



Snohomish County

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Assessment

NOVEMBER, 2023

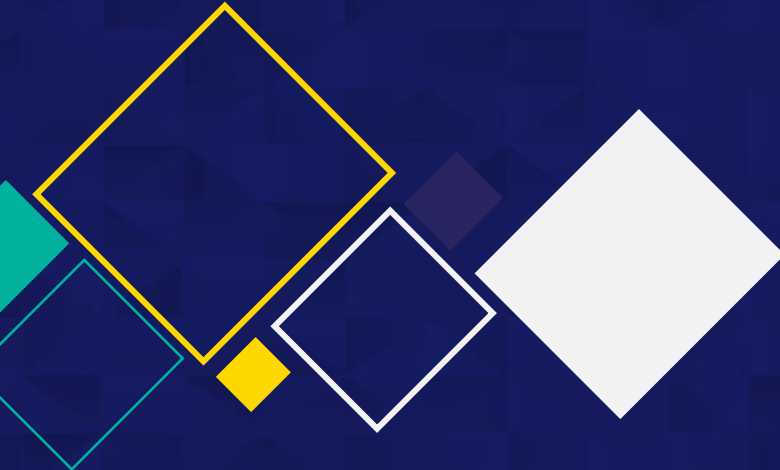


Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS **I**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **2**

 PROJECT SUMMARY 2

 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 2

 PREVIEW OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS 4

Executive Summary

Project Summary

In 2020, Snohomish County issued the Racial Justice Proclamation, as a clear response to the murder of George Floyd, but also announcing their commitment to equity and to ending systemic racism. Snohomish Executive Dave Somers established the Office of Social Justice (OSJ), assigning Annie Cole as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Executive for the OSJ. This was a demonstrable commitment of priorities and resources. In order to support the OSJ's progress toward addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the County organization, Snohomish County issued a request for proposals in June of 2022 to assess the state of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the organization and to gain understanding of the County's relationship with the communities it seeks to serve. The Office of Social Justice led the initiative, and selected MFT Consulting as a partner. The following report details our findings and insights from our research, as well as recommendations to move the DEI initiative forward. The DEI Assessment was conducted with the understanding that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are not commitments that exist "on top" of other priorities and commitments, but are essential qualities of a healthy, thriving, and inclusive workforce.

MGT's mixed-methods approach to Snohomish County's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Assessment launched with an all-staff survey and an analysis of the County's HR policies and practices. In order to get a closer read on how the County culture impacted staff and select community partners, we conducted a number of engagements, including focus groups, interviews, and virtual office hours, which were designed to gather candid insights and feedback in settings that offered "brave spaces," that is, spaces in which the difficult conversations are guided by vulnerability, authenticity, and good faith. Our recommendations are guided by the themes, insights, and innovative suggestions that emerged during our multiple avenues of research and our multiple group engagements.

The following report is a testament to Snohomish County's growing commitment to creating an inclusive workplace and County organization. This is work that requires the courage to listen, to learn, and to grow. The *Snohomish County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Assessment* is a reflection of where the organization is and a pathway toward where and how it can grow.

Summary of Findings

The "**Policy Analysis**" in the Snohomish County Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Assessment report reveals a number of gaps and opportunities in County policies. For example, Snohomish County does not have policies for anonymized resume screening or interview standardization in alignment with DEI emerging practices. Further, Snohomish County offers a generous compensation package, but misses some key benefits related to DEI such as gender-affirming care and childcare or eldercare subsidies. Finally, there was a lack of clear examples in the anti-harassment policies related to anti-retaliation.

An **all-staff survey** was conducted, of which one key takeaway indicates that Snohomish County's leadership team needs to meaningfully engage and help create a more inclusive workspace. Aggregate survey results show that **53%** of survey respondents agree that leadership is ready to create a safe space for all people. **52%** of participants reported that leadership understands that DEI is critical to Snohomish

County's future success and shows alignment with community-facing DEI priorities, suggesting that the County has both strengths to build upon and room to improve by fostering a culture of openness among its employees.

Moreover, respondents that identified as men were more likely to believe that the County takes appropriate action in response to incidents of discrimination and/or bias (49%) compared to women (33%). This suggests that women have significantly less faith in the County related to this issue compared to male counterparts. Additionally, respondents that identified as LGBTQIA+ were less likely to agree with the statement that all parts of their identity are accepted (66%) than their heterosexual counterparts (83%).

Finally, survey results indicated that there are significant differences in how people of color and white people experience the County workplace culture as staff. White respondents were more likely to agree that decision makers at the County are ready to create a safe space for all people (57%), more likely to feel comfortable raising a concern to their supervisor (81%), more likely to agree that employees at the County respect others who identify differently than they do (70%), and more likely to agree that all parts of their identities and backgrounds are accepted (80%). Conversely, Black respondents in particular were significantly less likely to agree that decision makers at the County are fully ready to create a safe space for all people (36%), less likely to feel comfortable raising a concern to their supervisor (57%), less likely to agree that employees at the County respect others who identify differently than they do (45%), and significantly less likely to agree that all parts of their identities and backgrounds are accepted (45%). These findings suggest that there is a lack of equitable treatment between white and black employees.

Staff focus group insights indicated that the lack of consistent communication, the absence of shared understanding around DEI, and the lack of inclusive leadership behaviors are among some of the reasons why DEI efforts seem stalled.

Overview of Qualitative Themes:

- ❖ **Diversity versus Inclusion (Visible Diversity does not equal Inclusionary Practice)**
- ❖ **Lack of Consistency when Assessing Snohomish County's DEI Progress**
- ❖ **Significant Barriers to Advancing DEI as a Priority**
- ❖ **Communication of DEI Initiatives Needs to Come from Leadership**
- ❖ **Fear of Speaking Out and Feeling Safe and Supported**

Preview of Key Recommendations

MGT developed eight recommendations, previewed here and developed at the close of the report, that reflect staff and community feedback from the survey, the focus groups, and the one-to-one interactions. These are actionable steps that require limited if any additional resources. While most are internal to Snohomish County as an organization, we strongly encourage Snohomish to create richer response systems and practices between the County and the communities it is intended to serve.

- ❖ **Staff the Office of Social Justice**
- ❖ **Focus Efforts on Community-Facing DEI Work**
- ❖ **Strongly Encourage DEI training for Staff and Leadership, as Part of Onboarding and then at Regular Intervals Throughout One's Employment**
- ❖ **Invest in LEAD Group with Leadership Engagement**
- ❖ **Enhance and Explore Existing Communication Channels for Efficacy**
- ❖ **Launch Cultural Awareness and Additional DEI Trainings Throughout all Levels of the Organization**
- ❖ **Create Consistent Performance Management Processes**
- ❖ **Implement Regular Pulse Check Surveys**
- ❖ **Address DEI Gaps in Snohomish County Policies**