



Regional Equity Strategy Initial Work Plan

Scope of Work | March 2021

Introduction

The central Puget Sound region has a long history of racism that continues to cause enormous harm. Generations of discrimination, disinvestment, and inequitable opportunities have helped lay the groundwork for a region where people of color and white residents too often have completely different experiences.

As a planning agency, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) makes decisions that shape transportation, land use, and the built environment. The agency has a responsibility to dismantle systems of inequity and reimagine a region where race can no longer predict life outcomes. The region's vision for advancing prosperity, a healthy environment, housing choices, and great public spaces in vibrant urban centers is not available to everyone, especially people of color who face ongoing discrimination in education, health services, employment, and safe access to public spaces.

Project Summary

Guided by boards, committees, and stakeholders, PSRC will develop a Regional Equity Strategy to improve outcomes for marginalized communities and how the agency operates internally. The Strategy will include a suite of tools and resources co-created with a committee of members that represent the perspective of those most impacted by PSRC's policies and plans. PSRC will use this strategy to work with its members and stakeholders to identify existing inequities across the region and recommend targeted strategies to improve the region's capacity to grow in an equitable manner, recognizing the unique needs of marginalized groups.¹ PSRC will lead with race, which has proven to be an effective method for not only increasing equitable outcomes for people of color but developing a framework, tools, and resources that can remove barriers for other marginalized groups.

¹ This is commonly referred to as targeted universalism. Rather than seeking to establish policies and practices where everyone is treated the same, targeted universalism establishes universal goals while considering how different groups have faced, and continue to face, different barriers.



The Regional Equity Strategy will implement the policies in VISION 2050 that work towards equitable outcomes and will inform future regional and local planning. It will provide guidance to help members work in a coordinated manner towards the region's goal of providing an exceptional quality of life and opportunity for all. It will also provide guidance for staff to ensure the agency effectively uses its roles to advance racial equity.

Guiding Principles

The strategy will be guided by the following principles. The Regional Equity Strategy should:

- Support VISION 2050 and the roles of regional planning related to advancing equity (e.g., staff capacity building)
- Inform, complement, and advance future planning efforts at regional, countywide, and local levels to correct for historic and existing disparities, while improving outcomes in all communities
- Identify negative impacts and develop strategies to mitigate them for people of color, people with low incomes, and vulnerable populations
- Help members prioritize historically underserved communities for investments to ensure marginalized groups do not suffer from undue burdens and enjoy the benefits associated with increased growth
- Conduct inclusive engagement to identify and address the diverse needs of the region's residents

Background

What is equity? Equity is an overarching goal and key policy area addressed throughout VISION 2050, the long-range plan for the central Puget Sound region. Equity is defined as when *all people can attain the resources and opportunities that improve their quality of life and enable them to reach their full potential. Those affected by poverty, communities of color, and historically marginalized communities are engaged in decision-making processes, planning, and policy making* (VISION 2050 Glossary, pg. 161). Equity is achieved when one's identity cannot predict their life outcomes.

How is equity addressed in VISION 2050? VISION 2050 was developed with equity and equitable outcomes in mind. Equity is reflected in the desired outcomes and throughout all policy areas. It is also reflected in the VISION statement: *The central Puget Sound region provides an exceptional quality of life and opportunity for all, connected communities, a spectacular natural environment, and an innovative, thriving economy* (VISION 2050, pg. 1). The VISION 2050 plan presents an opportunity for the region to develop a coordinated effort to better assess and address issues related to this goal of creating an exceptional quality of life and opportunity for every resident; a region where being a member of a historically marginalized community does not impact or predict where someone lives, the quality of their education, their net worth, or the likelihood they will be incarcerated. More specifically, a new action in the Regional Collaboration chapter of VISION 2050 directs PSRC to develop a regional equity strategy to achieve this goal.



RC-Action-3 Regional Equity Strategy: PSRC, in coordination with member governments and community stakeholders, will develop a regional equity strategy intended to make equity central to PSRC's work and to support the 2024 local comprehensive plan updates. The strategy could include components such as:

- Creating and maintaining tools and resources, including data and outreach, to better understand how regional and local policies and actions affect our region's residents, specifically as they relate to people of color and people with low incomes.
- Developing strategies and best practices for centering equity in regional and local planning work, including inclusive community engagement, monitoring, and actions to achieve equitable development outcomes and mitigate displacement of vulnerable communities.
- Identifying implementation steps, including how to measure outcomes.
- Identifying mechanisms to prioritize access to funding to address inequities.
- Developing a plan and committing resources for an equity advisory group that can help provide feedback on and help implement the Regional Equity Strategy.
- Developing and adopting an equity impact tool for evaluating PSRC decisions and community engagement.

