



Leading for Racial Equity at WSAC: Next Steps Recommendations Report

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Introduction

In 2020, the Washington State Achievement Council reached a critical new milestone. As a collective, the Council worked in collaboration with WSAC staff and leadership, DEI leaders, community partners, and students from across the state to anchor their commitment to racial equity. This commitment is central to the Council's Strategic Framework which consists of four priorities that provide a pathway for achieving their statewide goal to increase post-secondary attainment rates to 70% while also closing racial disparity in post-secondary attainment rates. This collaboration, known as the Equity Workgroup, was tasked with three important goals:

- 1). Co-create a Council racial equity statement to guide implementation of the Strategic Framework.
- 2). Co-create a clear definition of "equity" in the context of their equity statement.
- 3). Co-create recommendations for an Equity Advocates Model that would in short, provide the Council with guidance on how to collaborate with Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities, partners, students, families as an intentional practice in service of the Strategic Framework implementation.

Now that these goals have been achieved, the Council is well-poised to embark on the most important part of their journey: aligning their espoused value for racial equity with meaningful action driven by both the Strategic Framework priorities and their collective desire to end racial injustice for BIPOC people across the state.

The following report is organized into three sections, 1) Overview of the frameworks used to guide and contextualize recommendations; 2). Recommendations 3). Conclusion.

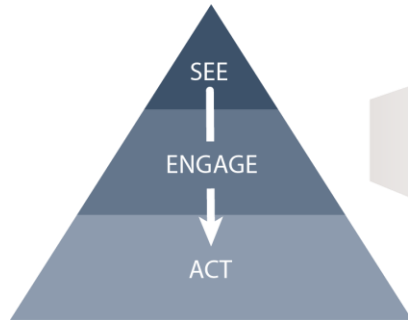
Overview of Frameworks

Becoming Justice's recommendations are guided by two sets of frameworks. The first is the [National Equity Project's](#) transdisciplinary *Leading for Equity™ Framework*. This provides a frame of reference that enables leaders to effectively navigate the complex territory of equity challenges and develop their individual and collective capacity to engage in transformative leadership action. This framework interrupts the ways in which most leaders are accustomed to leading and being led from the "outside-in," where the drivers of our actions are external requirements, hierarchical authority, and requisite programs to implement. When it comes to complex equity challenges this approach is inadequate. Instead, they offer an "inside-out" approach to leadership that creates a different set of possibilities for how they approach equity work.

Traditional leadership

Controlled approach

(top-down)



See: Order and control

Engage: Hierarchical management

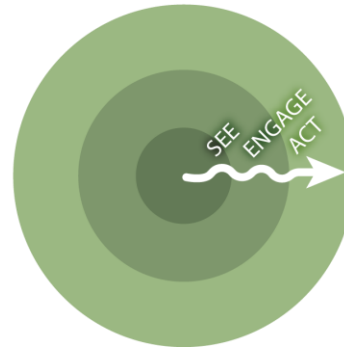
Act: Directing strategy and plans

Traditional leadership is appropriate when the problems are manageable and the solutions can be known. It is the dominant culture default leadership approach. This approach emphasizes *performance*.

Equity leadership

Emergent approach

(inside out)



See (anew): How we perceive the world (window) and practice self-awareness (mirror).

Engage (anew): How we “show up” and engage relationally; how we listen, build relationships, and create strong “containers” for complex work.

Act (anew): How we design, decide, implement, learn; how we influence direction, bring focus to action, engage in safe-to-fail experiments.

Equity leadership is needed when problems are complex and messy and solutions must be developed through experimentation and learning. This approach runs counter to our deeply entrained notions of what good leadership is. This approach emphasizes *learning*.

In addition, the Framework is grounded in three disciplines - **Equity, Complexity & Design** - each of which represents theory, knowledge, and approaches to practice. Understanding each of these, and their interrelationships, enables leaders to frame their challenges and focus their activities appropriately.

- **Equity:** developing equity consciousness (internal and external awareness of systemic oppression and its effects) and commitment (the will to take up equity challenges).
- **Complexity:** understanding the nature of complex systems, distinguishing between complex versus simple or complicated problems, and developing corresponding leadership approaches that match the actual complexity of equity challenges.
- **Liberatory Design:** because inequity is the product of past designs, we can redesign our systems and practices for equity. We can focus on concrete equity challenges using the approach



of Liberatory Design, which shifts traditional power dynamics related to decision-making and brings forth deeper innovation and agency amidst institutionalized norms and structures.

Liberatory Design is an approach to addressing complex equity challenges. It's a process and a practice to:

1. Create designs that help liberate and increase opportunity for those most impacted by oppression.
2. Transform power by shifting the relationships between those who hold power and those impacted by these designs.
3. Generate liberatory learning and increased agency for those

The following report provides a set of recommendations, for the Council to incorporate into their ongoing practice in order to truly live into their racial equity aspirations. All recommendations are grounded in the *Leading for Equity™ Framework* and Liberatory Design.

