming identifiable. There are also legitimate concerns about the data being used to harm BIPOC communities and care should be taken to avoid this harm.¹⁴ Nonetheless, there is a need to creatively think about ways to disaggregate the data and publicly report on it. Otherwise, one runs the risk of refusing to ask the hard racial equity questions by hiding behind one of the key issues workforce racial equity is meant to address: the too small numbers of BIPOC staff in the Bureaus’ workforce. This suggestion is consistent with PWB’s recognition that “achieving equity requires

¹⁴ Harm can be done in any number of ways, e.g., by using the data to blame a population for the systemic issues they experience (pathologizing the population) or by generalizing on the basis of imperfect data. Addition of this point credited to personal communications with Equity Managers. See also *Weaponized data: How the obsessions with data has been hurting marginalized communities*, by Vu Le. <https://nonprofitaf.com/2015/05/weaponized-data-how-the-obsession-with-data-has-been-hurting-marginalized-communities/>

intentionally examining policies and practices as well as reallocating resources.” (PWB Plan to Advance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, pg. 12)

- **Put racial equity front and center** in the decision-making and design of all workforce related surveys and data collection. For example, ask questions specific to BIPOC staff, e.g., As a BIPOC staff, what would make you want to stay at the Bureau? Or, as a BIPOC staff, what is a dealbreaker for you?
- **Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity in all workforce surveys**, for example, employee engagement, exit interviews, and any surveys responding to emerging needs, e.g., the surveys related to the pandemic and workforce safety needs, re-entry needs, etc.
- **Consider multi-layer analysis, factoring in demographic identities as well as job classification and department/service area.** Given the historical and continuing occupational segregation in the USA and the fact that often occupations with a higher percentage of BIPOC workers are deemed by society as less valuable and thus paid less, resourced less, and offered less opportunity for career change or advancement, a multi-layer analysis in future surveys may be illuminating of deeper organizational-level structural inequities. As an example, the CBWTP Needs Assessment, recommends that BES “[o]ffer operator-in-training path for disadvantaged persons and underprivileged communities.” (pg. 8)
- **City-wide consistent exit and stay surveys.** As suggested by the Subgroup #2: Retention, led by Dr. Koffi Dessou + Aly’ce Brannon-Reid, “Develop consistent Exit and Stay surveys. Focus on BIPOC staff. Share exit/stay interview data across Bureaus so we can all benefit from the information and develop a process for using this data to inform recruitment and retention.”
- **Include the overlay of racial and ethnic demographic data in the final reports shared with staff, Council, PUB, and the public.** Do so in visual ways that are easy for the reader to understand.
- **Use proxy information when disaggregated data specific to the Bureaus is not available.** A lack of disaggregated data should never be viewed as a stumbling block. When disaggregated data cannot be obtained, the Bureaus should be mindful of including proxy data such as information through their affinity networks and surveys and benchmarks based on regional, national, or comparable city data. So that BIPOC staff feel seen, this proxy data should be referenced or acknowledged in reports that contain only aggregated data.
- **Act on the results.** Where the disaggregated data shows issues, develop plans to address and then take swift action to address the issues. When survey results highlight a significant disparity in perception among a discrete population of the employee base, it should be treated as a business issue by Bureau leadership.

Findings

BES – Qualitative data appears to have been collected to some degree in the BES exit interviews, workforce development survey, and pandemic-related re-entry surveys, but it was largely not shared with the PUB team. We do not know if or how it was analyzed, incorporated, or acted upon.

While numbers can tell a story or paint a picture of larger trends, e.g., who gets promoted, who leaves the Bureau for what check-the-box reason; it is most often the details behind the checkboxes and answers to open-ended qualitative questions that best illuminate the facets of complex equity issues. This information can daylight concerns and suggest solutions that may remain unseen until narratively investigated. For example, 13.16% of respondents to the BES exit interview question 14 chose the option

“fair and equitable treatment” by their direct manager/supervisor as a factor in their departure, which was significantly higher than the other options, and 10.53% reported being “extremely dissatisfied.” (pg. 14) Providing the space for people to explain why they selected these options, can shed light that checkboxes cannot.