This action will provide guidance for updating regional plans, policies, and procedures as well as for required updates of local comprehensive plans, mandated by the state Growth Management Act in 2024, which will help address some of the greatest barriers to securing equitable outcomes in the region.

Why focus on equity? As in other parts of the country, the central Puget Sound region has a history of discrimination based on race, national origin, and other characteristics. Practices such as “redlining” and restrictive covenants, the relocation and internment of Japanese Americans, the expulsion of Chinese residents, and the restriction of Native Americans to reservations, have had long-lasting impacts on neighborhoods and residents throughout the region.² These practices disproportionately limited access to resources and created undue burdens for many people of color. Modern discriminatory practices (e.g., mortgage loan discrimination) continue to limit access to resources and create undue burdens. And contemporary neutral policies limiting opportunities for households that are less fortunate (e.g., exclusionary zoning) disproportionately impact communities of color, maintaining and widening racial gaps from previous generations. Because of the chain of choices made by government agencies and other institutions, racial inequities are pervasive and woven into the fabric of the region. Race continues to predict where people live and work, along with several other life outcomes. For example:

- African American and Hispanic / Latinx households are more likely to be cost burdened, regardless of housing tenure.
- The majority of Black and Hispanic / Latinx households are renters, while the majority of white and Asian households are homeowners.

² PSRC Fair Housing Equity Assessment for the Central Puget Sound Region (2014) - <https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/fairhousingequityassessment.pdf>

- Black (23.9%), American Indian (22.6%), and Hispanic (19.6%) residents in the Puget Sound region have about twice the rate of poverty than their white (8.9%) and Asian (10.9%) counterparts.
- The percent of people without a vehicle is approximately three to four times higher for communities of color than for the region and each of the four counties.
- Over half of American Indians and almost half of all Black and Hispanic/Latinx households live in areas of lower opportunity, while less than 40% of white households and less than one-third of Asian households live in these communities.

As the region becomes increasingly diverse, these outcomes will become increasingly important for the health of the region. This strategy will use a racial equity lens because centering the needs, perspectives, and desired solutions of BIPOC communities not only provides the opportunity to address the unique circumstances of these racial groups, but it also introduces a framework, tools, and resources that can be applied to other marginalized communities. Additionally, regions that remove barriers and reduce disparities maximize the ability of every resident and jurisdiction in the region, creating stronger economies, more engaged communities, and improved outcomes for all residents. Consequently, it is not solely a moral approach. It is an effective way to plan for the region's future.

What key equity issues will the strategy address and how will it address them? During the summer and fall of 2019, PSRC undertook an informal scoping process for the Regional Housing Strategy. During these discussions, staff explored stakeholders' thoughts on issues related to equity. Additional scoping conversations were conducted with Community Partners³. Many of their comments were adopted by the Growth Management Policy Board (GMPB) with unanimous approval and incorporated into RC-Action-3. Staff also combed through responses from the VISION 2050 public comment period for equity related recommendations.

The Regional Equity Strategy will seek to address issues identified in the scoping process⁴ through the following four key component categories: A) capacity building, B) data and research, C) community engagement, and D) best practices.

- **Key Issue: PSRC should work to develop a deeper understanding of racial and social equity.**
 - *A) Capacity building.*
 - **GARE Learning Cohort.** The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is an organization that works with government agencies across the country to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. PSRC staff will continue to work with GARE to build capacity to analyze and address policies, practices, and procedures in a way that reduces disparities experienced by people of color and allows PSRC to fulfill its VISION statement of providing an exceptional quality of life and opportunity for all (Start date: Q3 2019).

³ Community Partners is a group of local stakeholders established during the 2018 update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The group provides perspectives to PSRC on issues such as climate change, community engagement, affordable housing, etc., and offers unique viewpoints from the lens of local community-based organizations to help inform the development of PSRC plans, policies, and procedures.

⁴ Please see Appendix A for more details on the scoping process.

