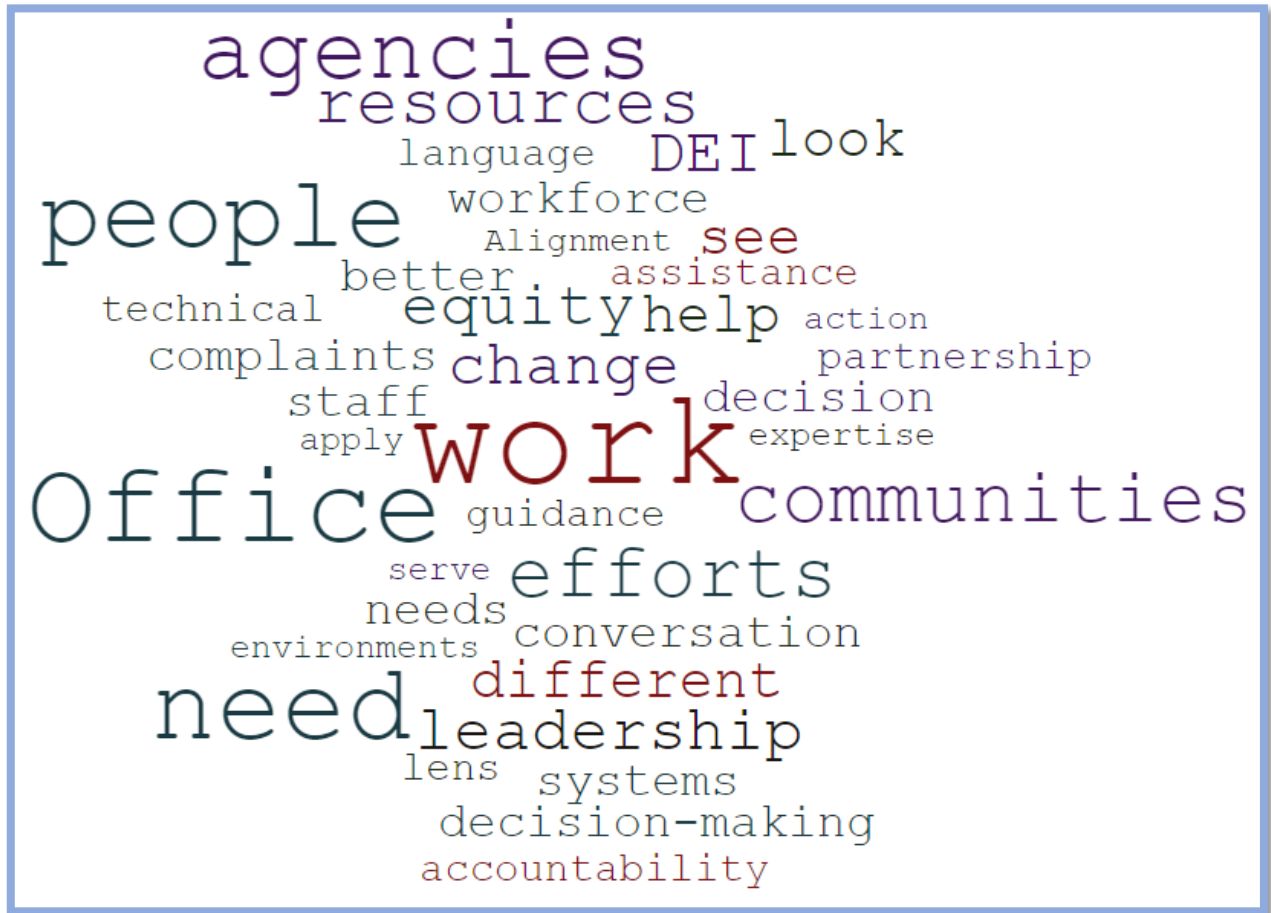


APRIL 23, 2020



FOCUS GROUP REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE EQUITY OFFICE TASK FORCE

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STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Equity Office Task Force is sincerely grateful toward the agency staff who participated in these focus groups. Thank you for volunteering your time to share individual perspectives and a vision for the Washington State Office of Equity. For all agency staff working to build a more equitable and inclusive government, we admire and appreciate your dedication and resolve.

Please note the recommendations in this report do not originate with and have not been endorsed by the Task Force. Quotes in this report have been paraphrased and are intended to accurately reflect the meaning of individual comments.

Introduction

The Equity Office Task Force was created in 2019 through [a proviso](#) in Washington State's operating budget. It is tasked with developing a proposal for the creation of a WA State Office of Equity. The Office of Equity is intended to promote access to equitable opportunities and resources that reduce disparities, including racial and ethnic disparities, and improve outcomes statewide across sectors of government.

The Task Force has been receiving public comments and holding [monthly public meetings](#) since August 2019. Members have been intentional in creating opportunities to listen, learn, and seek input from communities to guide their work.

To complement these efforts, Task Force staff conducted a focus group session on **March 2, 2020** to gather input and feedback from state agency staff. Specifically, Task Force staff wanted to understand:

- ▶ What vision do agency staff have for the Office of Equity? What could the Office do for our state, our government, and our communities?
- ▶ What should the Office of Equity's roles and responsibilities be, especially around providing support to agencies and staff?
- ▶ What accountability mechanisms and strategies do staff suggest for the Office of Equity?
- ▶ What concerns or cautions do agency staff have? What challenges do they foresee?

This report outlines the focus group process, some key findings, and recommendations synthesized from focus group conversations. **Figure 2** is a summary of recommendations for the Office of Equity's roles and responsibilities, especially as they relate to supporting agencies and agency staff.

