



Guidance to Agencies: FAQ on Equity and a Washington for All

“Washington is a place that supports every resident’s civil rights. We recognize that diversity, equity, and inclusivity is a strength.” -Governor Bob Ferguson

Purpose

Washington State is committed to ensuring every person in Washington has access to the opportunities and resources they need to pursue the life they want to lead. We cannot leave anyone behind. This document provides resources, guidance, and support to help you serve all Washingtonians. We will continue to update it as questions come and circumstances change. We are committed to a Washington for All and we must work collectively. There is no hidden message or covert effort. “Washington for All” means just that; our work benefits every single Washingtonian.

FAQs

What does “equity” mean in Washington State?

Washington law clearly enshrines the right to be free from discrimination because of race, creed, color, national origin, citizenship or immigration status, sex, military status, sexual orientation, or disability. ([RCW 49.60.030](#); [RCW 49.60.400](#)). In Washington State, equity means creating access to opportunity and eliminating barriers so that all people can have the opportunity, through hard work *and* access, to thrive and flourish. (RCW 43.06D.020).

Why was the Washington State Office of Equity created?

The Washington State Office of Equity exists within the Office of the Governor to promote access to equitable opportunities and resources that reduce disparities and improve outcomes statewide. ([RCW 43.06D.020](#); [RCW 43.06D.040](#))

How can we continue doing our work?

Maintain your commitment to delivering effective government services free of unnecessary burdens for anyone. Prioritize the unique needs of those who require access to government services. Use plain language to be clear about your intention to serve all Washingtonians.



How do we understand what people need?

The best way to understand the needs of the people we serve is to talk to them, seek their input on changes, and be honest about foreseeable challenges. Prioritize community engagement and assessment and analysis of data to understand the needs and priorities of those who utilize and are affected by state services. Agencies may want to consult with their agency's assigned Assistant Attorneys General (AAGs) when appropriate. Best practices in this process include:

1. Meeting with people in different communities to understand their unique needs.
2. Using additional reliable data sources (qualitative and quantitative) to supplement information shared in community-based meetings.
3. Create targeted approaches that address the needs of all Washington state communities.
4. Maintain and grow engagement to keep community needs current, relevant, and focused on eliminating barriers and improving access.

Why are all these steps necessary?

Government must serve ALL its people. To achieve this, government employees must understand and remove barriers based on factors such as geographic location, economic status, disability status, family situation, or spoken language. Government employees must understand the variety of needs of Washingtonians to remove such barriers.

How can we talk about equity?

How would you describe your work to your friends and family? Know your audience. Talk about our work in a way that people understand. Equity work is about fair access and removing barriers in government systems so we don't leave anyone behind.

What is an example of equity in action?

Every agency has recruitment, hiring, and retention processes. These processes may contain unnecessary barriers that exclude people from competing for jobs they have the skills to perform. Through [Executive Order 24-04: Increasing Employment Opportunities in Washington State Government](#), state employees are actively removing barriers from the hiring process to create a fair system so people can apply for the jobs they desire and have the skills, abilities, and knowledge to do.



What about our equity-related positions?

Equity work is about removing barriers in state government so that every person in Washington can easily access the services they need. Your equity-related position descriptions, title and work, strategic plans, performance metrics, documents, and communications should reflect this goal. The work is not going away, and we must describe it in plain talk so everyone can easily understand it without a dictionary.

How can we continue to meet different needs?

We serve ALL Washingtonians, and we acknowledge that government has not always done this well. At times, the focus has been on serving some at the expense of others, which has contributed to the disparities that exist today. As agencies that serve all Washingtonians, we cannot operate for some while excluding others. We must engage with all communities and build a better picture of what is needed for all people in Washington to access government services that support their goals. We can do this by using principles like [targeted universalism](#) to organize data in a way that helps us to understand the different needs that exist in Washington. Engage with the [people-focused commissions and agencies](#) to support and build trust with communities that have historically been excluded from access to opportunities in Washington.

How should we communicate to reach all Washingtonians?

Develop [accessible](#) public-facing documents that are written in plain language (plain language meaning one does not need a dictionary to understand) and then translated into multiple languages. Translate previously created documents into multiple languages as needed. A list of the most commonly used languages can be found [here](#). Communicate using different approaches to reach different learning styles. Communicate across digital and traditional communications methods to reach all Washingtonians.