43.81% of respondents checked “other” in answer to the question “Did any of these additional factors affect your departure?”. (BES exit surveys, pp. 22-23) Without the qualitative information behind “other”, all that can be known is that there is valuable information missing. As discussed earlier, this information must also be disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

PWB – We are informed that the Water Bureau offers optional exit surveys. The information remains confidential and is not aggregated. According to the Bureau, they are used in the context of work groups with points of information used locally. Surveys are screened by PWB Business Operations staff. Concerns are flagged and shared with the Director. Further action is at the Director’s discretion. By maintaining individual data points, the Bureau may miss trends or issues within discrete populations.

We’re presuming that the data collected for these exit interviews includes some qualitative questions. We were not informed of any other areas in which the Water Bureau collects qualitative information.



Suggestions

- **Make more use of open-ended qualitative questions in workforce surveys.** Even where you provide a checkbox list to assist the respondent and/or to allow for numerical analysis, where appropriate, the survey should invite the participant to expand on their checkbox choice in their own words. Analyze, incorporate, and act on the qualitative data collected. While it may be more difficult to collect and work with, qualitative data is essential to moving racial equity in the workforce forward. Share qualitative information with all levels of Bureau staff, Council, PUB, and the public in meaningful ways that also protect individual identities.
- **Incorporate community knowledge as data.** Community knowledge is often dismissed as “merely anecdotal”. The American English word has origins in the ancient Greek word for the things not written down. In contemporary usage it often carries the connotation of being less valuable information than other forms of information. Interrogating the over-valuation of certain kinds of written information and the devaluation of other kinds of information is part of the work of dismantling white supremacist culture.¹⁵

BIPOC communities develop and share community-level knowledge identifying issues, opportunities, and wisdom on how to navigate hostile environments and systemic racism. This knowledge may be communicated via stories, humor, pithy sayings, poetry, song, etc. Sometimes it is written down, other times it remains oral. Nonetheless, it is a valuable source of data and should be utilized. It adds depth and nuance to forms of data more commonly recognized by bureaucracies. And, when bureaucratic forms of data are lacking, community knowledge is often present. With this in mind, leadership should never accept or give as an excuse, “We didn’t act, because we didn’t know.”

Indeed, the origins of this report lie in talking with BIPOC friends and colleagues about the relief from workplace microaggressions that teleworking afforded as well as the desire not to return to the status quo office. While the impetus for the report came from a volunteer member of PUB, this community knowledge about the workforce racial equity issues was just as accessible to City and Bureau leadership within the ranks of their own employees. The open questions are:

- Why did leadership not seek out this knowledge?
- Why did BIPOC staff not feel empowered to convey this information?
- And, if this knowledge was sought and/or conveyed, why was it not valued?

Sometimes, being a leader means walking beside someone on their journey long enough to discover their struggles.

¹⁵ *Worship of the Written Word*, <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/worship-of-written-word.html>

- **Act on the results.** Where the disaggregated data shows issues — whether that data is quantitative or qualitative and whether the source is City/Bureau specific or proxy data from other sources or community knowledge — develop plans to address and then take action to address the issues.

Apply an Equity Lens to the Temporary Employee Experience and Act on Findings

Introduction

In analyzing the workforce surveys, it was not clear how or if temporary employees, including interns and apprentices, were included in the surveys. The team was not given any data on the potential racial equity issues related to use of temporary employees in the workforce, e.g., the experience of temporary employees in the work environment, and the career trajectories of temporary employees, including apprentices and interns, at the Bureaus. In this report, the PUB team shares some initial observations and preliminary suggestions. The team recommends further conversation with the Bureaus and information gathering, analysis, and action to address any concerning patterns.

The City often uses casual and seasonal employee classifications for temporary employees, sometimes even for ongoing needs that may not be temporary or seasonal in nature. Employees in these classifications can only work up to 1400 hours in a year and have extremely limited benefits and job security, despite significant contributions to the City. These employees may accrue limited sick leave, but do not accrue vacation, service credit or status in their classification, and can be terminated at any time without appeal rights. Certain benefits such as holiday pay or federal medical coverage may be available in limited circumstances.¹⁶

Findings

Currently, there is an opportunity gap between the temporary positions and the entry level positions, especially those that are ongoing. People who are advancing from the temporary positions are often those with more resources for them to pursue jobs without stable pay/benefits (spending years in a temp position just to wait for a chance to get a permanent job), and better connections, etc. while many BIPOC community members don't have equal access to this pathway.¹⁷

¹⁶ See: BHR 3.03 Administrative Rule: *Types of Appointments*

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/3.03-types-of-appointments.pdf>

¹⁷ The racial wealth gap has substantial impacts on both the individual and the local economy. McKinsey & Company estimates that "the wealth gap between American whites and Blacks is projected to cost the US economy between \$1 trillion and \$1.5 trillion in lost consumption and investment between 2019 and 2028. This translates to a projected GDP penalty of 4 to 6 percent in 2028 (Noel and others 2019)."