Process & Methodology

Task Force staff assembled a group of **30 focus group participants**. With the exception of one participant¹, all participants were state agency employees. There was a balanced mix of agency sizes, sectors, and staff roles. These roles included positions in Human Resources, administration, programs, and service delivery. Facilitators asked participants to read the [Task Force's preliminary report](#) before attending the focus group session.

We sought agency staff with experience in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts at their respective agency. Since the Office of Equity will likely focus much of its work on providing guidance and technical assistance to agencies, we hoped to get insight on how the Office could work with agency staff and leadership day-to-day, including any challenges and barriers that would be helpful to identify in advance. We used the distribution lists for the Interagency Equity Workgroup and the WA State DEI Council to ask for volunteers. Some individuals forwarded this message to others in state government, so there may have been focus group participants from outside of these two interagency workgroups.

¹ One participant was from the Health Benefit Exchange (HBE), which is separate and distinct from the state and not considered a state agency. However, this person elected to participate to consider how the HBE can support and harmonize with statewide DEI efforts.

Participants were divided into two groups, and sessions were held concurrently in adjoining rooms. LinhPhung Huynh facilitated the conversation for Group A, which had 17 participants. Christy Curwick-Hoff facilitated the conversation for Group B, which had 13 participants. Facilitators used the same general questions, and both sessions were approximately 3 hours.

Facilitators asked participants to draw on their full experience as DEI practitioners and to speak from their individual perspective, not their agency perspective. Facilitators explained that the Task Force is working on a final proposal, and input from the focus groups would inform the Task Force’s recommendations.

FIGURE 1. Table of Participating Staff and Their Agencies

Agency Title	Acronym	Employee Headcount ²	Focus Group Participants
Office of Civil Legal Aid	OCLA	4	1
Professional Educator Standards Board	PESB	20*	1
Office of Minority and Women's Business Enterprises	OMWBE	22	1
Traffic Safety Commission	WTSC	25	1
Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals	BIIA	154	1
Office of Administrative Hearings	OAH	185	1
State Board for Community & Technical Colleges	SBCTC	222**	1
WA Health Benefit Exchange (not a state agency)		269***	1
Department of Commerce	COMM	351	1
Office of Financial Management	OFM	430	3
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	OSPI	473	1
Department of Enterprise Services	DES	760	1
Department of Revenue	DOR	1,229	1
Department of Licensing	DOL	1,360	2
Health Care Authority	HCA	1,367	3
Department of Health	DOH	1,892	1
Labor and Industries	LNI	3,059	2
Department of Children, Youth, and Families	DCYF	4,541	2
Department of Transportation	WSDOT	7,163	1
Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration	DSHS ESA	16,157****	3
Department of Social and Health Services, Aging and Long-Term Support Administration	DSHS ALTSA	16,157****	1
TOTALS: 20 agencies / 30 individual participants			
* A count of staff listed in the staff directory. Does not include board members. < https://www.pesb.wa.gov/about-us/contact-us >			

² Headcount of general government employees, both permanent and non-permanent, as of 12/31/2019. WA State Office of Financial Management. (2019). *Number of Employees and Headcount Trends*. <https://www.ofm.wa.gov/state-human-resources/workforce-data-planning/workforce-data-trends/workforce/number-employees-and-headcount-trends>.

FIGURE 1. Table of Participating Staff and Their Agencies

**	A count of staff listed in the staff directory. Does not include board members or staff at individual community and technical colleges. < https://www.sbctc.edu/about/agency/sbctc-staff-directory.aspx >
***	The Exchange is separate and distinct from the state and not considered a state agency. Employee and contractor count for June 2019, including 126.5 FTE staff and 142.5 contractors. Information from the Health Benefit Exchange's 2020 Annual Legislative Report: https://www.wahbexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HBE_LEG_200101_Annual_Legislative-Report.pdf
****	Aggregate number for DSHS, including all divisions and field staff.

Vision for the Office of Equity

Facilitators asked participants to reflect on the following question and share with the group: **“What could an Office of Equity do for the state? What’s your hope?”** Clear themes emerged from the responses, and they are included below.

“Shine a spotlight on hope, commitment, and where things aren’t going so well. Ultimately, the goal is for all this work to be integrated. Ultimately, we’re all doing this and leaders are leading in the way they need to lead and resources are aligned in the way they need to be aligned. The system will be deconstructed and replaced with a new one. There will be enough successes, so momentum keeps continuing to be attached to it...”

Systems Change: Participants hoped the Office of Equity can be a catalyst for change at the policy and systems level. The Office would promote the recognition that systems work as intended, and we need to dismantle and rebuild the current one. Many participants said that mentorship and training for agency leaders would be critical in this work, especially around recognizing white privilege and white culture, since leaders cannot dismantle structures they cannot see.

“The Office can provide technical assistance on how to wrestle with doing the business we have to do today and also completely transform a system that has inequities baked into it, instead of putting Band-Aids on it.”

Inclusion and Belonging: Participants expressed the need for safe and inclusive environments, which ensures all employees can go to work and know it is a safe space. Participants shared their hope that the Office of Equity can create systems centered on belonging, interconnectedness, and abundance. One participant said they hoped the Office could demonstrate to agencies what it looks like to embody and practice healing-centered approaches that recognize and address racialized trauma. Another participant said they hope the State of Washington will become the employer of choice for people of color.

“Turn systems that have been used against marginalized communities to protect those communities. Repurpose the system.”

Systems Alignment: Participants expressed the need for alignment in definitions, policies, and practices to facilitate interagency collaboration and systemic change. The Office of Equity could lead efforts in: standardizing the definition of ‘equity’ to help guide enterprise work; creating standards for data collection and sharing; and harmonizing requirements across DEI-related executive orders, laws, policies, and goals.