What internal agency policies should be current?

We recommend you review, and update as needed, your agency's public disclosure, records retention, data protection policies, and the model policies directed in [HR Directive 20-03](#). We also recommend that you review your agency's Keep Washington Working policy or applicable model policies developed by the Attorney General's Office. Agencies may want to consult with their agency's assigned AAGs when appropriate.



What Washington laws, executive orders, and directives will support us in advancing a Washington for All?

1. Remain in compliance with the Keep Washington Working Act, [RCW 43.17.425](#). The relevant part of the Act requires:

*Except for [as required to comply with state or federal law; in response to a lawfully issued court orders; as necessary to perform agency duties, functions, or other business, as permitted by statute or rule, conducted by the agency that is not related to immigration enforcement; as required to comply with policies, grants, waivers, or other requirements necessary to maintain funding; or in the form of deidentified or aggregated data, including census data], **no state agency, including law enforcement, may use agency funds, facilities, property, equipment, or personnel to investigate, enforce, cooperate with, or assist in the investigation or enforcement of any federal registration or surveillance programs or any other laws, rules, or policies that target Washington residents solely on the basis of race, religion, immigration, or citizenship status, or national or ethnic origin. This subsection does not apply to any program with the primary purpose of providing persons with services or benefits, or to RCW 9.94A.685.** (emphasis added)*

2. Understand the Washington state statutes, executive orders, directives, and guidance listed in [appendix A](#).

Available Support

The following Commissions and Agencies are available to provide advice, recommendations and support to ensure every person in Washington is welcome and has access to the opportunities and resources they need to thrive.

Washington State's People-Focused Commissions and Agencies:

- [Commission on African American Affairs \(CAAA\)](#)
- [Commission on Asian and Pacific American Affairs \(CAPAA\)](#)
- [Commission on Hispanic Affairs \(CHA\)](#)
- [Department of Veterans Affairs](#)
- [Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment](#)



- [Governor's Office of Indian Affairs](#)
- [Office of Equity](#)
- [LGBTQ Commission](#)
- [Women's Commission](#)

Appendix A: Washington State Statutes, Executive Orders, Directives, and Guidance

RCWs

- [RCW 42.56.475: Department of corrections and private detention facilities.](#)
- [RCW 43.17.425: Immigration and citizenship status—State agency restrictions.](#)
- [Chapter 49.58 RCW: WASHINGTON EQUAL PAY AND OPPORTUNITIES ACT](#)
 - Washington State Department of Labor & Industries Guidance: [Equal Pay & Opportunities Act](#)
- [RCW 49.60.040: Definitions.](#)

Executive Orders

- [Executive Order 16-01: Privacy Protection and Transparency in State Government “Modernizing State Agency Privacy Protection](#)
- [Executive Order 17-01: Reaffirming Washington's Commitment to Tolerance, Diversity, and Inclusiveness](#)
 - Highlights include:
 - [RCW 49.60.030: Freedom from discrimination—Declaration of civil rights.](#)
- [Executive Order 19-01: Veteran and Military Family Transition and Readiness Support](#)
- [Executive Order 21-01: Affirming Washington State Business Resource Groups](#)
 - [HR BRG Participation Policy](#)



- [Executive Order 22-01: Equity in Public Contracting](#)
- [Executive Order 22-02: Achieving Equity in Washington State Government](#)
 - [HR Directive 23-01: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training \(DEI\) training](#) for state employees
- [Executive Order 22-04: Implementing the Washington State Pro-Equity Anti-Racism \(PEAR\) Plan & Playbook](#)
- [Executive Order 24-04: Increasing Employment Opportunities in Washington State Government](#)
 - Washington State must improve its ability to serve every person in Washington. Each state agency leader and staff person must be able to flex and adapt to the needs of different communities in Washington State. The toolkit to support agency implementation is coming in February 2025
- [Executive Order 24-05 Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disabilities in State Employment](#)

Directives

- [Directive of the Governor 16-11: LGBTQ Inclusion and Safe Place Initiative](#)
- [HR Directive 20-03: Requirement for model policies](#)
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion
 - Respectful work environment
 - Anti-discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment
 - Reasonable accommodation

Guidance

- [Washington State Attorney General Civil Rights Resource Guide](#)
- [Washington State Human Rights Commission: Guide to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and the Washington State Law Against Discrimination](#)