Addressing systemic racism is a moral imperative; it can also make economies stronger

<https://www.imf.org/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/09/the-economic-cost-of-racism-losavio> citing

Many current front facing positions that require close communication and relationship building with our communities are temporary and seasonal positions that do not have access to benefits. However, these positions are also very vital positions that maintain the relationships between the Bureaus and the community. In addition, BIPOC staff in these roles are also the ones holding extensive community expertise and knowledge regarding communication and relationship building with the most vulnerable people we serve. It is necessary that we take a close look at the structures of how the Bureaus interact with our communities. How we treat employees who connect with BIPOC communities on a day-to-day basis reflects how much or little we value these communities.

Suggestions

Again, the PUB team did not have time to fully investigate the Bureaus' use of temporary employees. The Bureaus may already be doing some of the items suggested below. In this case the PUB team encourages the Board to support the Bureaus in those efforts. Where the below suggestions are not already happening, the PUB team encourages the Board to recommend that the Bureaus undertake them.

- **Value temporary staff** whether interns, apprentices, or other temporary staff, as people, for their skills, and for the work they do.
- **Analyze current practices and procedures** that explicitly or implicitly treat temporary staff as less than, question why, and make change.
- **Provide support and mentorship** so temporary staff can navigate the application process for ongoing positions.
- **Create more career pathways to on-going, benefitted positions for interns, apprentices, and other temporary employees** through mentorship, opportunities for leadership, and better benefits for temporary employees to sustain basic living needs.
- **Explicitly include interns, apprentices, seasonal, and other temporary staff in all workforce and workforce culture surveys.**
- **Do not brownwash.** Placing BIPOC employees in lower valued and lower paid positions to advertise that the organization is diverse and inclusive, while upper-level management roles continue to be filled with primarily white ethnicities, is one of the common ways of tokenizing and brownwashing. Take steps to ensure the Bureaus are not brownwashing:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/the-economic-impact-of-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap#>

In a back of the envelop calculation presuming a 1.8% annual GDP growth for the Portland Metro region, this GDP penalty just for the White-Black gap could translate to \$7.7 Billion to \$11.6 Billion impact. Racial and ethnic inequality has cost US economy \$51 trillion since 1990.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/09/racial-and-ethnic-inequality-has-cost-us-economy-51-trillion-since-1990/>

- Conduct multi-layer analysis including appointment status, job classification, and racial and ethnic demographic data to determine concerning patterns, e.g., who moves from temporary positions to ongoing positions; who is doing work in job classification X as a casual appointment and who is doing this work in an ongoing position; etc. Take action to address any discovered concerning patterns.
- This analysis should be done for intern, apprentice, and general casual employees to ensure the Bureaus are not replicating long-standing inequities such as disparately hiring BIPOC staff into temporary positions or disparately requiring that BIPOC staff “prove” their skills by starting as interns in situations where a comparably situated white staff would simply be hired into an ongoing position from the start.
- **Analyze the extent to which the Bureaus rely on temporary/casual staff and what kind of work is generally done by those staff.** Examine the underlying valuation of that work through a lens of racial equity and, as concerning patterns and practices are found, plan and implement changes. For example, to what extent are the Bureaus relying on temporary positions to do some of the most important community facing work? Regardless of whether the use of temporary staff seems significant or not, consider reducing this use. If staff are good enough to employ, they are good enough to pay a living wage and benefits.

Analyze and Address Racial Disparities in Career Trajectory

Introduction

In reviewing the workforce surveys and data, the PUB team did not have time to significantly investigate general issues related to career trajectory. Below are some preliminary findings and suggestions.

Findings

City Wide — Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) and Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR) staff are in the process of enhancing the internal-facing workforce Equity Manager’s Dashboard as well as the public-facing human resources dashboard. The public-facing dashboard can be found here: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bhr/article/697805>.