- **Equity Related Learning Opportunities.** PSRC will provide learning opportunities for staff and board members to develop a deeper understanding of racial and social equity and its role in the agency’s work. This will equip staff and board members with the tools to develop a plan for clearly, thoroughly, and consistently addressing equity (Start date: Q4 2019).
- **Key Issue: Equitable outcomes are important and data highlights areas of concern and progress.**
 - *B) Data and research.*
 - **Equity Analyses Supporting Regional Planning.** These documents explore how race, income, and other factors intersect to affect residents’ access to opportunity in the region and how growth may impact vulnerable populations in the future. Building on these documents will provide a more nuanced understanding of the story behind both the Opportunity and Displacement Risk Maps. Analyses have and will be prepared for agency work program products, including the VISION 2050 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) (Start date: Q3 2019).
 - **Opportunity and Displacement Risk Mapping.** These mapping tools help users identify relative access to resources and risk of displacement, respectively. Expanding on these tools will provide jurisdictions with insights on where policies have led to increased opportunity for vulnerable populations and where they should target future efforts to improve educational, health, or other outcomes (Start date: Q1 2020).
 - **Equity Dashboard.** This public-facing dashboard will allow PSRC members to track progress on relevant equity related goals and adjust policies to reduce disparities when necessary. It will also allow communities to hold PSRC accountable as the agency attempts to create a region where race no longer predicts life outcomes and people have improved choices in where they live, how they travel, and where they recreate (Start date: Q1 2021).
 - **Existing Conditions Report.** This report will provide an overview of existing disparities in the region on topics related to transportation, housing, economics, etc. Having an accurate understanding of the region’s existing conditions will help inform member jurisdictions about current gaps and where strategies should be implemented to address these issues. It will essentially serve as the “starting point” to move toward the region’s vision of providing an exceptional quality of life and opportunity for all (Start date: Q2 2021).
- **Key Issue: Authentic engagement with marginalized communities is imperative to developing a more holistic understanding of problems and solutions.**
 - *C) Community engagement.*
 - **Equity Advisory Committee.** PSRC will develop a structure and operating procedures for an Equity Advisory Committee. This committee will help provide feedback on and help implement the Regional Equity Strategy. PSRC will explore funding options to resource

- members as well as identify which communities and demographics should be represented through broad outreach (Start date: Q1 2021).
- **Support Anti-displacement Organizations.** These organizations develop locally appropriate and community-driven solutions for displacement. PSRC will work to identify these groups and connect them to member jurisdictions to help support this work (Start date: Q2 2021).
 - **Inclusive Engagement for Regional Planning.** PSRC will center racial equity in a wide array of innovative strategies to engage residents that have historically been underrepresented in PSRC planning efforts. This process will help leverage the insights of communities most impacted by PSRC's policies and plans, which will help cultivate a more holistic understanding of barriers and potential solutions. When appropriate, the strategies will seek to move beyond simply informing community members to consulting, involving, and collaborating with them (Start date: Q1 2021).
- **Key Issue: Mitigation strategies, case studies, and resources are necessary to inform jurisdictions on how to ensure marginalized groups do not suffer from undue burdens and enjoy the benefits associated with increased growth.**
 - *D) Best practices.*
 - **Equity Impact Tool.** This tool will explicitly incorporate equity into the decision-making process. It will be used to forecast and prevent unintended, harmful consequences on marginalized groups. It will help reduce inequities by encouraging community engagement to address potential blind spots, identifying strategies to mitigate unintended consequences, and developing a structure to hold agencies accountable by evaluating the impact of their plans, policies, and actions on marginalized groups (Start date: Q2 2021).
 - **Equity Toolkit.** This toolkit will support jurisdictions in developing equity related strategies such as residential, commercial, and cultural anti-displacement plans that may result from planning, public investments, private redevelopment, and market pressure. This toolkit will include a range of strategies that are relevant to PSRC members' local context, the circumstances under which tools should be explored, and the regulatory incentive for using them (Start date: Q2 2021).

In addition to external scoping, during the winter of 2020, PSRC staff engaged in a series of internal facilitated discussions centered on exploring innovative strategies and actions the agency can implement to achieve various racial equity goals. These actions will be woven into the Regional Equity Strategy as the work progresses.⁵

What is this strategy's relationship with other regional and local equity work? The strategy will build on regional policy in the VISION 2050 plan and its local implementation through countywide planning policies and comprehensive plan updates. However, PSRC is not the first to explore issues related to racial and social equity in the central Puget Sound region. BIPOC communities have worked for

⁵ Please see Appendix A for more details on these goals and facilitated conversations.

generations with jurisdictions to address these issues. The strategy will extend on this work as well as the equity related work of PSRC members' such as Sound Transit's Racial Equity Tool, King County Metro's Equity Cabinet, and the City of Tacoma's Equity Index. Moreover, when relevant, the strategy will inform future regional work such as the Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Centers Framework, and Regional Economic Strategy. For example, using the Equity Impact Tool could minimize potential unintended burdens resulting from the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Additionally, PSRC staff will continue to coordinate with members and other stakeholders to ensure the strategy provides value at the regional and local level.