Recommendations

1. Invest in building Council-member capacity to lead for racial equity.

While Council members voted unanimously to adopt the equity statement and definition centering racial equity, members do not share a common language or analysis of racism. In order to authentically engage in their work, Council members cannot solely rely on their own BIPOC members or community partners, students, and families to provide a much-needed racial equity analysis. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure current Council members receive ongoing professional development, information about important equity conferences, articles and books that will support their continued learning. Professional development should also be offered as part of the onboarding process for new Council members. Training content should support Council members in developing a shared racial equity analysis, common language, and strategies for interrupting implicit bias and racial microaggressions.

It is also important to note that incorporating professional development will in fact, push the limits of the current Council meeting schedule and structure. Every effort should be made to hold extended meetings, or more frequent meetings in order to support their growth and development. Racial equity work takes time and rightfully challenges leaders to toss the traditional ways and structures that maintain the status quo in favor of structures that allow for growth, meaning-making and relationship building in service of the work.

2. Engage in authentic, continuous relationship building and collaboration with Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status, in service of co-creating new and equitable policies, practices, and processes informed by those who have been most impacted.

As stated in the WSAC Equity Statement, long-term relationship-building and partnership is an integral to statewide success in ending racial disparity in post-secondary attainment rates. To that end, here are the following recommendations:

1). Engage the Council in a collective reflection and discussion to unpack and articulate the importance of building relationships with Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status.

Though some Council members have expressed the importance of building relationships with stakeholders across the state, the Council has not discussed this recommendation as a whole. As a result, there is a lack of clarity amongst the Council as to how to proceed. Therefore, before acting on this goal, Council

members should take the time to collectively answer a few important and fundamental questions:

1. Why do we as a Council want to build relationships with Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status? What do we hope to achieve?
2. What value do we bring to Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status?
3. How will the Council ensure their work is responsive to the needs of Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status and result in equitable postsecondary outcomes for students of color?

Once the Council has completed this conversation, pathways for relationship building may become more apparent. The following are suggestions for potential action:

2). Consult with Other State Leaders.

The Council may consider contacting other states who have successfully engaged in this work. According to [“The Equitable Outcomes Imperative: Strategies for Advancing Racial Equity in Post-Secondary Attainment,”](#) (Education Strategy Group, 2021) several states such as Oregon, Texas, and Colorado are creating statewide stakeholder groups, especially with students, to inform, advance and lead their racial equity work.

3). Create New Pathways to Inform Relationship Building and Collaboration.

One approach to building relationships and models for collaboration, is to create opportunities for students and families who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status, to share how they would like to engage with the Council. This approach is grounded in the Equity Leadership, Emergent Approach and Liberatory Design by taking the Council outside of their traditional hierarchical role of creating the design, and transferring the power to those who are most often impacted by the design.

In this approach, the Council, WSAC staff and the Equity Workgroup would generate a list of stakeholders who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status to attend listening



sessions. The listening sessions would provide opportunities for stakeholders to share how they would like to engage with the Council.

Once the list is completed, the Equity Workgroup members and/or WSAC staff would hold listening sessions to: 1). Share information about the Council's role and purpose. 2). Share a brief overview of the Strategic Framework; 3). Listen to concerns and hopes as they relate to the Strategic Framework; 4). Discuss: "given concerns and hopes, how would they like to engage with the Council on an ongoing basis?" 5). Equity Workgroup would compile their responses and then create a plan of engagement based on feedback received from this process.

3. Diversify Council meeting locations.

While Council meetings will continue to be conducted virtually for the foreseeable future, diversifying Council meeting locations should be considered once in-person meetings can resume. In doing so, the Council would meet with students, families, and community partners in their own communities, rather than forcing them to come to the Council. This shift in power dynamics is integral to the Council's racial equity commitments.

4. Integrate use of the WSAC Equity Lens Tool or the [Governing for Racial Equity Toolkit \(GARE\)](#) into the Council's work.

In order to ensure the Council's work is aligned to the equity statement, members would benefit from using a racial equity analysis tool to develop and implement the Strategic Action Plan. Such a tool can reveal the unintended impacts of a strategy and/or legislative priority (for example) to students, families, and communities who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, regardless of immigration status. In doing so, the Council can mitigate impacts prior to implementation.

The Council can review both the WSAC Equity Lens Tool and the GARE Toolkit to decide which best aligns to their work. The benefits to using the WSAC Equity Lens Tool are 1). Creates more alignment with WSAC agency; 2). WSAC staff could train the Council to use the Tool. The benefits to using the GARE Tool are: 1). The tool was specifically designed for large-scale change at the city, county and state government level; 2). There are many examples, locally and nationally, of how the tool has been used to create change.

Conclusion

The Washington State Achievement Council has a clear North Star. With the new equity statement and definition to guide the implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Council is on a new course to end racial disparity in post-secondary attainment rates while increasing post-secondary attainment rates to 70%. In order to meet this important and lofty goal, the Council will need to strengthen their individual and collective capacity to lead for racial equity. This commitment and action will provide the strong foundation they need to accomplish their goal. Additionally, the Council will need to thoroughly examine, discuss, and articulate their purpose and plan to build relationships and collaborate with Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students, regardless of immigration status. In doing so, the Council will be well poised to influence the long overdue change Washington State students and communities so desperately deserve.