



## OVERVIEW

### Recognizing our community conditions are uneven

Many in our region are prospering and thriving, and for many, this is a great place to live, learn, work and play. In fact, we have some of the most “well-off” communities in the world. However, a closer look at how the benefits of our region are distributed shows that we have deeply entrenched social, economic and environmental inequities—by race and place—that in many cases are worsening and threaten our collective prosperity. This holds true for our employees and many of our communities.

These inequities are driven by an array of historical and societal factors including unequal access to the determinants of equity, and subtle but pervasive individual bias and institutional and structural racism and sexism. These factors, while invisible to some of us, have profound and tangible impacts for all of us.

Launched in early 2008 by Executive Ron Sims, King County Equity and Social Justice has now progressed into a cross-agency effort under the leadership of Executive Dow Constantine and supported by the 2010 King County Strategic Plan and the **Equity and Social Justice ordinance**, which has made a commitment to govern using “fair and just” principles. Information and highlights of how King County has advanced equity and social justice in the organization and the community can be found in past ESJ Annual Reports at [www.kingcounty.gov/equity](http://www.kingcounty.gov/equity).

The **Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Strategic Plan** is a mandate of the **2014 Executive Order** issued by Executive Constantine to further advance equity in King County. King County’s ESJ activities have been underway for a number of years. However, in the spirit of our continuous improvement, this strategic planning process is an opportunity to go deeper into the organization and in the engagement with employees and community to understand the root and historical issues internally and externally, that are both succeeding and impeding us as a “fair and just” organization and region.

This “Employee Engagement Results” report summarizes the themes and ideas from dozens of workshops with King County employees to create a vision for the ESJ Strategic Plan and gather insight about our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges as an employer and a service provider / regional partner. The results of both the employee and community engagements will be used to shape the ESJ Strategic Plan. The goal is to have new and existing King County teams, like those working on Best Run Government, to incorporate findings from these engagements into their work and develop short and long term strategies, as part of an operational component of the ESJ Strategic Plan.

### Realizing our internal dynamics shape how we impact our communities

When King County Equity and Social Justice first launched as an Initiative, the majority of the focus was on the community conditions in our region and how King County programs and departments can begin to incorporate an equity lens in program activities to achieve better outcomes in neighborhoods and by race. In recent years, King County government has increasingly turned its eyes inward, based on the principle we need to practice equity in our workplace and embody equity in our workforce as a necessary or even a precursor condition to achieve ideal outcomes in the community. In the last year, the King County Equity and Social Justice Inter-Branch Team chose equity in the workforce and workplace as a primary focus area.

This extensive employee engagement effort as part of our ESJ Strategic Plan is an effort to build on work already underway, learn directly from employees at all levels of the organization about what is working and not working, and go deeper into the organization to engage and build on the knowledge and skills of all employees. Our bold vision is that our employees and our partners in the community will co-create the ESJ Strategic Plan with King County government, based on their experiences and ideas. We need solutions for lasting equitable outcomes that are designed by, focused on, and owned by our employees and our partners in the community because they are the experts: they work with and are often impacted by the **root causes of the inequities** that fundamentally limit large portions of our workforce and communities from fulfilling their full potential.

## ESJ STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS & ENGAGING WITH OUR EMPLOYEES

The ESJ Strategic Plan is being developed in three phases:

### Phase 1 (April to September 2015)

- Engage with employees and partners from the public and community/civic sectors, business, labor and philanthropy – both in-person and online – to define a vision for equity and social justice, and to develop a “current state” picture of ESJ within County government and across King County communities.
- Analyze gathered input to provide the countywide “current state” picture and vision of equity and social justice, and share back widely.

### Phase 2 (October 2015 to February 2016)

- Use “current state” and vision analysis to directly shape the priority areas and develop cross-cutting strategies that advance fairness and opportunity for all employees and communities.
- Prepare a draft of the ESJ Strategic Plan by focus areas and with cross-cutting strategies, and ways to measure their effectiveness.

### Phase 3 (Post February 2016)

- Make available working draft of the Plan to guide the County’s 2017-18 biennial budget development process and for teams throughout King County government to begin implementation.
- Approve the ESJ Strategic Plan, and work with regional parts to advance an equity agenda and partnerships.

## How have we been engaging with our employees?

Between April and July 2015, working with the County’s ESJ Inter-Branch Team members and department/agency leadership, the ESJ Strategic Plan team invited all County departments and agencies, and employees from various levels of their organizations – non-management, management and leadership – to participate either in their department’s/agency’s three-hour or in one of four 90-minute ESJ Strategic Planning workshops.