“My big dream is to see efforts aligned across all agencies. My agency wants to build a more diverse workforce, and we can’t do it by ourselves. I see partner agencies at this table who need to be in the same conversation. How do we identify what we need and each agency’s part in the project?”

Support for Agencies: Participants emphasized the importance of lifting up agencies and providing the support they need. The Office of Equity must recognize that each agency has a different starting point and must be willing to meet agencies where they are. Participants envision the Office of Equity as a place where staff can access and share resources. Agency staff want to be able to find tools and best practices in a centralized place that is updated frequently as research and practices evolve. These cannot be ‘cut and paste’ tools—the Office of Equity should provide support to agencies as they learn to apply tools to their own contexts.

Benefit to Communities: Participants expressed hope that the Office of Equity and agencies’ work around DEI will be sustainable and lead to direct benefits for communities. This would lead to “healthy, thriving, and self-sufficient communities.” Ideally, the Office of Equity would inform conversations at the highest levels of government and take part in decisions that affect communities across the state.

“Access for all Washingtonians to services. Agencies need to be safe places, so all people, regardless of immigration status, feel safe to access services.”

How can the Office of Equity Support agency staff?

Facilitators shared that legislation to create the WA State Office of Equity ([E2SHB 1783](#)) was still going through the legislative process.³ Additionally, if an Office of Equity is created, its operating budget may be very limited in the first year. Facilitators asked participants to set these limitations aside and brainstorm the full range of support they would like from the Office of Equity, so the Task Force could understand their vision for a fully-functional and effective Office. Below are key findings, followed by a synthesis of recommendations.

Key Findings: Many participants expressed the need for more interagency coordination and collaboration, so agencies can work together to eliminate disparities and promote better outcomes. Participants said it is difficult to identify their counterparts (i.e. DEI practitioners) at other agencies and keep track of other agencies' efforts.

Agencies may be duplicating efforts as they each develop tools and frameworks. Many participants expressed the need for a centralized place in government (i.e. repository) where they can access DEI-related tools and resources. The Office of Equity should not 'reinvent the wheel.' Instead, it should vet resources to ensure only those that have been shown to be effective are shared across agencies. One participant said there are many people offering consultation services, but there is a huge range in quality. It would be helpful for the Office of Equity to organize and promote high quality resources, services, meetings, and events.

*"We have tons of evidence on what doesn't work.
We need more on what does work."*

Participants expressed the need for guidance and technical assistance from a central entity. They would like the Office of Equity to offer consultation to staff as they apply general standards to their unique agency context.

As agency staff implement DEI-related standards and requirements, they would like a central space to gather, share work, and find support. Participants said it is important to have frequent and intentional meetings, so the same information is shared with everyone doing the same type of work.

³ On April 3, 2020, Governor Jay Inslee signed E2SHB 1783 into law with a partial veto of the bill. Access the full text here: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1783&Year=2019&Initiative=False>

FIGURE 2. Summary Table – Focus Group Recommendations on Roles and Responsibilities for the WA State Office of Equity

These recommendations were created through a synthesis of participant comments.

Advocacy:

- ▶ Advocate for resources.
- ▶ Act as the statewide voice for agency employees on equity issues.

Business Resource Groups:

- ▶ Provide support to the BRGs by advocating for resources to build/create them.
- ▶ Elevate issues important to BRGs, create policies, and coordinate implementation.
- ▶ Work as a funding source to provide resources to BRGs, state commissions, etc.

Interagency Coordination and Collaboration:

- ▶ Bridge DEI efforts across state government.
- ▶ Cultivate relationships across agencies, organizations, local government, etc.
- ▶ Facilitate interagency collaboration to address systemic inequities.
- ▶ Create an inventory of DEI efforts.
- ▶ Hold monthly/quarterly meetings with DEI Liaisons.
- ▶ Foster a community of practice.
- ▶ Promote/provide guidance on community engagement.

Guidance, Technical Assistance, and Resources:

- ▶ Serve as a clearinghouse.
- ▶ Maintain a website repository of useful practices, policies, and resources.
- ▶ Help all agency staff apply an equity lens to their work.
- ▶ Provide consultation on DEI issues in real time and within an agency's context.
- ▶ Advocate for financial resources.

Setting Expectations and Measuring Progress:

- ▶ Promote a common language to support DEI-related efforts.
- ▶ Help standardize training and policies that promote a safe and inclusive workplace.
- ▶ Ensure practices in DEI are applied to the full employment life cycle.
- ▶ Develop guidelines on implementing an equity lens in the hiring process.
- ▶ Help agencies incorporate learning and understanding of cultural competency and DEI issues in their Human Resources programs.
- ▶ Require agencies to apply an equity lens.
- ▶ Introduce an equity lens in statewide funding processes.
- ▶ Help agency leadership understand the business case for DEI work.
- ▶ Require that DEI Liaisons report directly to the agency head.
- ▶ Provide executive leadership with opportunities for education and mentorship.
- ▶ Set expectations for agency leadership. Consider the following strategies:
 - Require mandatory training for executive leadership.
 - Measure agency directors' performance with a scorecard.
- ▶ Work with agencies to create performance measures and continually revisit them.
- ▶ Assess agency performance and help identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- ▶ Maintain a public dashboard with a scorecard for the state and for each agency.

Advocacy:

- ▶ **Advocate for resources.** The Office should advocate the importance of work in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to ensure efforts are sustainable and the work is prioritized in government and within agencies. The Office should help agencies create a business case for staffing DEI work and demonstrate to the Governor and the Legislature that resources are instrumental in this work. The Office of Equity should have a legislative liaison who can make the case for funded legislation and caution against unfunded mandates.
- ▶ **Act as the statewide voice for agency employees on equity issues.** Employees often do not feel safe or welcome to voice questions and ideas internally, so the Office of Equity can serve as a place where employees can go to express concerns that do not amount to a formal complaint. As one participant put it, “It’s not always safe to bark up the chain.”