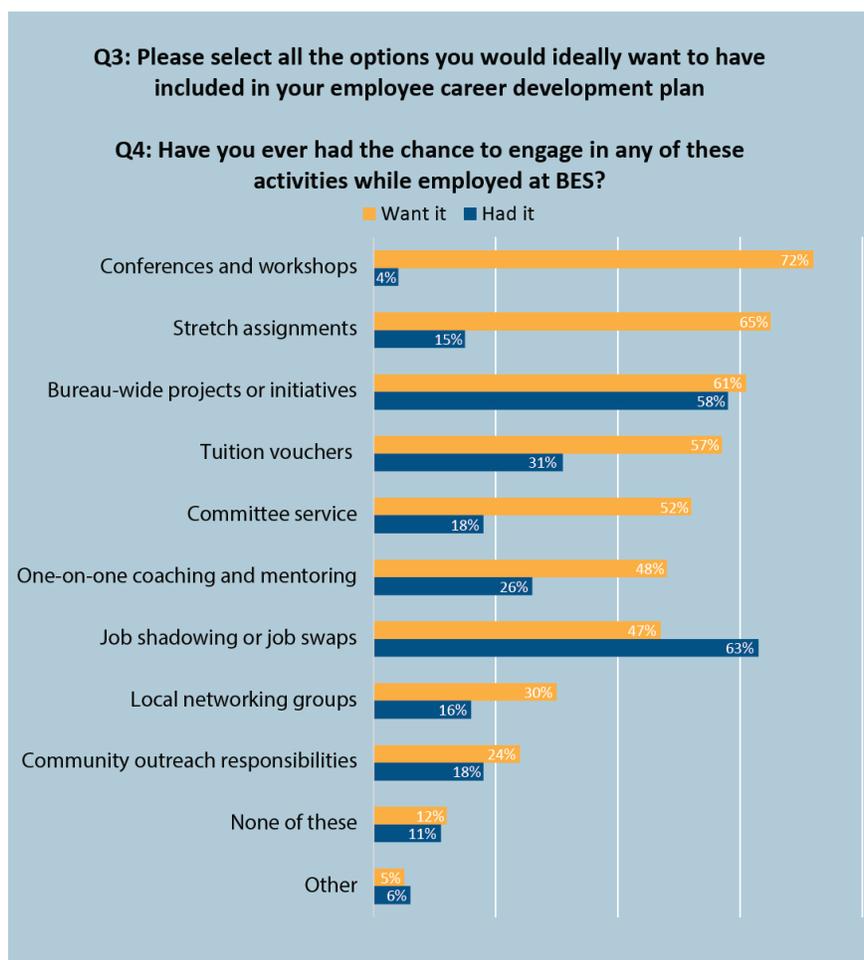
The PUB team met with BHR staff to review the internal Equity Manager’s dashboard. This dashboard primarily collects information related to the City’s affirmative action plan and reporting to the EEOC. It does not include qualitative data. There was not time for a comprehensive review, but the following dashboards were briefly viewed and discussed: promotion by race, average time to promotion by race, did not pass probation by race,

discipline rate by race, and discipline type by race. Data was available citywide, as well as by each utility bureau for the years from FY 2015-16 through FY 2020-21.

BES — In reviewing the BES “workforce development and culture” survey it seemed that staff felt there were a lack of opportunities and activities for career advancement. This can be easily identified in the difference in access to different types of staff support activities. For example, as shown in Figure 3 below:

- 65% of staff reported wanting stretch assignments with only 15% reporting having had a stretch assignment opportunity.
- 52% of staff reported interest in committee service with only 18% reporting having access to such an opportunity.
- And, while 48% of staff wanted a mentor, only 26% of them reporting having access.

Figure 3 - BES Workforce Development and Culture Survey Results (Page 3)



In general, it seemed staff reported having less access to career supports that offer more opportunity to advance in their career, e.g., stretch assignments, compared to supports that

represent less advancement opportunity, e.g., job shadowing (63% report access with 47% expressing interest).

We found that a significant portion of staff (73%) said they did not have plans to advance in the Bureau, with only about 1/3 of those staff having discussed their interests. (workforce survey, pg. 5) Due to lack of additional data, particularly qualitative data, we don't know why so many staff have no advancement plans. However, responses to questions from the BES exit survey suggest that this is partly attributed to the lack of upward mobility opportunities within the Bureau, in addition to dissatisfaction with the workplace culture.