Each participating department and agency conducted a SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) analysis, which was designed to provide employees with a safe and healthy space to have open dialogue, and genuinely share their experiences and ideas of the current state of King County government as it relates to being “fair and just,” as well as a vision for a more equitable and just future.

External facilitators, experienced in generating and managing discussions around equity and social justice issues, facilitated all of these workshops.

King County government employs nearly 14,000 employees. In Phase 1 of the ESJ Strategic Plan development, the County engaged with a diverse group of 560 employees across and at various levels of King County government, through 22 ESJ Strategic Planning workshops. Almost 80 percent of employees who participated were selected for their department/agency workshops, while the remaining employees selected themselves to participate in the 90-minute all-employee workshops. All executive branch departments, the legislative branch (Council) and judicial branches (the Courts), and some separately elected agencies (Elections) participated in this broad, County-wide effort. Each group consisted of 25 to 30 employees on average, mainly from mid- to upper-level management positions.

**Phase 2 employee engagement** efforts are already underway. In Phase 2 of the ESJ Strategic Plan development, the County is engaging with employees in two ways: 1) conducting small, 8 to 10-person focus groups with a self-selected sample of non-supervisory frontline/shift/hourly employees who work primarily in South and East King County, and 2) developing strategies and measures by focus areas, such as workforce/workplace, partnerships, policy and budgets, communications and education, budget and policy, and operations and lines of business.

## What questions were employees asked to speak to?

The ESJ Strategic Planning team reviewed the most recent employee data available from the 2012 and 2015 King County Employee Survey to understand how employees generally feel about King County being a “fair and just” institution. Overall, County employees strongly identify with King County. In both surveys, about 7 in 10 recommend King County as a good or great place to work, and about 3 in 4 say that they are proud to work in King County.

However, of those same respondents in 2012, only 47% of employees said that King County was “fair and just.” There are some positive signs for “fair and just” in the 2015 Employee Survey. The 2015 survey found agreement from 57% of employees that “my work unit is working to improve equity and fairness in our internal practices,” and 62% agreed that “my work unit is working to improve equity and fairness in the delivery of services.”

In an effort to continue to improve in these realms, the ESJ Strategic Planning SWOC workshops were designed to learn more about King County as “fair and just” as an employer and service provider/partner. In each session, employees worked individually, in pairs, and in groups to share input into the following topics:

### Vision Exercise

Employees were asked to imagine 10 years into the future, what King County would *look* like and *feel* like if it was truly a more “fair and just” institution – as a place to work and being a service provider and partner to its communities and customers. Department /agency groups were also asked about what types of habits and practices King County government “must-do” and “must-not-do” to be a truly “fair and just” institution in 2025.

### SWOC Exercise

Employees conducted SWOC analysis on King County in terms of (1) as a “fair and just” place to work, and (2) being “fair and just” to its communities, customers and partners using these discussion prompts:

- Where we are strong – what are we doing well that promotes fairness and opportunity?
- Where we are weak – what negative behaviors, practices and systems undermine being fair and just?
- Where do we have opportunities – how can we innovate and/or learn from others doing well to help us advance fairness and opportunity?
- Where do we have challenges or barriers that may hinder our efforts to get better in being fair and just?

## SUMMARY OF ESJ STRATEGIC PLAN SWOC FINDINGS

### What is/ the data telling us about where King County is in being a “fair and just” institution?

These findings only reflect experiences and ideas of the 560 King County employees, and do not yet include information being gathered from sessions with partners in the community. Over 3,400 statements and several rounds of data analysis show these 11 topic areas at the countywide level as it relates to King County being a “fair and just” institution:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| • Commitment to Equity and Social Justice | • Human Resources Policies, Practices and Processes | • Strategic Approach to Equity and Social Justice |
| • Community Engagement                    | • Inclusivity                                       | • Structural Issues                               |
| • Culture Change                          | • Resources – Time & Budget                         | • Training  |
|   | • Service Provision                                 | • Workforce Development                           |

**More discussion and content were generated on themes of commitment to ESJ, community engagement, service provision, structural issues, and workforce development,** compared to the content of the other themes.



**Examples of VISION include:**

- The people working for, on behalf of and with King County government reflects the mosaic of King County communities in all ways - how we look, how we sound, what we value, and how we think - in all our activities, at all levels of our organization.
- King County holds itself accountable to its stated principles and values in how it relates to residents and employees.
- King County promotes a culture of inclusion through a supportive and safe environment where employees feel they are listened to while working together for One King County.
- King County acknowledges the truth of our national story and history on race, is a leader in a resurgent national movement on race, and is a region where discussions of race, class, and related issues are commonplace.