FIGURE 3. Support for Business Resource Groups (BRGs)

The statewide business resource groups (BRGs) are employee-led groups comprised of employees and their allies who share a common interest or characteristic. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) provides staff support, but these groups are unfunded. BRGs have advocated for increased representation in workforce and leadership positions, assisted agencies in recruitment and retention efforts, and informed state strategies and policies for a safe and inclusive workplace. On an *ad hoc* basis, BRGs provide training to state agencies.

Current BRGs include:

- Blacks United in Leadership and Diversity (BUILD)
- Veterans Employee Resource Group (VERG)
- Rainbow Alliance and Inclusion Network (RAIN)
- Latino Leadership Network (LLN)
- Disability Inclusion Network (DIN)
- Washington Immigrant Network (WIN)

Focus group participants said BRGs have done much work, including policy advocacy, but they lack visibility and the ‘teeth’ needed to ensure their recommendations are implemented. Participants suggested the following actions for the Office of Equity:

- ▶ **Provide support to the BRGs by advocating for resources to build/create these employee-led groups.** Support existing groups and efforts to create new resource groups. For example, it would benefit the state to create a support group for multilingual employees and advocate for more bilingual staff positions in agencies.
- ▶ **Help elevate issues, create policies to address statewide issues, and coordinate implementation of these policies.** As the Office works with leadership, including the Governor, it should elevate the issues and policy changes that matter to BRGs.
- ▶ **Work as a funding source to provide resources to BRGs, state commissions, OFM, and the Department of Enterprise Services (DES).**

Interagency Coordination and Collaboration:

- ▶ **Bridge DEI efforts across state government.** The Office of Equity should serve as the hub that unites and aligns DEI work happening across programs and agencies. There are multiple advantages to serving in this central, coordinating role. First, the Office has the opportunity to research and share best practices and tools that have been effective in communities. Agency staff would connect with the Office when they want to know if something has been tried before (whether successfully or not) and what resources already exist for an issue or project. Second, the Office could promote consistency and alignment between executive orders, laws, and goals related to DEI. It can contribute to discussions that affect practices at all agencies (e.g. around the tension between 'time to fill/hire' for a position and the need to promote diversity in the candidate pool).
- ▶ **Cultivate relationships across agencies, organizations, local government, etc.** The Office should work at many levels within an agency, engaging leadership and staff. It should provide resources (tools, training, etc.) and help agencies identify their blind spots, their own resources, and their needs. As the Office of Equity builds relationships across agencies and understands each agency's needs, it can identify opportunities for agencies to share resources, which could potentially include staff time and effort.

“Whoever does the work, does the learning. Agencies must do this work in community with other agencies. The Office of Equity should help agencies help themselves.”

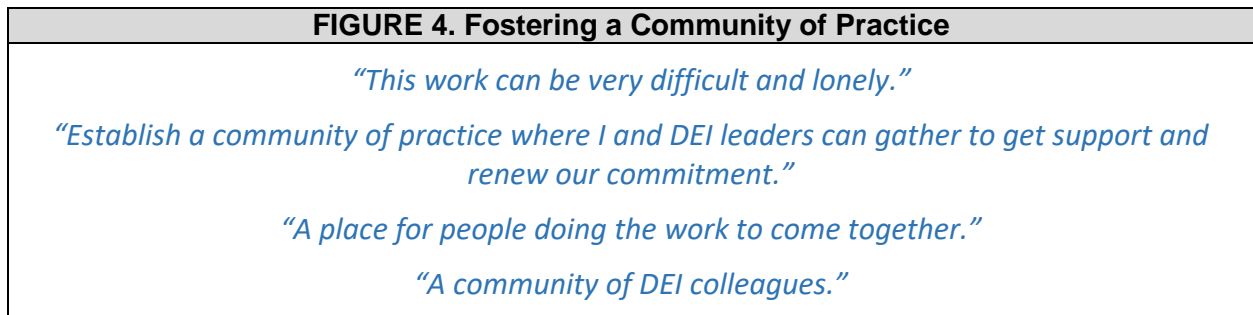
- ▶ **Facilitate interagency collaboration to address systemic inequities.** An individual agency cannot tackle population-based disparities and disproportionalities, such as income and wealth disparities, on its own. The Office of Equity should build linkages across agencies as they work on addressing social determinants of health. Support could be in the form of policy guidance and establishing standards for data collection and sharing. The Office should also provide education on the interconnectedness of systems, so agency leadership and staff can understand why inequities exist and dedicate resources in an effective way to move toward better outcomes.

“Within our systems and structures, we are harming ourselves over and over again. We’re not looking at how we’re perpetuating problems.”

- ▶ **Create an inventory of DEI efforts.** This inventory provides the 'big picture' view of DEI efforts across state government, and can show how certain changes have the power to impact multiple systems. The Office of Equity should use this inventory to understand what structures and efforts already exist and build or modify from there. Agency staff would benefit from this inventory, because they could see where they fit into the big picture and easily identify their counterparts at other agencies. The Office of Equity could use this inventory to keep track of where DEI coordination lives within each agency.

“In attempts to bring down barriers in some agencies, it causes barriers in others because we weren’t prepared to think about this. This is problematic for communities. The Office of Equity could help us be strategic at all agencies to meet community where it is.”

