



Racial Equity Strategy Plan 2023-2025

Opening Statement:

Welcome to the Housing Financing Commission's three-year strategic plan centering racial equity and antiracist priorities. This plan represents our goal to promote racially equitable outcomes for Washington residents and to become a truly antiracist organization.

Completed with the support of racial equity and antiracism consultant Dr. Carmen Phelps of Project 986 and resulting from the involvement and participation of WSHFC staff and board members, this plan is being implemented from 2023 through 2025.

We acknowledge that legacies of racially biased systems and policies continue to inform racial inequities in housing that impact communities of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC). In this plan, we have identified opportunities for our agency to proactively address systemic and cultural barriers in both our internal and external practices.

Overall, the implementation of this racial equity strategic plan will support our intentions to:

- Promote agency-wide accountability for advancing racial equity in key areas of focus;
- Engage external invested parties, collaborators, partners and beneficiaries in our efforts; and
- Take meaningful steps toward the longer-term goal and ongoing work of aligning all WSHFC practices and processes with racial equity and antiracist objectives.

This plan also represents a shared commitment to racial equity among all leadership and across all divisions at the Commission. It is not a project that might come to a halt without one or two internal champions on the executive team, but a seismic shift that has already led to significant changes in our decisions and programs. While we have much work ahead of us, the Racial Equity Strategic Plan we now share builds upon many foundational steps taken over the past several years.

Lessons Learned and Measuring Progress

In the process of developing this plan and simultaneously implementing racial-equity principles in our programs and internal policies, we have realized the necessity of slowing down to ensure our actions are thoughtful, deliberate, and respectful of the complexities inherent in this critical work. While we feel urgency toward achieving goals, we also need to balance that progress with inclusion and sensitivity. Our timelines have therefore required much more flexibility than we expected.

On a related note, our next challenge regarding this strategic plan is to set meaningful measurements of our progress so that we can steer our course and be accountable to ourselves and the community. We are committed to regularly sharing our progress toward these goals. Looking farther ahead, these measurements will also help us when we update and recalibrate this strategic plan in 2025.

Acronyms:

- AMC = Asset Management and Compliance division, monitoring the WSHFC's portfolio of affordable apartment buildings for compliance with federal requirements.
- IT = Information Technology team.
- EMT = Executive Management Team
- HO = Homeownership division, providing home loans, downpayment assistance and education to low- and moderate-income homebuyers as well as overseeing services for homeowners.
- HR = Human Resources.
- MHCF = Multifamily Housing and Community Facilities division, overseeing and implementing financing programs to develop affordable apartments, nonprofit facilities, sustainable energy projects, and other community needs.
- PMs = People managers
- WSHFC = Washington State Housing Finance Commission

The 5 Guiding Principles

Five core principles were developed to guide us in the racial equity strategic planning process.

Collaboration:

Seek opportunities to work across divisions and teams to maximize our potential to realize our racial equity goals.

Connection & Communication:

Create opportunities to communicate with one another within our teams and across divisions about challenges and triumphs we are experiencing as we implement racial equity actions, steps, and processes and encourage shared learning and growth.

Valuing Diverse Perspectives:

Validate, acknowledge and be responsive to all voices and experiences representing our agency internally as well as the external communities we serve.

Transparency:

Communicate about our divisional racial equity efforts with openness, consistency, and authenticity.

Shared Accountability:

Hold us accountable for our division and agency-wide racial equity efforts and dedicate time to an intentional focus on our respective and collective progress.

The 8 Focus Areas

Among the eight focus areas of our strategic plan, five are internal. We believe that addressing the enduring impacts of racism requires building a strong, equitable foundation rooted in racial equity. We are actively increasing our capacity in this area, recognizing that significant transformations require reflection on our own practices.

The three external-facing focus areas relate to how we use our resources and engage communities.

While we have identified a main group or groups who will be most impacted by each focus area, we hope the consequences of these efforts will extend throughout our operations, benefiting not only those named but also the broader community.

A note on action steps: Some action steps address more than one focus area. For example, we may start with public engagement efforts to reach the ultimate goal of increasing access to the resources we oversee.

Internal-Facing Focus Areas:

➤ Culture & Restorative Healing:

Create a work environment of trust, support for, and validation of all employees representing WSHFC. Promote restorative healing and address organizational, race-informed trauma in support of BIPOC employees.

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, managers and directors

Timeline considerations: Range is third quarter of 2023 to third quarter of 2025.