**Examples of STRENGTHS include:**

- Sincere Executive priority on ESJ and a County leadership committed to the advancement of this priority, and creating cultural change that promotes fairness, opportunity and social justice
- Employees – at all levels of the organization – who are passionate, knowledgeable and engaged in advancing ESJ
- Having strong collaborations internally, and in the community
- Providing a wide array of services, at a reasonable cost, to the people who need help most, and being committed to delivering excellent customer service

**Examples of WEAKNESSES include:**

- Lack of accountability and transparency around decision-making and human resources policies
- Not doing enough to seek input and feedback from our customers and the community at large, and focusing on “downstream” services without strategically targeting root causes
- Not acknowledging our own biases and not feeling comfortable talking about race, leading to disrespectful interactions with colleagues and customers
- Regressive, hierarchical structures and systems – such as institutional racism, favoritism, and bias – that reinforce each other and create barriers to collaboration, coordination, and access to opportunity

**Examples of OPPORTUNITIES include:**

- Eliminating policies and practices that undermine access to and consideration for advancement opportunities, while diversifying leadership and management to bring in new perspectives
- Training our managers and leaders on current “best-practices” in management and ESJ issues such as inclusivity and bias
- Exploring and addressing “upstream” root causes by engaging in deep problem-solving with community partners
- Creating a budget that reflects our values around ESJ, and provides the time and resources to support ESJ efforts

**Examples of CHALLENGES include:**

- State and federal issues – political dysfunction, broken taxation systems, and policies which do not align with each other and are biased against communities of color – create problems for county government
- Labor policies
- Entrenched organizational behaviors and practices create fear, uncertainty, and resistance to change, alongside ever-present danger that important initiatives (i.e. ESJ) will fall out of favor, lose traction, and become unsustainable
- Change is difficult and slow

The following pages present the County-wide, synthesized assessment of the ESJ Strategic Plan internal SWOC information, **reflecting the views, experiences and ideas from 22 workshops with a diverse group of 560 King County employees (some self-selected) across county government, and from all levels of the organization.**

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## VISION STATEMENTS

1,400+ phrases from the 560 employees around a vision of King County as a “fair and just” institution - a place to work, and a service provider and regional partner - have been analyzed and synthesized into the following draft statements. In the next phase of employee engagement, employees across county government will get an opportunity to interact and share which statements most closely resonates with their views .

1A: The people working for, on behalf of and with King County government reflect the mosaic of King County communities in all ways - how we look, how we sound, what we value, and how we think - in all our activities, at all levels of our organization.

1B: All levels of King County government demonstrate inclusion of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and background. This is achieved through intentional hiring, mentoring, and promotion practices while working closely with our partners and listening to those we serve.

2A: King County acknowledges that some residents have greater needs than others, actively focuses resources to address disparate needs, and recognizes the wealth of knowledge and perspective contributed by nurturing meaningful and sustained relationships.

2B: Decision-making in King County involves early, meaningful, and ongoing involvement from all communities, inclusive of communities of color and low-income communities, to achieve equitable outcomes.

3A: King County holds itself accountable to its stated principles and values in how it relates to residents and employees.

3B: Our diversified workforce fulfills our equity values through open and transparent actions.

4A: King County is a workplace where all employees can access the support, training, and mentorship they need to succeed in their career without encountering bias or discrimination, and where honest and true conversations about difficult issues are the norm.

4B: King County promotes a culture of inclusion through a supportive and safe environment where employees feel they are listened to while working together for One King County.

5A: King County deeply understands and respects its residents, regardless of race, place and experience, has removed barriers to accessing County services, and adapts service delivery to the varied needs of our changing demographics.

5B: King County provides equitable access to services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and responsive to community needs.

6A: King County acknowledges the truth of our national story and history on race, is a leader in a resurgent national movement on race, and is a region where discussions of race, class, and related issues are commonplace.

6B: King County is a place where Truth (historic, present, and future), Justice, and Equity is the Standard.

7A: King County is a place of employment that empowers its diverse workforce, minimizes hierarchy, collaborates with labor, and has eradicated institutional racism and other oppressive policies and practices.

7B: King County is an anti-racist organization that recognizes our history of structural and institutional oppression by reviewing all laws and practices to eliminate bias and disproportionality.