In BES exit interview summaries, a significant percentage (38.10%) indicated job change/career advancement as a factor affecting their departure. This was second only to "other", which may contain related factors such as when temporary employees' jobs simply end (exit interviews, pp. 22-23). Similarly, "Opportunity for Advancement" (17.21%) and "Professional Development Opportunities" (9.73%) were the highest factors in departure noted in the development and recognition section of the survey (exit interviews, pp. 16-17). When asked about their direct manager or supervisor, while "Exhibit Leadership" received the most dissatisfaction ratings, "Fair and Equitable Treatment" and "Communication" received the most dissatisfaction that directly contributed as a factor to their departure (exit interviews, pg. 14).

As discussed earlier, without racially and ethnically disaggregated data we don't know *who* feels career advancement supports are unavailable, and *who* is leaving the job due to experiencing unfair and inequitable treatments. And, without the qualitative answers to *why* people responded to the survey the way they did, we lose illuminating nuance. We do know, however, that career advancement and development within the Bureau has become something unattainable, leaving many talented employees with no choice but to seek better work elsewhere.

PWB –The Water Bureau has identified a substantial issue with the pass rate from probation of Black employees.

In terms of probation, 12% of female Employees of Color did not pass probation, compared to 4% for female White employees. 9% of male Employees of Color did not pass probation, compared to 5% for male White employees. The bureau must address the issue of People of Color not passing probation at higher rates than their White peers. (May 18, 2021, *Response to City African American Network letter*).

These results only heighten the need to review the new 2021 engagement survey results.

“Tradition is a cage.”

– Tommy Pico, IRL

Suggestions

Because the PUB team did not have time to fully investigate career trajectory issues, the below list of suggestions are preliminary and incomplete. Review of PWB 2021 engagement survey results is crucial to fully developing these suggestions and the PUB team recommends that the Board request it be provided promptly.

- **Act on the recruitment and retention actions** outlined in the May 18, 2021, *Response to City African American Network letter*.
- **Resource the BHR internal Equity Manager’s Dashboard development and maintenance.** BHR has only produced one workforce data report for Equity Managers. BHR has not had the capacity to maintain this dashboard in the long term. City employees report this creates a barrier for Equity Managers across all Bureaus to inform workforce related equity issues. Sufficient funding and staffing is necessary to ensure the data collection and analysis is accurate and relevant.
- **Ensure the public-facing workforce dashboard is up to date.** The work of maintaining the public facing dashboard should also be fully resourced.
- **Implement 360 reviews for managers and supervisors with four or more direct reports.** Ensure both Bureaus meet this expectation to incorporate valuable feedback from employees, peers, and colleagues in performance reviews as part of the citywide implementation in Fiscal Year 2022-23.
- **Investigate challenges the Asian and Hispanic or Latinx PWB employees face and take action to address the situation.** This recommendation is based on BHR [online employee demographic data](#) which showed that Asian and Hispanic or Latinx employees are under-represented in the PWB employee base.
- **Review and revise HR administrative rules through a racial equity lens.** The PUB team is aware that various efforts to conduct a racial equity analysis of HR administrative rules which govern workplace personnel issues have, at various points, started and stopped, including in response to the CAAN report. This work should be resourced; BIPOC staff, including frontline staff, should be given ample paid time to participate as needed; and this work should continue without delay and avoid interruption.

Findings

Beyond the City — The PUB team began by reaching out to contacts in sister jurisdictions to see if anyone knew of pandemic related surveys, conducted by their employers, that were disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Tantalizingly, the team heard that early in the pandemic the City of Seattle conducted a survey with responses disaggregated by race and ethnicity that revealed a distinct preference of BIPOC staff to remain remote as compared to white staff. The team reached out to Seattle’s HR department several times but did not hear back so could not corroborate.

The team’s contacts at other jurisdictions shared that they were unaware of any pandemic related surveys that included racial and ethnic disaggregation of data. While this does not mean that issues of racial equity were not being considered vis-à-vis remote work, re-entry to the office, or on-site work during the pandemic, it does suggest that racial equity was likely not centered in leadership-level discussions since data was not available. In general, our contacts expressed agreement of the importance of these issues and appreciation to the PUB for raising them.