- ▶ **Hold monthly/quarterly meetings with DEI Liaisons.** Agency staff could use this platform to support system alignment, build interagency relationships, and share their work and their agency’s legislative agenda. These meetings should be frequent and intentional, so agency staff can get the same information in one place.
- ▶ **Foster a community of practice.** The Office of Equity should build a community of DEI practitioners and provide a central place where they can gather to find safety and emotional support. Agency staff want a place to go to when they hit resistance and roadblocks in their agency. The community of practice would be a place to find materials, training, and other resources for leading cultural change. The Office should create a toolkit for those who want to mobilize within the system in order to change the system.



- ▶ **Promote/provide guidance on community engagement.** The Office should guide agencies toward the point of co-design and co-creation with communities, so communities have a prominent role in making the decisions that affect them. The Office of Equity can support efforts to strengthen the feedback loop between government and communities.

“We don’t want to fatigue communities of color. A helpful resource from the Office would be guidance on a consistent manner of reaching out to communities, so agencies don’t reach into communities separately and over and over again.”

Guidance, Technical Assistance, and Resources:

- ▶ **Serve as a clearinghouse.** The Office of Equity should conduct research and survey agencies to uncover best practices and useful tools. The Office can also identify strategies that have been tried and failed, sharing ‘lessons learned’ and cautions from these cases. Through the Office, agencies would be able to access model policies, data collection strategies, and training modules. In particular, participants mentioned the need for resources related to language access, contracts, and racial equity tools.

“The office can empower agencies to increase their capabilities and capacity. There is a lot happening at agencies—agencies have to do the best they can and staff often have to look for solutions in different ways. Currently, this is not the best way to use agencies’ resources.”

- ▶ **Maintain a website repository of useful resources.** The Office should create a centralized website with links to tools, calendars of events (e.g. meetings for the DEI Council, BRGs), and other resources. The Office can also link to agency websites that highlight agencies’ DEI efforts, so staff can easily see what their counterparts are working on at other agencies and connect for collaboration and learning. On this central website, the Office could provide sample policy language and contracts, highlight successful programs, and share sample communication such as flyers and email messages.

“We created a hiring toolkit and would love to share it with others. How can we share and not have to recreate everything from scratch?”

- ▶ **Help all agency staff apply an equity lens to their work.** The Office should make a ‘WA State Equity Toolkit’ available to every state employee, including new employees. The Office should create a mapping tool that every employee can use to understand equity issues that exist in their work and within their agency. When individuals know where to look, they can recognize blind spots. Staff would also benefit from training related to implementing an equity lens in common processes, such as funding requests and bill analyses.

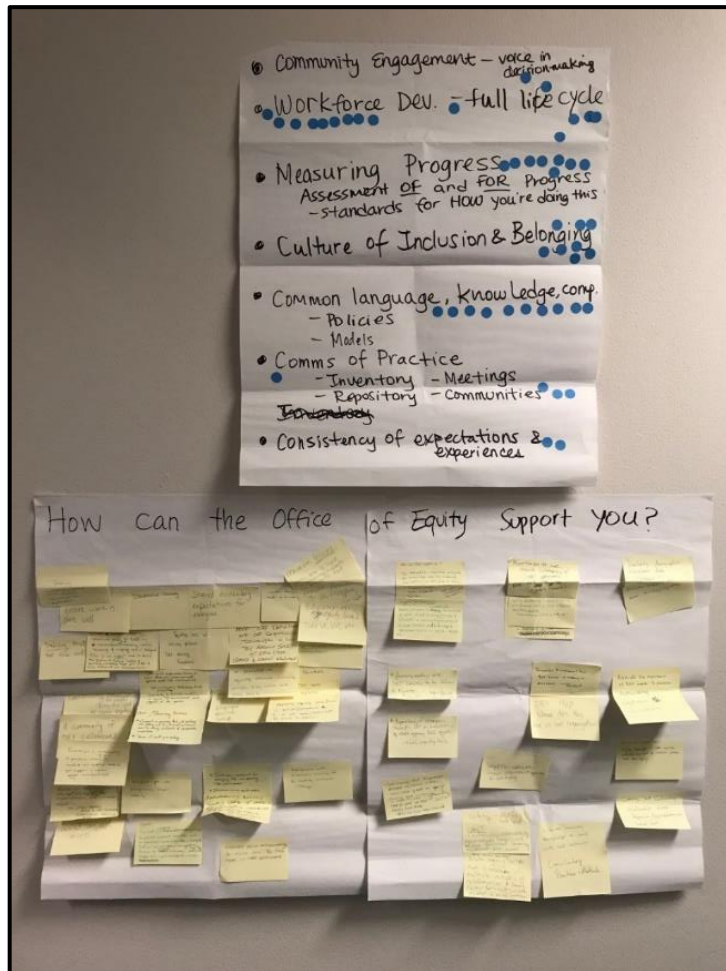
“People can get DEI on a personal level, but they may not know how to apply it to their work. Make things less abstract and provide more concrete resources.”

- ▶ **Provide consultation on DEI issues in real time and within an agency’s context.** The Office of Equity should provide *timely* guidance to agency staff or connect them with resources when staff need to interpret and apply laws and policies. The Office could coordinate efforts that help staff become familiar with laws, policies, directives, and executive orders. The Office should take an agency’s unique situation and scope into account when helping staff incorporate strategies and standards (e.g. data disaggregation).

- ▶ **Advocate for financial resources.** The Office of Equity should help agencies make the case for increased resources to implement DEI efforts, including the need for a dedicated staff position who can focus on these efforts. The Office should provide adequate support to small agencies. It could explore the possibility of creating state grants and/or a source of pooled funding to assist small and under-resourced agencies implement DEI initiatives. As the Office of Equity builds relationships across agencies and understands each agency's needs, it can identify opportunities for agencies to share resources, which could potentially include staff time and effort.

“Small agencies do not have dedicated staff positions for DEI work. They need a resource to look to. Help the small agencies in particular to incorporate those practices.”

