

Researching Existing Entities

As part of the development of recommendations for establishing a Whatcom Racial Equity Commission, the Project Team conducted research into other entities that were either an advisory body to a government entity or were advancing equity within their community. This research led to meetings with a variety of leaders from other communities. The project team also researched local entities to provide insight into the current advisory bodies – their structure, scope of work, and authority. This report provides details and summaries from the research, including salient information that was relevant to the process to establish Whatcom County’s Racial Equity Commission (WREC).

Findings & Incorporation

LOCAL RESEARCH

For the development process, local existing entities establishing documents were accessed first to create templates and context materials for the Stakeholders (36+ community members representing diverse identities and perspectives) informing the scope and makeup of the WREC. These templates were then reviewed by Working Group Members (10 policy makers, project managers, and institutional/government partners and leadership) to ensure they were comprehensive and complete. Recognizing that not all members of Stakeholder group had experience navigating this kind of process, these locally crafted materials became valuable tools that allowed all community members to participate with a shared understanding of the elements of an establishing ordinance. Sample text from existing boards, task forces, and commissions provided a launching point for understanding and accessibility of information.

Additionally, we learned about benefits and challenges of various aspects of our local entities. Several Stakeholders have served on various advisory bodies locally which allowed even deeper insight to how an ordinance is operationalized. These members were able to describe the implications and impacts of drafted text on implementation. Sometimes these were benefits written into the policy that the group sought to capture in our recommendations. Sometimes they were pitfalls that the group was determined to avoid.

RESEARCH FROM OUTSIDE WHATCOM

As the team looked outside of the county, we conducted research and reviewed online information related to racial equity work in general and in other geographies. That broader work led to direct communication with several organizations and entities. Contacting entities outside of the area created both learning and relationship building opportunities. In conversations with representatives of each organization we gained an understanding of the regional, state, and national landscape related to the work of advancing racial equity. We learned that Whatcom would be a part of a broader national conversation while also having an opportunity to build closer to home through connections with related efforts and organizations in other counties and at the state level.

Throughout this process, we were able to both ask and answer many questions. One question our group posed to every person we met with was:

If you were to start over from the beginning today, what would you do again

and what pitfalls would you avoid?

Without fail, we learned. Again, we were given the gift of “going second” through having an opportunity to build upon what worked and avoid what another organization experienced as detrimental. Below, we’ve included a table that lists several key organizations/entities we studied as well as the takeaways from each that were incorporated into this process.

Three Key Success Factors to Racial Equity Work:

1. **VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE** – People who have experience with the condition that an entity seeks to change also have an awareness of the daily circumstances contributing to the issue and are in a position to provide critical insight to how to best manifest change.
2. **SPECIFICITY IN THE SCOPE** – Addressing equity broadly across multiple impacted populations has the potential to not only reduce the efficacy for implementing change within a single demographic group, it also can lead to participant burn-out due to growing scope of work. It was repeatedly recommended that racial equity is centered and prioritized within the scope of the Commission in order to be most effective.
3. **MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST** – In working with communities, especially if those communities may have a distrust of government due to how their lives are currently or historically impacted by policy, relationship-building and tending are essential to progress. Sometimes that building is creating an opportunity for challenging conversations where grievances are aired while other times it is important to lean on organizations to facilitate relationship-building as *trusted messengers* within a community.

TABLE: Summary of Key Takeaways

Entity	Description	Key Takeaways
OUTSIDE OF WHATCOM		
Greenville Racial Equity + Economic Mobility Commission (REEMGVL) ¹ Greenville, SC	Coalition convened in conjunction with the local United Way focused on eradicating race-based disparities/ inequities experienced by the Black community in Greenville County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “Urgency not haste” being intentional about work & not prioritizing speed over efficacy & desired outcomes ✓ Creating committee work around focus areas ✓ Engaging private sector partners in coalition work including business leaders ✓ Participants needed a shared understanding of local data & history to have a shared working context ✗ Entity is 100% in the private sector which means can limit direct influence on policy change
Civil Rights Commission King County, WA	County-wide commission addressing equity across multiple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Target populations for policy recommendations varied broadly