Roles and Responsibilities

Engagement with a wide array of stakeholders is a critical element in the development of an effective strategy. The Executive Board will lead this process and may consider adopting the strategy as warranted. Staff will provide regular briefings on key topics to incorporate their input. The Regional Staff Committee and Equity Advisory Committee will serve in an advisory role and provide their subject matter expertise throughout the process. The project will leverage the strong ties of Equity Advisory Committee members to incorporate the views of marginalized communities that historically have been underrepresented in the PSRC planning process. Additional updates will be provided for the Growth Management Policy Board (GMPB), the Transportation Policy Board (TPB), the Central Puget Sound Economic Development District Board (EDD), and relevant PSRC committees.

Process and Timeline

The work plan was finalized in March 2021. Initial phases of the strategy will be finalized in 2022. This work will be ongoing.



Appendix A:

Regional Equity Strategy Scoping

During the summer and fall of 2019, PSRC undertook an informal scoping process for RC-Action-3 and H-Action-1, which directs PSRC to develop a regional housing strategy. PSRC staff interviewed 14 stakeholders to help inform the scope, methodology, and deliverables of both actions.

Scoping interviews were conducted with staff at the following local jurisdictions and agencies:

- King County
- Pierce County
- Snohomish County
- City of Bainbridge Island
- City of Edmonds
- City of Kent
- City of Puyallup
- City of Seattle
- City of Tacoma
- A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH)
- Snohomish County Alliance for Affordable Housing (AHA)
- Hilltop Action Coalition
- Housing Development Consortium of King County
- Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties (MBAKS)

The vast majority of interviewees were in favor of addressing equity regionally. They also noted some local concerns they believe PSRC can help address through a Regional Equity Strategy. Some common themes from these conversations included:

- *Equitable outcomes are important and data highlights areas of concern and progress.* These data can help jurisdictions tell relevant stories, better understand the experiences of residents, and make arguments that are salient to decision makers. They can also show disproportionate impacts for certain communities and reveal nuances in outcomes that are often overlooked. Acknowledging these disparities can be challenging, and stakeholders requested guidance on how to present this information and for PSRC to serve as a leader.
- *Displacement is a major concern, and everyone has a role to play to ensure current residents can equitably benefit from future investments.* Interviewees noted that displacement was impacting not only residents but businesses and cultural institutions across the region. Mitigation strategies, case studies, and resources for jurisdictions were consistently requested.
- *Authentic engagement with marginalized communities is challenging but imperative.* Many jurisdictions recognize the importance of having members of marginalized groups in the room during policy discussions but have struggled engaging with these underrepresented groups. They also noted how stories from marginalized groups can serve as a powerful complement to quantitative data. Several interviewees noted that a lack of trust, resources, and time have



served as barriers to community engagement. They encouraged PSRC to not only develop an equity advisory group but to share insights with member jurisdictions on how to bring community voices to the table.

- *PSRC should work to develop a deeper understanding of racial and social equity.* Some jurisdictions and community-based organizations suggested that PSRC should explore strategies to help staff and board members understand issues related to equity and the role government agencies have played in creating and perpetuating disparities, so it can more appropriately address these issues in its products, plans, and policies.

Additional scoping conversations were conducted with the Community Partners, which is a group of local stakeholders established during the 2018 update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The group provides perspectives to PSRC on issues such as climate change, community engagement, affordable housing, etc., and offers unique viewpoints from the lens of local community-based organizations to help inform the development of PSRC plans, policies, and procedures. Community Partners shared thoughts related to the Regional Equity Strategy during the VISION 2050 comment period. Many of their comments were adopted by the Growth Management Policy Board (GMPB) with unanimous approval and incorporated into RC-Action-3. PSRC staff also addressed these comments in more detail at a meeting in winter 2019, and through a follow-up survey. Some common themes from the meeting and survey included:

- Community Partners group members suggested PSRC develop an Equity Advisory Group to help provide feedback on and help implement the Regional Equity Strategy. The group also shared that PSRC should identify funding to resource members, identify which communities / demographics should be represented through broad outreach, and develop a plan to determine how the group's feedback would be incorporated. In addition to the Equity Advisory Group, members noted that equitable engagement is critical and cannot be replaced by an advisory group. This includes identifying and promoting strategies to ensure marginalized groups from across the region are included in the planning process.
- Some group members recommended creating anti-displacement toolkits and plans to mitigate potential physical, economic, and cultural displacement resulting from redevelopment and market pressure. These toolkits and plans could be implemented by member jurisdictions to help marginalized residents, businesses, and cultural institutions remain in their communities and enjoy the benefits associated with increased growth.
- The group requested a public-facing dashboard to track equity related performance metrics at the regional level. This would allow PSRC to assess if the region is meeting its goals, and for jurisdictions to determine if they are making progress, be held accountable if they are not, and adjust policies as needed to reduce racial/economic disparities. Several members of the Community Partners group specifically recommended developing displacement thresholds, which would capture significant disparities in displacement between white households and households of color. These thresholds would help member jurisdictions determine when it is necessary to implement anti-displacement tools and strategies.
- Responses to the survey suggested that it was important to craft an Equity Impact Tool, which helps organizations systemically weave equity into their plans, policies, and procedures.



Feedback from the survey also noted that several tools have already been developed. However, these tools can be cumbersome and overwhelming to implement. It will be important for PSRC to adopt the features of these tools that are most relevant, while streamlining it to increase its utility.

On June 3, 2020, PSRC staff that attended GARE trainings met with the Management Team to propose agency-wide racial equity goals. As a follow-up, during the winter of 2020, the GARE Cohort hosted a series of facilitated, small-group discussions with staff to leverage their unique understanding of the agency and determine actions PSRC can take to advance these goals. Below are key takeaways from the discussions that will inform additional actions that will be included in the Regional Equity Strategy moving forward:

Goal #1: Staff & boards understand how racial equity relates to work

- *Learning opportunities can serve as a level-setting opportunity.* Learning opportunities provided to staff and board members should clearly highlight the thread between past and present racial inequities, and how PSRC's work relates to these disparities. Learning opportunities should use consistent terminology, explain why PSRC is leading with race, articulate how this is different from geographic equity, etc.
- *Scoping should be used to complement, not duplicate, racial equity efforts.* Departments can survey best practices, and explore what other agencies are doing and how PSRC can complement these efforts. Events like Peer Networking can be used to host sessions on equity topics, provide opportunities for members to celebrate successes and share lessons learned, and coordinate work. Each department can also determine how to channel these practices into their respective work programs to complement the equity work of our regional partners.
- *Equity should be put at the forefront of PSRC work.* Equity issues should be brought up at the beginning of projects and effectively integrated into the work we do. It should not serve as an afterthought. This requires allotting time for trainings, developing tools, and exploring how to incorporate equity into work programs, tasks, performance goals, etc. It also requires time for staff to maintain an ongoing dialogue with supervisors to explore strategies and establish clear expectations related to issues of racial equity. Standing equity agenda item at team/division meetings could help facilitate this process.
- *Data and tools can serve as helpful resources.* Staff requested more race specific qualitative and quantitative data to inform work across all departments. This may require the agency to invest resources to oversample people of color and capture their experience in the region related to housing, transportation, economics, etc. In addition to data, tools such as the racial equity toolkit and equity impact tool will also be helpful.

Goal #2: PSRC's workforce reflects the diversity of our region

- *Increase racial diversity in our staff pipeline and improve our recruitment efforts.* This can be accomplished through a variety of different strategies. PSRC can track how people of color learn about our job opportunities and make improvements based on what works. Additionally, PSRC can post job announcements in different languages, share them with different communities, and seek to increase overall awareness of PSRC work. The agency can also increase opportunities upstream in the workforce pipeline (e.g., internships and job shadowing opportunities for students at schools with a racially diverse student body).



- *Use best practices for application and interview process.* Research has shown that implicit bias plays a role in marginalizing communities of color during the application process. PSRC can anonymize job applications during the review process to reduce the impact of this bias. Additionally, PSRC can diversify interview panels, use an equity lens on the interview score sheet, and ask interview questions about lived experience and racial equity.
- *Workforce diversity strategies should move beyond inclusion; it should address retention and career advancement too.* PSRC should encourage professional development and publicize agency training resources. The agency should also create a transparent process for promotions and career development, so all staff are aware of this process regardless of their social networks, or lack thereof. Additionally, there should be a process in place to ensure equity related to compensation / benefits. The agency should also seek to accommodate different life circumstances by removing barriers (e.g., promote telework to address long commutes that result from the displacement of communities of color). And lastly, PSRC should prioritize hiring, developing, and promoting junior level staff from communities of color.