FIGURE 5. Focus Group Materials



Setting Expectations & Measuring Progress

Key Findings: Throughout the session, many participants underscored the importance of promoting consistency across the enterprise, setting expectations for agencies and leaders, and measuring progress. Consistency at the enterprise level reinforces the work done by individual employees. Below is a synthesis of recommendations.

Common Language, Knowledge, and Competencies:

- ▶ **Promote a common language to support DEI-related efforts.** The Office of Equity should adopt the glossary of DEI-related terms and the employee competencies that agency subject matter experts developed in 2019 in partnership with OFM and DES.

“It’s difficult to convince people of the need when we’re not speaking the same language.”

Additionally, the Office of Equity should provide common language to address interpersonal issues in the work place. It could promote conciliatory practices, so issues are addressed in constructive ways and not skipped over.

“When someone says something offensive at a meeting and they don’t even know, is there a way to provide common language to deal with this behavior? We need to do something so people can talk it out.”

- ▶ **Help standardize employee training and policies that promote a safe and inclusive workplace.** Training should not be ‘one and done.’ In partnership with DES, the Office should develop training for agency staff that is consistent and includes follow-up, so concepts and skills are reinforced over time. The Office should also promote policies and practices that agencies can use to address staff concerns that do not reach the threshold of a complaint.

Workforce Development – the ‘Full Life Cycle’:

- ▶ **Ensure practices in DEI are applied to the full employment life cycle.** This cycle includes recruitment, hiring, onboarding, training, retention, and ongoing career development. Agency staff would benefit from having common strategies, practices, guidance, and expectations for all stages. In recruitment and hiring, the Office of Equity can assist agencies in their outreach to diverse populations, and review draft job postings to ensure language is appropriate and welcoming. The Office should ensure that agencies are providing intentional onboarding and career development support for staff of color.

- ▶ **Develop guidelines on implementing an equity lens in the hiring process.** Agency staff should apply these guidelines when assembling a panel, interviewing candidates, giving consideration to lived experience, and making efforts to increase community representation.

“There is an urgent need to build the pipeline of future leaders and decision makers that get DEI and fully represent our communities.”

- ▶ **Help agencies incorporate learning and understanding of cultural competency and DEI issues in their Human Resources programs.** HR staff could use this knowledge to identify systemic, organizational, team, and personal “-isms” and barriers. HR staff would be encouraged to navigate issues in a more human-centered approach, while creating cultures that are safe for all staff to address potential issues/discomfort at the lowest level possible. The time, energy, and resources spent involved in the intake, investigation, and discipline processes could then be reduced, creating a much more positive and healthy workplace culture.

“Typically, Human Resources programs/teams are driven to represent agencies/management and do not necessarily require cultural competence or DEI knowledge and understanding for their staff members. Much of the work in HR is driven towards employee performance (or lack thereof) and behavioral issues. This practice leads HR staff to be really good at helping supervisors manage issues, but not become culturally competent or knowledgeable in the process.”

Applying an Equity Lens to Decision Making and Service Delivery:

- ▶ **Require that agencies apply an equity lens.** The Office should require and help agencies apply an equity lens when developing policies, procedures, and budgets. Agency staff should be required to apply an equity lens in their own work, including in their services to the public.
- ▶ **Introduce an equity lens in statewide funding processes.** Currently, there is no requirement for agencies to include a DEI component in the funding decision packages they submit to OFM. The Office of Equity should take the lead in advocating for changes to these types of decision making processes. For example, agencies should be required to conduct an equity impact assessment with every funding decision package.

“It should be standard practice to implement a DEI lens. How can we apply this lens even before a project starts? It would be great to have an office to consult.”

Expectations and Support for Leadership:

- ▶ **Establish relationships with agency leadership and help them understand the business case for DEI work.** The Office of Equity should help leaders understand changes will not happen overnight, but they are urgently needed. The Office of Equity can show there is a need to resource staff positions in each agency, so staff have capacity to implement effective strategies. The Office should lead with messages of “We can help you do your work better” and “We can help you better serve your communities.”

“What is the environment we’re creating for the changes we’d like to see? We’re trying to interrupt leaders from doing business as usual. What is the piece that won’t be met with so much resistance? Encourage them to think about how these [DEI] efforts will help them achieve what they want to achieve. Work with agencies to figure out the barriers to change.”

- ▶ **Require DEI Liaisons to report directly to the agency head.** This requirement would be similar to the requirement for agency tribal liaisons, as stated in [RCW 43.376.020](#) (Government-to-government relationships—state agency duties).
- ▶ **Give executive leadership opportunities for education and mentorship.** In partnership with OFM and DES, the Office of Equity should support leaders’ development and capacity. The Office should create a learning cohort for agency leadership, so they can receive DEI training and support.
- ▶ **Set strong expectations for agency leadership.** Consider the following:
 - **Require mandatory training for executive leadership.** Several participants said it should be a requirement for all executive leaders to successfully complete the Certified Diversity Executive (CDE) program as a condition for employment.
 - **Measure agency directors’ performance and make this process transparent through a scorecard.** This is similar to the idea of creating agency-specific measures for performance and effectiveness. These measures could look different for each agency head, and the scorecard can help the Office of Equity identify skills and training needs.

Measuring Progress:

- ▶ **Work with agencies to create performance measures and continually revisit them.** These measures should encompass processes, outcomes, and culture change. Key performance indicators could include: the number of certified DEI professionals employed at an agency; the number of employees who have fulfilled their DEI training; an ‘inclusion index’ to measure how safe and inclusive an environment is; and information gained through the employee engagement survey that OFM administers.

“We have different functions, so equity might not be the same for every agency. One size does not fit all.”