Action Steps Include:

- a. Invite staff to establish race-based affinity groups, prioritizing the experiences of BIPOC staff. *Lead division(s): BIPOC and white allyship groups, EMT, HR.*
- b. Establish a Racial Equity Education Task Force/Coalition, made up of staff. *Lead division(s): BIPOC group, EMT, HR.*
- c. Hire or contract with a racial equity/antiracism-centered conflict-resolution specialist. *Lead division(s): Conflict Resolution Workgroup.*
- d. Hire a racial equity/antiracism-centered training facilitator. *Lead division(s): BIPOC group.*
- e. Establish a series of racial-equity training opportunities for WSHFC staff. *Lead division(s): Racial Equity Task Force.*

➤ **Leadership and Staff Development:**

Build the capacity, skills and awareness of our leaders, managers and staff to model/exemplify racial equity and antiracist leadership practices, both to ensure a firm foundation for our work and to support BIPOC employees.

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, managers and directors

Timeline considerations: Range is third quarter of 2023 to third quarter of 2025.

Action Steps Include:

- a. Provide one-on-one racial equity coaching for managers. *Lead division(s): EMT, Admin/Exec.*
- b. Provide people managers with interactive activities and training focusing on modeling intersectional racial equity/antiracist values. *Lead division(s): EMT, Admin/Exec.*
- c. Train HR and executive leadership on approaches to align internal policy with racial equity objectives and antiracist practices. *Lead division(s): EMT, HR, Admin/Exec.*
- d. Conduct regular discussions and updates among divisions around the status of racial equity efforts. *Lead division(s): EMT.*
- e. Ensure that all staff members are meaningfully engaged in racial equity efforts, as reflected in their workplans and evaluations. *Lead division(s): EMT, Admin/Exec, HR.*
- f. Provide employees with opportunities to share how they are experiencing their managers' leadership and supportive practices. *Lead division(s): All staff.*

➤ **Internal Data-gathering:**

Develop information and data-gathering processes to learn about past and ongoing experiences of WSHFC staff, especially BIPOC staff, so we can better support their success and advancement.

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, managers and directors

Timeline considerations: Range is third quarter of 2023 to fourth quarter of 2025.

Action Steps Include:

- a. Design and implement data-gathering processes to assess employee experiences. *Lead division(s): Admin/Exec, EMT, IT.*

➤ **Internal Policy Revision:**

Review and revise all our internal policies to ensure their impacts are equitable.

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, managers and directors

Timeline considerations: Range is third quarter of 2023 to fourth quarter of 2025.

Action Steps Include:

- a. Implement antiracist policies in support of BIPOC staff. *Lead division(s): EMT, HR, all managers.*
- b. Complete a holistic review and revision of all internal and external policies in our Office Procedure Manual (OPM), including evaluation and advancement processes, to ensure alignment with racial equity objectives. *Lead division(s): Admin/Exec/Finance.*
- c. Transform processes and practices that affect employees' advancement, job evaluation, professional skill development, benefits and compensation to ensure alignment with racial equity objectives. *Lead division(s): EMT, HR, Admin/Exec.*
 - This work will include reviewing recent outcomes to assess racial disparities and soliciting input from employees.

➤ **DEI Director Recruitment (Completed):**

Recruit a DEI Administrator/Director to serve as a member of the Executive Management Team. This new position will report to the executive director, hold decision-making power and advise and guide leadership and staff as we work toward our racial equity and antiracist goals.

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, managers and directors

Timeline considerations: Recruitment range is by fourth quarter of 2023. Range for work related to developments of plan next phases is third quarter of 2025.

Action Steps Completed:

- a. Establish a Recruitment Committee with members at all levels from across the Commission, led by the executive team and HR. *Lead division(s): EMT, HR.*
- b. Secure a DEI recruiter through an RFP process. *Lead division(s): DEI Recruitment Committee.*
- c. Confirm and implement a fair, just, and equitable recruitment process for hiring a DEI Administrator. *Lead division(s): DEI Recruitment Committee, Recruiter.*
- d. Select and hire DEI director. *EMT, executive director.*

Action Steps for 2024:

- e. Determine DEI director's role in racial equity/antiracism efforts and onboard the new hire. *Lead division(s): EMT.*
- f. EMT and new director collaborate to review racial equity/antiracism plan for next phases of work and budget development. *Lead division(s): EMT.*

External-Facing Focus Areas

Group(s) impacted: WSHFC staff, our partners, including developers using our financing, contractors, residents of affordable housing, homebuyers, homeowners, etc.