8A: King County has a budget that reflects its stated priorities and values and applies an equity lens to achieving deep, lasting, and systemic change.

8B: King County provides sustainable funding and resource stewardship that equitably addresses the needs of its residents.

9A: King County is a respected and respectful partner that meaningfully involves community in decision processes and continuously innovates in improving equity for all.

9B: King County respectfully partners with and involves communities, and supports community participation and leadership.

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## COMMITMENT TO EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Current State** - King County and its leadership have the courage, momentum and demonstrated commitment to equity and social justice. But, there is inconsistency in how Equity and Social Justice is embedded within agencies and mid-level managers sometimes lack the skill or will needed. Differing issues can compete for the attention of elected officials and “top-down” management structure of County government impedes progress.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has an opportunity to harness recent regional and national energy around racial disparities and leverage local movement toward greater impact.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>King County has courage, momentum and a strong focus on equity and social justice. Prioritization of ESJ issues comes from the highest levels, and is sincere.</p> <p>King County has the good will and willingness to change, improve and innovate; to ask hard questions and look for answers.</p> <p>The County Executive has made ESJ a priority of his administration. County leadership is committed to ESJ and making organizational change.</p> <p>King County is creating spaces to have conversations about ESJ issues and focus on root causes.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>While there is a positive direction in many parts of the County, there is a lack of commitment and transparency in other parts.</p> <p>The top down management structure of County government results in not getting the best out of employees, and leaves them feeling uninspired, unempowered and mistrustful.</p> <p>Leadership in general, is inconsistent in how it has embraced ESJ, and some mid-level managers lack skill or will needed to forward the cause.</p> <p>Accountability is lacking.</p> <p>Issues compete for the attention of elected officials, which detracts from the focus on ESJ. Elected leadership can switch their priorities or changes in elected leadership can change the commitment.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>Grow momentum and leadership toward implementing practical ideas that can change inequities.</p> <p>Harness the regional and national energy around racial disparities, and upcoming political change, to raise the bar on how deeply we invest in ESJ issues.</p> <p>Leverage the Executive’s and leadership’s commitment on ESJ to shape lasting organizational and cultural change.</p> <p>Invest in activities that allow us to learn about each other and our differences so that as an organization, we can break bad habits and tackle root causes.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>King County tries to do too much and priorities are not always clear.</p> <p>There is a lack of political and organizational will to tackle systemic challenges and clarify priorities.</p> <p>There is an everpresent danger that important initiatives (e.g. ESJ) will fall out of favor, lose traction, and become unsustainable.</p> <p>There is an apparent lack of priorities and decision making coming from the Executive down to supervisors.</p> <p>We are driven by whatever the political climate is, competing agendas and council alignment, which creates inconsistent leadership; lack of diversity in leadership; and trust issues with leadership.</p> <p>Change needs to happen top down, and accountability for change needs to be maintained for management/leaders who are resisting change.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Current State** - King County has a long-standing practice of engaging and responding to community partners. At the same time, King County is sometimes negatively viewed as a large government entity, with leadership and policy makers who are isolated and separate from the communities they serve, leading to general distrust in government and a perceived lack of authentic community engagement.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County can grow its partnerships with local cities, business and other regional and community partners, using each other's best practices, sharing resources, and building new relationships.

### • STRENGTHS •

Current efforts in King County to engage community groups, nonprofits and cities are long-standing and often based on community feedback.

There are some inter-departmental and inter-work group projects, which promote communication.

### • WEAKNESSES •

King County does not do enough:

to seek input and feedback from our customers and the community at large, and

to resource and promote community outreach and engagement.

When the community provides input, King County doesn't always listen.

King County leadership and policy makers are physically and culturally isolated from many of the communities we serve.

King County does not make time to gather the right people to make effective decisions.

### • OPPORTUNITIES •

It is important to engage the community in strategic initiatives and new programs:

Communicate information to the community, involving marketing/community ads, etc.

Be visible.

(Best Starts for Kids is an excellent venue to get the community engaged and have their voices heard. The CFJC has highlighted the need to engage with the community - and all branches of government must be involved.)

Find multiple ways to engage with the community, including by being visible and speaking up about emerging issues.

(e.g. #BlackLivesMatter, immigration, fair wages, etc.)

Increase partnerships with community, other governments and businesses:

work together to share best practices and resources (cutting budget costs)

partner with others to form new, potentially synergistic relationships

### • CHALLENGES •

King County faces challenges in engaging, communicating, and building relationships with a diverse population in authentic means.

(Examples of engagement challenges include indigenous communities as it relates to climate change, diverse languages, multicultural communities, and CFJC construction.)

