Building an Inclusive and Informed City with Opportunities for All

RENTON EXPERIENCED A DRAMATIC 82% INCREASE IN GROWTH FROM 2000-2010, one that included a remarkable increase in the ethnic diversity of its population. Today, Renton, is a minority-majority city—WalletHub designated Renton as the 7th most diverse mid-size city in the nation in 2020. Residents from minority groups, especially those who speak a language other than English at home, are typically less engaged in the civic process and in government and are less likely to access information and services that the city provides. They are at a higher risk of being disproportionately affected by disasters and are more susceptible to inequalities and discrimination. They also need to be more effectively engaged in efforts to promote common local government concerns such as crime prevention and emergency preparedness.

A change in population leads to action

THE GROWTH OF RENTON’S MINORITY POPULATIONS (up 165% from 2000–2010) was a major “wake up” call for the city. In recognition of these changing demographics, the city launched a dedicated effort to “Build an Inclusive City,” to ensure all constituents have equal access to city services and equal opportunity for civic engagement. The mission statement in the city’s strategic business plan was revised:

- Improve access to city services, programs, and employment
- Make residents and businesses aware of opportunities to be involved with their community
- Build connections with all communities that reflect the breadth and richness of the city’s diversity
- Promote understanding and appreciation of the city’s diversity through celebrations and festivals
- Provide critical and relevant information on a timely basis and facilitate two-way dialogue between city government and the community

To achieve its ambitious goals, the city began a two-pronged effort: reaching out to minority and under-represented groups and assessing its own internal capabilities regarding inclusion.

External focus: Promoting a diverse and unified community

THE CITY ADOPTED AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH to connect with the various ethnic, cultural, and other diverse community groups. In 2007, it created a network of community leaders to represent these groups and act as a liaison between their communities and the city. A few years ago, this network evolved into the Mayor’s Inclusion Task Force, which currently includes over 30 individuals representing the following communities: African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Indians, Sikhs, Somalis, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Filipinos, Latinos, Ukrainians, LGBTQ, Senior, and Muslim faith groups. Renton elected officials also serve on the task force and the Mayor leads it.

Internal focus: Investing in our infrastructure and a workforce that values diversity

IN ORDER TO GO BEYOND THE EXTERNAL FOCUS and “integrate diversity at every level of the city government,” Renton hired a consultant with a background on equity and social justice. The initiative was made part of the Executive Department and fell under the oversight of the city’s Deputy Public Affairs Administrator, though it involves participation and investment of every city department.

One of the first priorities for the consultant was to provide a thorough and unbiased assessment of the city’s strengths and weaknesses, including reviewing key policies and practices. Beginning in 2014, the city provided annual training to all employee in structural and institutional racism and implicit bias.

Making inclusion “business as usual”

WHAT HAS MADE THE INCLUSION INITIATIVE IN RENTON SUCCESSFUL is support from the Mayor and Council with oversight and facilitation from the Executive Department/Mayor’s Office. There has currently been a broad-based commitment to inclusion, both within city government and the community. As long as the goal of inclusion permeates into every area of city business, it can continue to be successful.
Key Accomplishments

- Growing partnerships with multiple community groups—MITF, RAAP, Youth, Latino, Vietnamese
- Renton Police—several efforts from recruitment to School Resources Officers to community forums and partnerships
- Renton Equity Lens use city wide
- HR Inclusion Tactical Plan—significant success and progress in implementation
- ASD Inclusion—data collection
- Language Line established citywide; interpreter services established; translation guidelines completed
- Renton Multicultural Festival, Black History Month, Renton Pride, other festivals
- Advisory input for key plans—Parks, Seniors

Challenges

- Continue to see changes in our demographics—are we reaching our key audiences?
- Are we engaging with all socio-economic levels?
- Still need to implement vendor fair—changes in staffing
- Integration of equity/inclusion into Neighborhood Program
- Getting good metrics or consistent information has been challenging
- For Inclusion/Equity to continue to succeed it needs continued support from the top—need to keep working on aligning our department strategic planning with equity planning.

Next Steps

- 2018 Mayor’s Inclusion Task Force Annual Report—review and determine priorities for 2020
- 2019 Inclusion summary department report—review
- Renton African-American Pastors group—review strategy and objectives to reach non-church going members and youth
- Renton River Days and Renton Multicultural Festival sub-committee collaborating on this year’s programs
- Completed one round of optional cultural competence training for employees
- Exploring membership with GARE
- Planning regional equity conference with GREI
- Work on Inclusion dashboard on Inclusion strategic plan based on Mayor/Council priorities