- ▶ **Assess each agency’s performance and help identify strengths and areas for improvement.** There was a range of ideas on how the Office could implement agency assessments. One participant said the Office should provide voluntary audits upon agency request. Another participant suggested implementing a ‘secret shopper’ practice, so the Office of Equity could provide feedback on service quality and compliance.
- ▶ **Maintain a public dashboard with a scorecard for the state and for each agency.** A dashboard promotes transparency and gives a “grade” for DEI competency and implementation. The Office of Equity should establish a baseline and measure progress relative to that baseline. The Office should ensure that the measures and other information on the dashboard are meaningful to communities. In addition to showing each agency’s performance, the dashboard should show the ‘state of the state,’ meaning the State of Washington’s progress in shifting culture, practices, policies, and outcomes.

“Words versus actions. Uphold all agencies to the action level, not words.”

Accountability

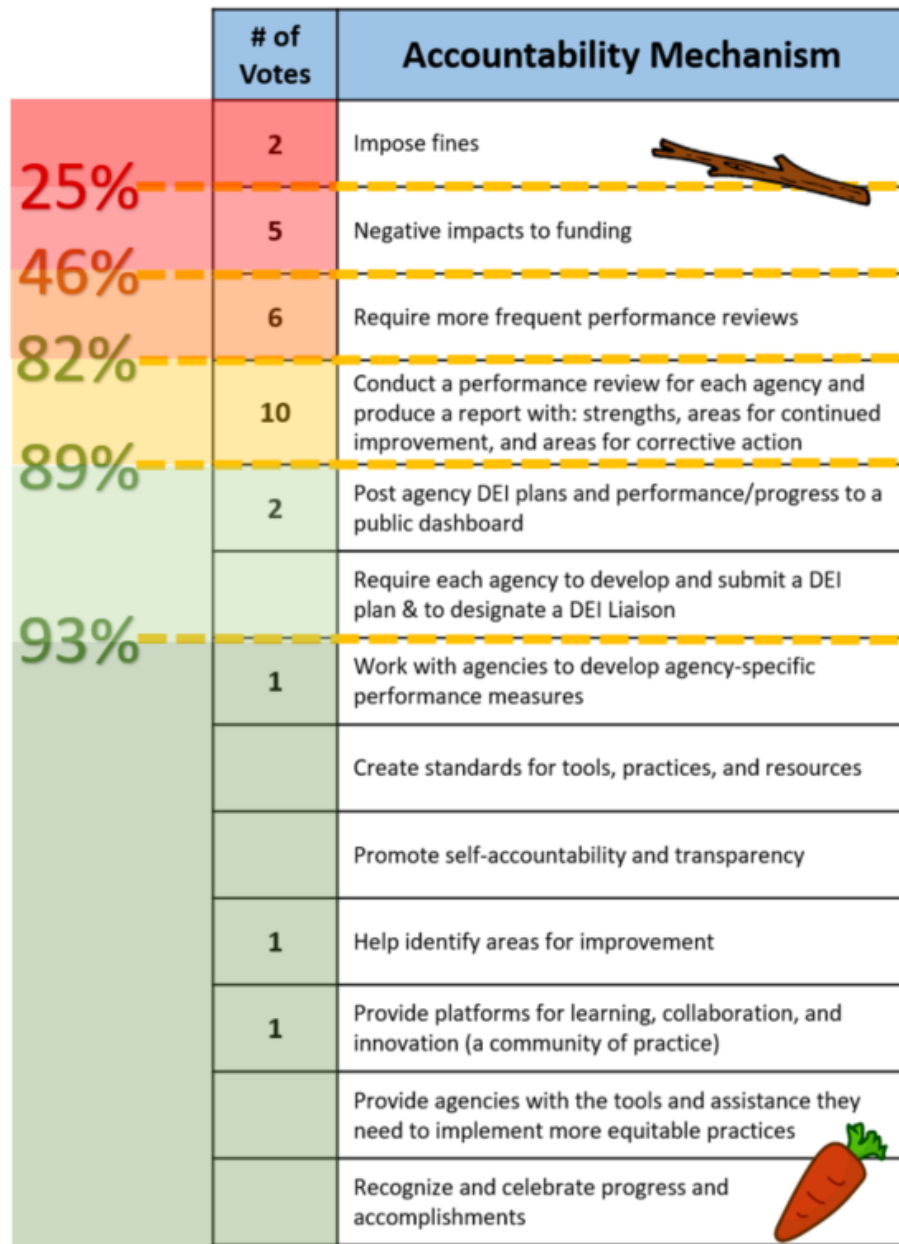
To frame the conversation on accountability, facilitators shared Task Force members’ comments from recent public meetings:

- The Task Force recognizes that the Office of Equity has a unique opportunity and responsibility to hold agencies accountable for implementation of DEI efforts.
- Although accountability is important, the Office of Equity should be a place agencies can go to for support, not a place it should run or hide from.

Facilitators asked participants to think about how the Office of Equity can best hold agencies accountable. Facilitators showed participants a list of accountability mechanisms, arranged on a scale from carrot (rewards) to stick (punishment). Facilitators asked each participant to place a red dot on the scale to indicate where they think the right balance between reward and punishment should be. In other words, participants were asked to indicate the limit/cap on what the Office of Equity should do to promote accountability. For example, a participant who placed their red dot on the item ‘*Post agency DEI plans and performance/progress to a public dashboard*’ thought all actions up to this point are acceptable or helpful, but actions past this point are not.

FIGURE 6. Accountability Mechanisms

Each participant placed a red dot on the scale to indicate where they think the right balance between reward and punishment should be. In other words, participants were asked to indicate the limit/cap on what the Office of Equity should do to promote accountability.



‘Number of votes’ indicates how many participants placed their red dot on a certain item on the scale. There were 28 votes total, because 2 participants did not vote.