King County is sometimes negatively viewed as a large government entity, separate from the community it serves:

There is a general distrust in government, public disengagement, and lack of support from stakeholders and the public.

With this climate, understanding and providing fair access and opportunities are challenging.

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## CULTURE CHANGE

**Current State** - King County has many employees – at all levels – who are passionate, knowledgeable and engaged to promote ESJ work. However, we often don’t acknowledge our own biases and don’t feel comfortable talking about race, resulting in employees being disrespectful to their colleagues and their customers.

King County has deep challenges in creating culture change as employees have varied feelings around ESJ values and priorities. In many cases, there is disagreement, discouragement and distrust in real change taking place. There are entrenched organizational behaviors and practices that create fear, uncertainty, and resistance to change. Also, the County’s actions are sometimes not aligned with its stated values.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County needs and has the opportunity to be strategic and engage diverse work teams to better align its actions and values.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>There are many in the County, at all levels, who are passionate about ESJ and put in time and effort to promote the work.</p> <p>We have started our ESJ journey, but there is a long walk ahead with many obstacles.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>We often don’t acknowledge our own biases and don’t feel comfortable talking about race, which results in employees being disrespectful to both their colleagues and to the people that they serve, and prevents us from meaningful relationships with our fellow employees and the community.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>King County needs and has the opportunity to be strategic and engage diverse work teams to better align its actions and values.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Not everyone in the County is on board with ESJ goals: some do not think it’s a good idea; others who seek change, don’t trust that change will really happen and get discouraged.</p> <p>King County’s actions are sometimes not aligned with its stated values.</p> <p>Entrenched organizational behaviors and practices create fear, uncertainty, and resistance to change.</p> <p>Change is difficult and slow.</p> <p>Many employees want and are willing to change, but find that implementing change is very hard due to rigid structures, large size, political cycles, and insufficient knowledge and means to find out what needs to change.</p> <p>Employees have a lot of internal knowledge which is lost when they retire because it has not been institutionalized.</p>



*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES, PRACTICES & PROCESSES

**Current State** - King County is progressing towards diversifying the workforce (including at its highest levels). However, the County lacks the level of accountability needed to adequately eliminate the entrenched inequities in hiring practices, union contracts, professional development, flexible schedules, employee retention and conflict resolution protocols. This currently undermines successfully creating and retaining a diverse workforce - including at King County's highest levels - and becoming a fair and just place to work.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has opportunities to increase equity and social justice by changing its HR policies to reduce recruitment and retention barriers in its policies, practices and contracts, by offering flexible work options, and by evaluating supervisors and managers on the equity impact of policies and practices.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>As King County prepares for the new generation entering the workforce it is gathering strong data that details hiring disproportionality within departments.</p> <p>King County is looking to build upon momentum to improve upon its recruitment, hiring, development and promotion practices with the goal of diversifying the workforce at all levels.</p> <p>King County is expanding employee work/life balance opportunities and cultivating fair and just workplaces.</p> <p>King County provides good total compensation.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>Current human resource policies, hiring manager practices and union contracts limit the County's ability to effectively diversify, especially at the highest levels.</p> <p>There is a lack of accountability and checks and balances.</p> <p>King County does a poor job of encouraging a diverse pool of young people to become interested in working for the County.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>To advance equity and social justice through HR policies, the County has several opportunities:</p> <p>Address barriers in HR practices/policies/ union contracts around recruitment and retention;</p> <p>Create greater work flexibility (e.g., job sharing, part-time positions, telecommuting, choices on job location, job type and benefits, flex schedules); and</p> <p>Evaluate supervisors/managers on policies and practices that impact equity.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Current recruitment practices/pipelines that yield hires that maintain the status quo.</p> <p>Keeping diverse employees is a challenge.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## INCLUSIVITY

**Current State** - There is improved communication with staff and higher level of inclusion with some staff in King County. Still, employees are often not listened to, respected and considered in decision-making, and many employees have not bought into ESJ.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has the opportunity to listen to and include employees in decision-making, while creating safe places for honest conversations so employees bring their complete selves to work and embrace change and equity.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>King County management is improving communication with staff and in some cases, staff throughout the organization are included in decision-making.</p> <p>King County has many strong collaborations internally, and in the community.</p> <p>There is a willingness to recognize and accept the need for change.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>In many situations, employees are not listened to, respected and considered early and consistently in decision-making.</p> <p>Limiting decision-making to a few individuals blocks new voices and methods.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>Institutionalize equity in a way that puts equity first:</p> <p>Foster continuously improving inclusive decision-making;</p> <p>Respect and consider the whole person, not just their body of work;</p> <p>Focus on listening, work/life balance, diverse teams, and critical thinking; and</p> <p>Improve access to and understanding of how decisions are implemented.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Specific to ESJ, significant numbers of employees have not bought in to ESJ as a priority, and are poorly informed about ESJ.</p> <p>Employees in support of ESJ do not always have a safe place to be heard and bring up issues.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## RESOURCES - TIME & BUDGET