¹ <https://www.reemgvl.org/>

	issues including but not limited to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ADA compliance & accessibility	making the scope of work too large to be effective
<i>Coalition Against Hate & Bias²</i> <i>King County, WA</i>	Community-led initiative supported by King County Office of Equity & Social Justice. Coalition of community-based groups & organizations convened to engage & support communities experiencing hate & bias incidences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Utilizes existing community-based organizations as connections to communities that may not otherwise engage with government entities
<i>Poverty Reduction Work Group³</i> <i>Washington State</i>	PRWG leverages the guidance/wisdom of a Steering Committee composed of people with lived experience alongside a Working Group of members from various systems/sectors to develop plans & strategies to address root causes of poverty/ intergenerational poverty. These plans, strategies, & goals are co-designed with community members who have been impacted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Composed of both people with lived experiences of poverty as well as experience navigating/work in public & private sector service systems ✔ Steering Committee formed to set working priorities/ trajectory of work ✔ Steering Committee is composed of people who have been impacted ✔ Relationship building within the group lays the groundwork for successful collaboration
LOCAL		
<i>Incarceration Prevention & Reduction Task Force⁴</i> <i>Whatcom County, WA</i>	The purpose of the Incarceration Prevention & Reduction Task Force is to continually review Whatcom County's criminal justice & behavioral health programs & make specific recommendations to safely & effectively reduce incarceration of individuals struggling with mental illness & chemical dependency, & minimize jail utilization by pretrial defendants who can safely be released.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Having less frequent full group meetings & creating opportunities for committee work ✔ Is illustrative of how advisory bodies & their scope of work can evolve as the needs of the county change ✘ Without defining terms & term limits in ordinance, WCC 2.03 terms apply which does not give flexibility or discretion to maintain members after their limit if there are midstream on a project
<i>Child & Family Well-being Task Force⁵</i>	The purpose of the Whatcom County Child & Family Well- being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Addressing participation barrier reduction to include

² <https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/Coalition-Against-Hate-And-Bias.aspx>

³ <https://dismantlepovertyinwa.com/about-the-work-group/>

⁴ <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/2052/Incarceration-Prevention-and-Reduction-T>

⁵ <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3537/Child-and-Family-Well-Being-Task-Force>

<i>Whatcom County, WA</i>	Task Force is to continually review Whatcom governmental impact on children & families & make specific recommendations for improvements for all departments.	<p>people who are not normally on advisory bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is currently the most diverse County advisory body ✓ Multiple Co-Chairs creates a more reasonable workload for members in leadership ✓ Utilized “Fist to Five” consensus decision-making which increased full group participation ✗ Experienced challenges reaching consensus at times ✗ The combination of the size of the body & number of meetings/hours can create challenges reaching quorum
<i>Climate Impact Advisory Committee⁶</i> <i>Whatcom County, WA</i>	The Whatcom County Climate Impact Advisory Committee provides review & recommendations to the Whatcom County Council & Executive on issues related to the preparation & adaptation for, & the prevention & mitigation of, impacts of climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Illustrates importance of local work on a larger global & national issue ✓ Leverages partners from multiple sectors who share an expertise in the body’s subject of focus ✗ Has a large scope of work & has a clause prohibiting compensation in ordinance which may create participation barriers for some community members
<i>Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission on Sexual & Domestic Violence⁷</i> <i>Whatcom County, WA</i>	The purpose of the Commission is to provide leadership in effort to reduce & prevent sexual & domestic violence. The Commission is a quasi-governmental entity. Operating as a hybrid, it has the public mandate of an advising body as established through ordinance/interlocal while being administered by a nonprofit entity, Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services as established through contract.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is fiscally sponsored by a 501c3 nonprofit ✓ Because of nonprofit relationship, the org can access private funding for programmatic work ✓ Is funded through a public-private partnership ✓ Has designated staff employed through nonprofit sponsor ✓ Works in cooperation with staff & departments to conduct audits/research for recommendations

⁶ <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/2744/Climate-Impact-Advisory-Committee>

⁷ <https://www.dvcommission.org/>

Immigration Advisory Board⁸
Bellingham, WA

The purpose of the Immigration Advisory Board is to review & evaluate existing policies & make specific recommendations to the Mayor & City Council regarding City policy related to immigration matters. The Board is also tasked with monitoring compliance with E2SSB 5497 & to support community involvement in regional issues related to immigration.

✗ Has some limitations in engagement of cities outside of Bellingham

✓ Provides translation services in multiple languages over zoom for increased participation of people with lived experience

✓ Utilizes committee/work group structures to accomplish tasks in smaller groups that are presented to the whole Committee

✓ Has multiple co-chairs

✗ Lack of specificity in scope of work can create challenges regarding clarity on what is expected of members & COB Staff

✓ Beneficial insight incorporated into recommendations

✗ Pitfall identified & avoided in recommendations

⁸ <https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/immigration-advisory-board>