

A Successful First Meeting for the Office of Equity Task Force

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The Office of Equity Task Force held its kick-off meeting on Monday, August 19. The public meeting took place at The Evergreen State College (TESC) in Tacoma and began with a welcome message from TESC President, George Bridges. TVW video-recorded the meeting, and the recordings are available here: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#).

The Office of Equity Task Force is creating a proposal for a new Washington State Office of Equity and will be holding frequent meetings to accomplish this work. The Legislature established the Task Force through the state's 2019-21 operating budget. [Task Force members](#) include state legislators, representatives from state agencies, councils, and commissions, and community representatives appointed by Governor Jay Inslee.

Co-Chair Benjamin Danielson encouraged Task Force members and public attendees, "I want us to be a little afraid by what we're asking of our state. I want us to be afraid of the change that we are expecting in the world around us, because it's so audacious and so bold as to *almost* seem impossible. But because we think of it and we dream it up, and we share ideas about it and we're bold enough to say it, that it becomes possible. And then we work hard on it, it becomes probable. Then we continue to see it through because we're accountable, and it becomes a reality. I think we have to dedicate ourselves to that."

The first meeting was instrumental in establishing shared language and goals. Members reviewed the Task Force's charge, including its authority to create policy recommendations and its responsibility to engage diverse communities in ways that are authentic and impactful. Esmael Lopez, Community Engagement Coordinator for the Task Force, emphasized the role of communities, "If we're speaking about equity, we have to speak about historical trauma. We've got to speak about inequality, and we have to speak about love and compassion and courage. I'm very honored to be here, very honored to be able to learn from each and every one of you here, from the communities especially, because I believe that's where the learning happens."

With input from public attendees, the Task Force discussed concepts and vocabulary related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. They crafted [bylaws and operating principles](#) to drive their work, "committing to being comfortable with discomfort as a bold action." Members and attendees engaged in conversations around white supremacy, racism, and oppression, agreeing to center these issues in the Task Force's work.

Sally Perkins, a resident of the Hilltop neighborhood where the meeting took place, reminded members, "You are dealing with racism, you are dealing with people who don't want to be uncomfortable... My urging to you is to use real words. Don't back off from the fact that they make people uncomfortable. Invite people into their discomfort and invite them to think about why they're so uncomfortable." Perkins added, "Thank you for tackling these very tough issues in a real way. I get the overwhelming feeling that the members of the Task Force really want to make a measurable, discernible, real difference on these issues."

Co-Chair Jan Olmstead expressed her appreciation toward Task Force members and public attendees, "It's an honor to hear from people when they are being authentic regardless of their status in the world and are really bringing their true selves and their truths to the work."

The meeting adjourned with members and attendees feeling hopeful and excited. Dr. Karen A. Johnson, a Task Force member, reflected on the first meeting and the road ahead: “I’m leaving hopeful that we’ll create a future—a reality right now—that we want to live in, our parents will want to be in, for our children, our children’s children, and the generations yet born.”

The Task Force’s next public meeting is on Monday, September 16 in Clark County. We will send more information through our distribution list closer to the event. Members of the public are able to submit [written comments](#) to the Task Force ahead of each meeting. We encourage community members to attend these meetings to engage in conversations with the Task Force, share their stories, and help shape Washington’s more equitable future. As Co-Chair Danielson expects, “We’re going to have more beautiful, hard, wonderful conversations and we’re going to do something amazing for this state.”



Members of the Office of Equity Task Force

- Back row, from the left: RaShelle Davis (Office of the Governor), Representative Melanie Morgan, Maria Siguenza (Commission on Hispanic Affairs), Allison Spector (LGBTQ community representative), Karen A. Johnson (Washington State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council), Mandeep Kaundal (disability community representative).
- Middle Row, from the left: Senator Manka Dhingra, Michelle Gonzalez (Washington State Women’s Commission), Toshiko Hasegawa (Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs), Mystique Hurtado (Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs).
- Front row, from the left: Benjamin Danielson (Task Force co-chair), Jan Olmstead (Task Force co-chair).
- Not pictured: Craig Bill (Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs), Lisa van der Lugt (Office of Minority and Women’s Business Enterprises), Representative Jeremie Dufault, Ed Prince (Commission on African American Affairs).