**Current State** - The county's economy is growing, however, revenues are insufficient to serve the needs of the most vulnerable residents in King County or to fund more equitable service delivery. The County must develop new and/or reallocate existing revenue sources to address these needs and move towards a more "upstream" approach in developing services and solutions.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has opportunities to fix resource issues related to time and budget by improving resource allocation processes to better reflect the current values of the community and County leadership. It can make resource allocation more equitable and focus it "upstream" rather than "downstream" for greater impact by creating a budget that reflects our values around ESJ, and that provides employees with the time and resources to support ESJ efforts.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>The economy is growing and diversifying in this region.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>King County's resource allocation process does not reflect the current values of the community or County leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a focus on equity and social justice work, equitable resource allocation, and</li> <li>a desire to move away from funneling resources "downstream" rather than "upstream" where the return on investment is much higher.</li> </ul> <p>ESJ efforts are not funded to the magnitude that is needed to effectively address hard ESJ issues and needs.</p> <p>Employee workloads are increasing and they feel pressed for time to complete their work, including ESJ efforts.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>To fix resource issues, the County has the following opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve resource allocation processes to better reflect the current values of the community and County leadership;</li> <li>Increase focus on equity and social justice work;</li> <li>Make resource allocation more equitable;</li> <li>Move away from funneling resources "downstream" rather than "upstream"; and</li> <li>Create a budget that reflects our values around equity and social justice, and provides the time and resources to support ESJ efforts.</li> </ul>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Our values have changed, and our budget must reflect our evolving values to better serve the public and to provide employees the time and budget to support ESJ efforts.</p> <p>Structural gap between revenues and expenditures in the County's budget.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## SERVICE PROVISION

**Current State** - King County has the responsibility and the ability to make a difference in the lives of its residents, and its staff have a genuine desire to deliver excellent customer service, specifically to the underserved. But, interacting with County services can be intimidating and inconsistent; customers often feel disrespected and treated differently based on how they look; and barriers to accessing services make some groups feel left behind. The County often does not adequately inform the public of what it does, especially its good work.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has the opportunity to change its processes and systems to be more accessible to all of our customers and residents, and to provide services that are more flexible toward customer priorities and needs, and better publicize them.

### • STRENGTHS •

King County has a **huge responsibility and the ability to make a difference in the lives of its residents:**

**It provides a wide array of services, at reasonable cost, to the people who need help most;**

**It is committed to delivering excellent customer service and making customer-driven improvements; and**

**Staff have a genuine desire to serve the community, specifically the underserved.**

### • OPPORTUNITIES •

**King County services can be made more accessible:**

**Change the way processes are developed / executed to be more understanding of and flexible toward the customer's priorities and needs** (culturally agile staff, a commitment to accountability, and customer-focused internal efficiencies);

**Build 4-6 new facilities (CFJC, etc.) and develop new policies focused on accessibility and inclusiveness;**

**Increase access to information about services and system navigation - simplify language, translate documents, create customer educational opportunities, and provide navigational support; and**

**Change location, travel distance, operational hours, online/alternative options, and co-locate services.**

### • WEAKNESSES •

**King County lacks a unified, recognizable brand. It often does not do enough to inform the public about what it does, particularly its good work and successes.**

**The County's services can be intimidating and we often treat people differently based on how they present themselves.**

**In some cases, customers are looked down upon and disrespected; in other cases, they are misunderstood.**

**We are not reaching many communities with our services, so some groups feel left behind - barriers to access need to be addressed.**

**We are not consistently responsive and we don't communicate service changes effectively - we don't provide continuity from a customer's point of view.**

### • CHALLENGES •

**Physical and language barriers, limited hours, costs, and distance to King County facilities make it difficult to access County services.**