Beyond the City this topic has been widely covered in the news. In a blog post, Future Forum also reports that: “...Only 3% of Black knowledge workers want to return to full-time co-located work (vs. 21% of white knowledge workers in the U.S.)”¹⁸

BES – In an April 2021 survey, over 90% of respondents chose “the ability to work remotely” in answer to “what pandemic-related adjustments would you want to continue after the pandemic is over?” This was true even for employees who were unable to work remotely during the pandemic. If given the choice, almost nobody



¹⁸ *A new era of workplace inclusion: moving from retrofit to redesign*, <https://futureforum.com/2021/03/11/dismantling-the-office-moving-from-retrofit-to-redesign/>

See also: *Why many Black employees don’t want to return to the office*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/black-workers-return-to-office-future-forum-workplace/> and *Returning to the Office...While Black*, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/tnyradiohour/segments/returning-office-while-black>

said they would want to work 100% of their work time in a BES/City facility. 34% wanted to work entirely remotely, and 35% wanted a hybrid schedule – nearly 50% of those said 1-2 days per week in the office was preferred, 20% chose 3-4 days (the remainder didn't answer or chose "other"). On a general note, it seemed staff were feeling that their hard work was not being recognized.

Again, what would have been extremely valuable would be to know how the survey responses broke down by race and ethnicity; by location, telework or onsite; and possibly other salient factors, e.g., department/service area, job classification. In the absence of Bureau specific data, we may fairly infer that only a tiny percentage of BIPOC staff are likely to wish to return to the office on a full-time basis.

I see no benefit for me, my family, or the City having me in the office. I am struggling to get help at home that allows me to be away all day. The care help I had before COVID is no longer available and I can't seem to replace that paid assistance which allowed me to be gone all day.

– City Employee, April 2022 ¹⁹

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PWB – PWB conducted a survey titled, “Re-envisioning the Workplace,” where respondents overwhelmingly valued remote work. The survey included nearly all remote workers, plus 32 responses from individuals whose work cannot be remote. 85% of employees were hoping that remote work-related adjustments and flexibility would continue post pandemic. This survey did not break out responses demographically to discern whether certain populations valued different benefits of the ability to work remotely. This might have afforded the Bureau with an opportunity to understand the ways in which the pre-pandemic work environment was "created to accommodate the needs of white people, and specifically men."²⁰

City-wide – The City has now moved into Hybrid Pilot Phase 1 of Workplace Reentry which is currently planned to run from April 18, 2022 through September 2, 2022. Disappointingly, racial equity considerations appear to have played little to no role in leadership's development of the Phase 1 policies and procedures.

¹⁹ The City Employee quotes were provided in response to an anonymous survey in April 2022 with no way to determine the ethnic, racial, or gender identity of the respondents. The PUB team was unable to ask the respondents' permission to use the quotes but included them since they were relevant, provide no information that could be used to identify the individual(s), were responses to an employer survey and thus, the respondent(s) might naturally assume replies may be shared in some format. The hope is that including the quotes will elevate the issues and amplify the concerns shared by the employee(s).

²⁰ *Who Wants to Return to the Office?*, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-post-pandemic-offices-could-be-whiter-and-more-male/>

I do not feel great. Everyone seems so excited to get back in the office. Folks that are there more than required seem to be encouraging others to do the same. It feels pressuring, like I'm not a team player or something. Being in the office is not productive for me and I miss being able to get work done on the days I am now required to be in the office. I am less productive and that means I work weekends / eves to keep up.

– City Employee, April 2022 ¹⁹

Suggestions

- **Act now to address workforce environment issues faced by BIPOC staff.** Even though Phase 1 of Workplace Reentry has already begun, start now in taking actions to address workforce environment/culture issues faced by BIPOC staff.
- **Build racial equity considerations into the core of Phase 2 plans.** All policies and procedures related to Phase 2 should be run through a racial equity lens. Sometimes, racial equity is used as additional fodder in decision-making – like an object that can be picked up and dropped as needed depending on the exigencies of the situation.²¹ In order to unleash the full potential of the workforce so that BIPOC employees can thrive, racial equity should be woven into the fabric of decision-making at all levels.
- **Limit/Eliminate top-down approaches.** Future Forum reports repeatedly noted the top-down approach and the disconnect between executives and everyone else. The Bureaus should consider methods for ensuring the perspectives of BIPOC staff become an integral part of organizational decision-making.
 - For instance, any taskforce or committee should include seats for frontline BIPOC staff and equity managers. This suggestion is consistent with PWB’s Plan to Advance Equity, Diversity and Inclusion’s 5-year objective on participatory decision-making: “Research and adopt models of effective shared governance, such as decision-making committees and participatory budgeting.” (pg. 28)
 - Another suggestion would be to ensure that affinity groups are engaged in developing significant workforce policies. (See, Subgroup #2: Retention, led by Dr. Koffi Dessou + Aly’ce Brannon-Reid.)