Goal #3: Communities of color inform decision-making processes

- *PSRC staff have a role in amplifying the voices of community members.* Historically, different groups have been actively prevented from participating in the public process. We now have a community that is built for some, but not all. Involving people of color in public processes addresses our history and builds our future, ensuring we have an inclusive community and environment. As PSRC staff we don't have all of the answers. Going out into the community and meeting people where they are helps add their voices to all of our plans, programs, and projects. By listening to community, we can bring this information back to our Boards as important data points in the decision-making process.
- *Making our work more accessible could lead to more meaningful engagement.* PSRC could do a better job in explaining the purpose of our agency and the impact our decisions have on people's daily lives. By increasing knowledge of PSRC and relating our work to daily impacts, more people may be interested in getting involved with the decisions being made. To do this we can use past PSRC work to point to what's happening in communities today.
- *We need to do more than our traditional tools and techniques of engagement.* The tools used to effectively engage communities' changes with time, by project, and the community we're connecting to. PSRC should not rely on the same methods of outreach and engagement for every project, but instead be more flexible. This includes using new tools to support people at our meetings, including compensation and food, and using new methods, such as online involvement, to connect to new audiences.
- *We should start every project by understanding who is impacted and how they can impact the decision-making process.* All of PSRC's projects and decisions have impacts on the lives of people living and working in our region. At the outset of each project we can work to understand who will be impacted by the decisions made and develop a strategy for engaging these communities and elevating their voices at the point of decision-making.

Goal #4: Agency uses its role – convening, education, data, etc.—to advance racial equity in the region and be a leader both for member jurisdictions and other regions in the country.

- *PSRC can use its existing communications platforms to elevate racial equity conversations.* PSRC's existing communication channels – website, blog posts, social media, interactions with



Boards and Committees, PSRC staff serving on external groups, etc.— can help to ensure racial equity is a part of the dialogue and to foster ongoing conversations about racial equity and its importance in planning at all levels of government.

- *PSRC can use its data and modeling expertise to support local jurisdictions.* While many local jurisdictions have the interest and political will to better address racial equity, they do not have the expertise and/or capacity to deeply engage in racial equity work. PSRC can continue to work with local jurisdictions to develop data tools and resources to support local efforts.
- *PSRC can push the state of the practice forward.* Currently, there are some aspects of racial equity that are difficult to answer using existing data sources and analysis methodologies. Acknowledging the current successes and gaps in racial equity analyses is a critical step in moving the practice forward and looking for new data sources and ways to assess data to better understand past, current, and future inequities.

Goal #5: PSRC spends resources to improve equity outcomes

- *Encourage diversity in subcontracting.* Encouraging PSRC contractors to work with businesses owned by people of color can make this a priority for these firms and expand the resumes of marginalized businesses. In addition to encouraging applicants to subcontract with businesses owned by people of color through various application questions, we could refer applicants to a list of potential firms that would qualify to make this a more attainable goal. Staff noted that this is the most direct action we can take to improve the livelihoods of underrepresented communities in our region.
- *Break down project into different deliverables.* Because businesses owned by people of color are typically smaller in scale, PSRC could also divide projects into various smaller deliverables. For example, a study could be broken up into tasks such as facilitation, data analysis, final report, etc. Instead of paying one consultant to do everything, PSRC could manage these separate, smaller contracts. This could help businesses of color grow and gain experience, and ultimately increase diversity in the pool of consultants.
- *Center equity in the contracting process.* Many staff members highlighted that PSRC should apply an equity lens to this process. Staff noted that PSRC should gather data to assess the current racial disparities in contracting (e.g., how much of our budget do we spend on disadvantaged businesses). Policies and evaluation criteria would institutionalize this process and help hold the agency accountable for this work moving forward.
- *Expand marketing and increase pool.* To improve racial equity in contracting, staff shared ideas about how PSRC could reach more potential contractors and vendors and cast a wider net. Staff suggested advertising widely and publicizing opportunities with community organizations and partnering with member jurisdictions, and potentially using consultants located outside the region. Another focus could be improving and expanding the RFP database and developing a larger roster of preselected firms, with information on what they do and if they are owned by people of color and/or women.
- *Increase time for contracting process.* Staff commented that a time crunch may lead to using a limited number of consultants. Ensuring there is enough time to fully research the field of consultants and vendors available to do the work could result in more equitable outcomes. Staff could seek out recommendations from partner agencies and professional organizations, use a Request for Qualifications, and research best practices. The agency could also provide training to assist staff in managing the contracting process.