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## STRATEGIC APPROACH TO EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Current State** - King County has taken significant first steps around ESJ (ESJ ordinance, ESJ Office creation), but recurring themes show that the County still does not strategically focus on root causes of inequities, has not successfully linked diversity efforts with internal initiatives underway to improve organizational performance, and lacks internal accountability for follow-through on its ESJ commitments.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has opportunities to take a more strategic approach to ESJ by focusing on upstream root causes and by solving problems with community partners, using technology to learn, engage and adapt to changing needs, and by preserving/institutionalizing employee knowledge.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>Tangible accomplishments such as the ESJ ordinance and ESJ office have solidified the County's commitment to being fair and just.</p> <p>King County is using an equity lens in decision-making, including budgeting.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>Focusing more on "downstream" services without strategically targeting root causes.</p> <p>Lacking internal accountability to ensure follow-through on our ESJ commitments and creating a disconnect between our message of committing to ESJ and our actions to operationalize it.</p> <p>Not clearly linking increasing diversity with current efforts to increase organizational performance (i.e., Continuous Improvement, Best-Run Government, workforce development).</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>Explore and address "upstream" root causes by engaging in deep problem-solving with community partners.</p> <p>Use technology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to learn (gather demographic and needs data);</li> <li>to reach out and engage (make services / training more accessible);</li> <li>to adapt (continuously improve in response to needs of customers, use best practices / lessons learned from other institutions).</li> </ul> <p>Institutionalize employee knowledge / learning to prevent loss with the impending wave of retirements.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Loss of internal knowledge developed among employees will occur with the impending wave of retirements.</p>



*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## STRUCTURAL ISSUES

**Current State** - King County's workforce includes diverse, knowledgeable and passionate employees, but employees face barriers to innovation and collaboration due to siloed and hierarchical organizational structures and systems, and pathways for advancement that place higher value on seniority than other types of expertise.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has opportunities to fix structural issues: by addressing institutional racism and rigorously using an equity lens in decision-making, especially in its work to address disproportionality in the criminal justice system; and by working with local, state and national partners and players to change laws and practices which are biased against communities of color.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>King County has come a long way to be a respected agency that openly speaks about ESJ, and is becoming more financially responsible and transparent.</p> <p>Vertical and horizontal communication is happening and more is needed.</p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>King County has negative structures that reinforce each other and create barriers to collaboration and coordination:</p> <p>being / working in silos;</p> <p>lack of transparency;</p> <p>regressive / hierarchical structures and systems; and</p> <p>"good ol' boy" networks that value and reward seniority above all.</p> <p>Poor communication is widespread between managers and staff, and between workgroups, divisions and departments.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>To fix structural issues, King County can:</p> <p>Address institutional racism by using an equity lens in decisionmaking, including in its work to address disproportionality in the criminal justice system;</p> <p>Work with state and national players to change laws and practices (within the County's purview but which may be dictated by other agencies) that are biased against communities of color;</p> <p>Increase collaboration and partnerships between departments;</p> <p>Increase and leverage partnerships with all types of community organizations; and</p> <p>Promote digital equity.</p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Difficulties in changing the charter, court rules and administrative codes combine with bureaucratic roadblocks to slow advancement.</p> <p>Heavy workloads and competing priorities prevent implementation of new ideas.</p> <p>State and federal issues - political dysfunction, broken taxation systems, and policies that do not align with each other - create problems for county government.</p> <p>Economic inequality and rapid growth are impacting the people we serve.</p> <p>Systematic and structural racism and reactive race dialogue continue to impact the national cultural landscape.</p> <p>We have changing demographics, which requires promotion of <i>inclusion</i>, not just diversity.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## TRAINING

**Current State** - King County is committed to providing training opportunities for employees on important ESJ topics. However, the availability and approval of ESJ training resources can be inconsistent across employee types or agencies, and training dollars are vulnerable in tight budget times.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has opportunities in that the emerging ESJ Strategic Plan may advance ESJ capacity-building and, through more robust and available training, can be augmented with mentoring opportunities and other informal training that target resources to those who need them.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>King County is committed to providing ESJ training opportunities for employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural Competency</li> <li>Implicit Bias</li> <li>ESJ Basics &amp; ESJ tools</li> <li>Micro-aggressions in the Workplace</li> <li>Race: the Power of an Illusion, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>ESJ training resources do not meet the need and demand.</p> <p>Training may not be encouraged or supported equitably across employee types or agencies.</p> <p>Current trainings - Implicit Bias, multi-cultural competencies, institutional racism, awareness of privilege – fall short of showing employees how to apply new skills: from talking to doing.</p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p>Training and education opportunities empower employees, enable them to be better leaders, and create equity in the workforce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on training our leaders and managers.</li> <li>Include more activities specific to leaders/leadership development - mentorship, special duty, cross-training, and skill development - that lead to more equitable promotion and advancement.</li> <li>Expand the amount and types of training opportunities to include more internal and external opportunities.</li> <li>Train on navigating ethnic and cultural differences, and on County practices.</li> </ul>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Demand is outstripping the supply of trainers.</p> <p>Training dollars are vulnerable in tight budget times.</p>