²¹ Dr. Tema Okun identifies a continued sense of urgency as one of the characteristics of white supremacy culture. The characteristics are “damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. Because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us – people of color and white people.” The sense of urgency “makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences.” white supremacy culture by Tema Okun. dRworks. www.dismantlingracism.org

- **Develop and launch trauma informed approaches.** We are living and working through a traumatic period that has stressed individual financial and emotional resources and mental health. We encourage the Bureaus to integrate knowledge about this trauma and the impacts of microaggressions as it formulates its policies and practices.
- **Engage and include on-site workers.** The Bureaus should ensure they are fully engaging with and including the needs of employees who work on-site in workplace and organizational culture surveys as well as other efforts around workplace culture.
- **Monitor.** Conduct a survey, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, in 6 to 9 months after remote workers return to in-office or hybrid work schedules.
- **Disaggregate data by race and ethnicity.** Employee survey data on work environment and culture must be disaggregated by race and ethnicity if it is to be useful for racial equity work.
- **Use all sources of data: Bureau data, proxy data, and community knowledge in your decision making.** If data is lacking in one category, look to data from the other categories. Synthesizing and analyzing the available data from all categories will also provide deeper understanding of the complexities of the issues and assist in identifying concrete, innovative actions that can be taken.

From Future Forum's October 2021 Pulse report,
The great executive-employee disconnect.

- Eighty-seven percent of Asian respondents and 81% of Black respondents want flexible or hybrid work, compared to 75% of white respondents. (pg. 4)
- In particular, since the broad adoption of remote-work policies, employee experience scores for Black knowledge workers have risen most sharply, with Black men making the biggest quarter-over-quarter gains in employee experience out of all demographic groups in the U.S. (pg. 4)
- Most executives (66%) report they are designing post-pandemic workforce policies with little to no direct input from employees. (pg. 3)
- While two-thirds of executives (66%) believe they're being "very transparent" regarding their "post-pandemic" policies, less than half of workers (42%) agree. (pg. 3)

Conclusion and Next Steps

In closing, our report has covered five central themes and provided a host of suggestions that we hope will invigorate the work ahead. As you absorb and contemplate this report, we ask you to answer these questions:

- Are our BIPOC employees seen, heard, and valued, especially during times of change or transition?
- Can I add my voice as an amplifier for the needs of our BIPOC employees?
- Is there a suggestion I would add to this list?
- What projects should be appropriately funded to promote workforce racial equity?

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the many City staff who take great efforts, including career risks, to speak truth, advocate for change, and move workforce racial equity forward in whatever way they can from their perch within the City system. To them, both those known and unknown, your work is valued and will inure to the benefit of all Portlanders. We also thank the many folks who generously gave of their time over the course of the last 10 months in assisting the PUB team in developing this report. To preserve confidentiality, we cannot thank everyone by name. Be assured your passion and commitment was palpable —even through Zoom.

We wish to heap special praise on our indomitable PUB staff, Eliza Lindsay and Amy Archer-Masters, who kept this project on track and gave us the space for our thoughts to flourish.

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“The power of visibility can never be underestimated.”
– Margaret Cho

List of Primary Documents Consulted

This is a list of the primary documents consulted. [Brackets] indicate the filename and is included in cases where the document title may not immediately make clear which file contains the document.

The list does not include informal email or oral communications. Where a document is available online a URL has been provided.

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- *BES 2016-2021 Discipline Summary Report*
- *BES April 2021 COVID-19 Re-entry Survey Summary* [BES ReEntry Survey Summary May 2021]
- *BES COVID-19 Survey #2 Summary Results*
- *BES Equity Plan 2016-2021*
- *BES Exit Interview Summary, January 28, 2022*
- *City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services Columbia Boulevard Treatment Plant: Needs Assessment Review, Stantec, January 25, 2022* [CBWTP-NeedsAssessmentJan2022]
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City-wide

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