Timeline considerations: Range is second quarter of 2023 to second quarter of 2025.

➤ **Community Engagement:**

Increase community/public engagement, outreach, and data-gathering. Invite and foster community and public engagement.

It is our goal to open dialogue and create relationships with BIPOC communities and residents, for the purpose of being guided in our decisions by their needs and priorities. In the past, we have relied on intermediaries, such as apartment developers or mortgage lenders, to represent the needs and priorities of the end user such as the housing resident or homebuyer. Now we are seeking to directly engage those groups in inclusive and collaborative ways.

➤ **Communications:**

Design and implement an internal and external-facing communications strategy to share our racial equity and antiracism priorities and progress with stakeholders.

Our intention is to make information about us and our antiracist practices and efforts accessible to all audiences. We seek to use our communications channels to provide transparency into our decision-making and impact, to inform people about housing resources and options that could be helpful to them, and to keep us accountable to those we serve as well as policymakers and elected leaders.

➤ **Resource Accessibility:**

Increase access to our resources for BIPOC communities, organizations, developers and residents by actively removing barriers.

In the past, though the Commission's race-neutral approach provided "open doors" to BIPOC groups, there were many barriers that prevented them from taking advantage of our financing opportunities.

To reduce or eliminate these barriers requires us to serve the needs of other customers: the developer who has never used the LIHTC program or tax-exempt bonds, as well as the experienced developer who is well versed in these tools; the resident of an LIHTC property, as well as the property manager and owner; and the homebuyer, as well as the lender and real-estate professional who offer our home-loan programs.

Our goal is to be proactive in providing financing tools and guidance that empower small and BIPOC housing developers; centering the needs of housing residents when supporting property managers and owners in our portfolio; and working collaboratively to transform the housing system to increase BIPOC homeownership.

External Action Steps Include:

All Audiences/Customers:

- a. Develop an equitable, inclusive organization-wide strategy for engaging community members in decision-making. *Lead division(s): Admin/Exec/Communications.*
- b. Develop and implement an internal and external communications strategy focusing on racial equity/antiracism efforts. *Lead division(s): Admin/Communications.*
- c. Create an equity-based protocol to guide Commission decisions on memberships and sponsorships of organizations and initiatives. *Lead division(s): Finance and Admin.*

Rental Housing Residents

Developers, Owners and Managers of Housing and Community Facilities

- a. Recenter Asset Management & Compliance program resources on the needs of residents of properties in our portfolio, with a particular focus on increasing accessibility and support for BIPOC residents. *Lead division(s): AMC.*
 - Train Asset Management & Compliance portfolio analysts in addressing the needs of BIPOC residents. *Lead division(s): AMC.*
 - Create an online portal where residents of rental properties in the WSHFC portfolio can securely share required documentation and concerns with WSHFC staff. *Lead division(s): AMC, IT.*
 - Develop an external-facing webpage on WSHFC.org that offers community resources and connections for renters. *Lead division(s): AMC.*
 - Update the language and content of WSHFC forms, applications, and other materials to address communication barriers among residents. *Lead division(s): AMC.* Develop trainings and materials to educate residents of and applicants to LIHTC rental properties about the program and its required forms and supporting documents. *Lead division(s): AMC.* Improve WBARS data gathering and reporting to inform policies addressing negative housing outcomes among residents of LIHTC housing. *Lead division(s): AMC.*

- b. Build capacity for Multifamily staff to engage with and support BIPOC communities. *Lead division(s): MHCF.*
- c. Reduce financial and structural barriers that impede access to multifamily and community facilities financing programs by BIPOC and historically disadvantaged communities and organizations. *Lead division(s): MHCF.*
 - Encourage and incentivize participation in our financing programs by new and community-based BIPOC housing developers. *Lead division(s): MHCF.*
 - Identify and map all interested parties (such as developers, residents, funders, community organizations, etc.) who are impacted by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program and evaluate their access to the program for the purpose of increasing access among those most impacted.
 - Conduct a racial equity impact assessment to analyze the effects, benefits and burdens of MHCF programs on people of different racial backgrounds, in order to identify equitable program improvements.

Homebuyers and Homeowners

- a. Partner with community organizations and initiatives to improve homeownership outcomes for BIPOC and historically underserved populations. *Lead division(s): HO.*
- b. Ensure that presentations to community partners emphasize our commitment to racial equity. *Lead division(s): HO.*
- c. Offer services and materials in other languages to improve access to homeownership in non-English-speaking communities *Lead division(s): HO.*