*Employee views, experiences and ideas*

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Current State** - King County's workforce includes diverse, knowledgeable and passionate employees. However, recurring theme is many employees' experience of overwhelming unfairness – feeling undervalued and unrecognized, uninformed of promotions and opportunities, fearful of management/ unfairly evaluated.

**Opportunities to Improve** - King County has the opportunity to change our processes – and hold ourselves accountable – to build a more diverse workforce that represents our community by diversifying leadership/management, reducing barriers to recruitment/hiring, and eliminating practices that undermine access to opportunity, while developing employees for professional growth.

<p><b>• STRENGTHS •</b></p> <p>A workforce that includes <b>diverse, knowledgeable, passionate, welcoming, and accessible people.</b></p>	<p><b>• WEAKNESSES •</b></p> <p>Among the current workforce, many <b>employees experience overwhelming unfairness:</b></p> <p><b>feeling unrecognized for their experience/ undervalued in their evaluations;</b></p> <p><b>lacking information and access to new promotion opportunities because of favoritism;</b></p> <p><b>lacking mentoring and networking tools and training on career development;</b></p> <p><b>lacking confidence in the fairness of evaluation tools; and</b></p> <p><b>being fearful of their fate left in their supervisor's hands.</b></p>
<p><b>• OPPORTUNITIES •</b></p> <p><b>Diversify its leadership and management to bring in new perspectives and added vibrancy as its aging workforce retires.</b></p> <p><b>Reduce barriers that prevent hiring/recruitment by allowing greater flexibility (e.g., allowing experience as a valid alternative to education as minimum qualifications).</b></p> <p><b>Eliminate policies and practices that undermine access to and consideration for advancement opportunities.</b></p> <p><b>Foster professional development for all staff (mentorship, career planning, internships for leadership development, etc.).</b></p> <p><b>Create an accountability system to evaluate and track progress on creating and retaining a more diverse workforce at all levels of government.</b></p>	<p><b>• CHALLENGES •</b></p> <p>Some of the <b>barriers to recruiting a more diverse workforce include:</b></p> <p><b>rigid minimum qualifications,</b></p> <p><b>labor policies,</b></p> <p><b>lack of connection with communities of color/ youth, and</b></p> <p><b>lack of public transportation to work locations.</b></p>

## METHODOLOGY FOR DATA ANALYSIS

### How did we analyze and combine the data?

Through the Vision and SWOC exercises, we received the ideas, experiences, and opinions of 560 employees. The information that employees provided was transcribed and analyzed at a department/agency level by the IBT member. Then cross-departmental teams analyzed and synthesized the data at the county level using qualitative data analysis methods. In order to minimize the effect of bias, a diverse group of employees performed the data analysis and all findings are the product of at least two employees' analysis.

#### Step 1: Identifying themes

Each category – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges – included between 400-600 statements. Two qualitative data analysts from King County – one from Public Health and one from Performance Strategy and Budget – sorted the statements within each category by naturally occurring topic areas, such as leadership, resources, workforce, training, etc. Duplicate statements were eliminated.

#### Step 2: Developing findings

The statements for each topic area were printed on strips of paper. Two different cross-county groups of eight employees each, reviewed each set of statements within each topic area, sorted them, and developed findings statements. Two employees reviewed and wrote their own findings from the data set for each topic area.

#### Step 3: Synthesizing findings

The findings statements developed by each employee were reviewed by a third cross-county group of eight employees, working in pairs, developed a singular finding statement for each topic area. The findings for the topic areas were combined across categories – for example, findings about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges related to ESJ training were combined into a finding statement about that topic area. Refer to the **SWOC Data analysis flow chart**.

#### Limitations:

The countywide data analysis process did not preserve which specific topic area emerged from which departments, and instead looked at the dataset as a whole. Therefore, some findings may be more relevant for some departments/agency, which they can find through looking at the outputs of their department/agency SWOC.

**For more information about this report, contact the King County Office of Equity and Social Justice.**

**For more information about data from individual departments and agencies, contact the Equity and Social Justice Inter-Branch Team representatives for each department or agency:**

**[www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/team.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/team.aspx)**