Percentages indicate the portion of participants that found accountability mechanisms up to that point of the scale acceptable or helpful. For example, 82% of participants thought the Office of Equity should conduct performance reviews, but stop there. These participants also thought that all actions below ‘performance reviews’ were acceptable or helpful for promoting accountability.

Key Findings: Participants emphasized the role of accountability in promoting systems change. One participant said that power, control, and resources are at the core of systems, and the ‘let’s play nice’ approach will not work. While some participants said agencies would require additional resources to implement requirements from the Office of Equity, others said this type of work should already be a core piece of agencies’ work.

“I put my red dot on ‘Impacts to funding.’ DEI should be a core part of our agency’s business. If we don’t achieve core parts of our work, we have impacts to our funding.”

One participant pointed out that the dichotomy between carrot (rewards) and stick (punishment) is not helpful when communicating accountability to agencies and leadership. Incentives should be embedded in both process and outcomes, so performance reviews should not be seen as a punishment.

“Punishment and sticks, particularly given this subject area isn’t preferred. Resource investment and creating a culture of expectation is the way to do it.”

Below is additional advice from participants, including comments related to unintended consequences.

- **Recognizing and Celebrating Progress:** Awards can motivate some people to do better, and the Office could consider holding an annual Gala. Rewards in the form of funds and resources can help agencies expand their work, and would be especially valuable to smaller agencies.
- **Performance Reviews:** The Office of Equity should want everyone, regardless of their starting point, to engage in DEI work and receive support. The Office should portray performance reviews as a support or incentive, not as a punishment. By requiring more frequent performance reviews for certain agencies, those agencies may come to realize that they need to invest more resources, including staff time, toward DEI efforts.
- **Consequences for Non-improvement:** If agencies do not improve after receiving support from the Office of Equity, the Office could implement a remediation plan and make that plan public. The Office would only lift this plan once the agency makes sufficient improvement.
- **Impacts to Funding:** Participants brought up the unintended consequences of withholding funds from an agency due to poor performance. This consequence could be passed down to programs and services, therefore harming communities. Furthermore, it would be counterproductive for agencies that are already under-resourced. Some participants thought that tying performance to requests for *new* funding could work well.

“There will be pushback, even unwittingly, since people won’t want to give up any power. They won’t do this without accountability.”

- **Imposing Fines:** Some participants thought fines could be warranted if an agency's non-improvement or non-compliance became persistent. Others said this action would cause agencies to disengage and resist the Office of Equity's guidance and support.

“Imposing fines could motivate changes, but the Office will be seen as a watchdog and agencies will run from it. Resistance can be overt or subliminal.”

FIGURE 7. Focus Group Materials II



Additional Advice on Implementation

As participants shared their vision for the Office of Equity, many also expressed concern about unintended consequences and challenges related to implementation. Below are their concerns, along with advice on how to mitigate potential issues.

FIGURE 8. Implementation-Related Concerns	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Office may push for equity and inclusion, but misapply efforts by not centering Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and not making sure we are addressing the greatest needs.• People may expect quick fixes.• Equity work may be seen as an intellectual activity, and we may fail to create observable change.• This work may become a check box instead of a transformational opportunity.• Equity work may be assigned to one person or one department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The DEI Liaison's work may be layered on top of all their other duties, so they are unable to dedicate sufficient time and effort.• Agencies may become defensive and disengage.• The Office of Equity may be underfunded.• The Office of Equity may lack the authority to promote accountability.• By being in the Governor's Office, the Office of Equity will make recommendations and they may not be accepted.

“My concern is that we do this work the way white folks have always done it and we replicate what doesn't work: scarcity mentality, divide and conquer, failure to truly engage all marginalized voices, and defaulting to hierarchical demand and control.”

Buy-In: “If someone doesn't believe in it first hand, how do we get them to buy in?” Employees might not understand the need for DEI efforts, and they will not get behind something they do not understand. It is important to:

- Build norms within agencies to ensure consistent and adequate staffing and resources for DEI work;
- Make DEI less abstract, and help agency staff apply strategies to their own work; and
- Bring allies along on the journey—it is especially important for white men to be part of the process, so the Office must help them understand where they can start.

Race and Intersectionality: Multiple participants said the Office of Equity should include all identities and sectors in this transformational work, and hoped it would adopt an intersectional and multi-dimensional framework. One participant shared their worry that centering race in the Office of Equity's work would create a political target, and said this approach further marginalizes some groups because they will not see their issues represented. Other participants said that race and indigeneity are logical starting points, because they undergird so many inequities.

“Let’s start the revolution by leading with race. If the work is to be around getting a culture of practicing values and respect for racial equity, let’s call it that.”

Existing Efforts: The Office of Equity should strive to integrate seamlessly with existing efforts, instead of recreating or usurping work. It is important to recognize and honor past achievements, and not overlook groups that have been instrumental in statewide DEI efforts.

Sustainability and Resilience: “There will be pushback. Sometimes it will not be apparent—there could be efforts on the side and efforts to dismantle the Office over time. How can we make the Office sustainable?” The Office of Equity must have a well-resourced team that can build on existing efforts and work with other groups to illuminate and remove barriers. To weather political challenges, the Office’s structure should be the hardest thing to dismantle and should not hinge on any one component. The Office could incorporate strategies such as: rotating terms for members of the Community Advisory Board; installing rules that prevent members from being removed by a change in leadership; and setting up the public dashboard as quickly as possible, so metrics cannot be watered down. Finally, the Office of Equity should be nimble and adaptable as it builds momentum and credibility.

“The key to success is being nimble and willing to change. Updating, upgrading, and learning as we go. The roadmap won’t always work and we may need to go in different directions.”
