



Board Report

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**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 18, 2021**

SUBJECT: FEBRUARY 2021 EQUITY AND RACE PROGRAM UPDATE

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE February 2021 status report on the Equity and Race Program.

ISSUE

This report provides an update on Metro's Equity and Race Program.

BACKGROUND

Metro defines Equity as both an outcome and a process to address racial, socioeconomic, and gender disparities, to ensure fair and just access - with respect to where you begin and your capacity to improve from that starting point - to opportunities, including jobs, housing, education, mobility options, and healthier communities. It is achieved when one's outcomes in life are not predetermined, in a statistical or experiential sense, on their racial, economic, or social identities. It requires community informed and needs-based provision, implementation, and impact of services, programs, and policies that reduce and ultimately prevent disparities.

Metro's Equity Platform ("Platform"), which provides a framework for advancing equity, was approved by the Metro Board of Directors ("Board") in March 2018 (Attachment A). The core objective is to increase access to opportunities including housing, jobs, healthcare, education, and other key determinants of health and thriving communities. The Platform is explicit in its focus on the vast disparities that exist in access to opportunity and is intended to help identify and implement projects or programs that reduce and ultimately eliminate those disparities. It is driven by access needs, not geographic equality, though some disparities have a geographic element. The Platform has been incorporated into Metro's Vision 2028 Strategic Plan and must be a critical factor in our decision making. In August 2020, Metro published an Equity and Race Program Update (Attachment A) outlining the activities taken under the leadership of Metro's new Executive Officer, Equity and Race and plans to continue implementing the Metro Equity Platform Framework adopted by the Board in March 2018.

DISCUSSION

Updates on the Office Equity and Race's staff recruitments and program progress over the last six months are outlined below:

A. Equity and Race Staff Recruitments

The Office of Equity and Race (OER) received approval to hire three full time staff members. In October 2020, the OER posted recruitments for the three staff positions and conducted interviews in late November through mid-December. Offers have been made for two of the positions.

B. Measure and Define: Applying an Equity Lens to Decision Making

Under the Measure and Define pillar, staff has focused on developing tools and processes to help staff understand the benefits and burdens of our services, programs, and policies, how they are shaped by disparities and gaps in opportunity, and how we can make more equitable decisions. In the fall of 2020, Metro launched the Metro Budget Equity Assessment Tool (MBEAT). Staff provided the Board a summary of the development process and findings from the Mid Fiscal Year 20-21 pilot in January 2021 (Attachment B). This was the first equity assessment to be integrated into one of Metro's agencywide processes. Implementation highlighted the benefits of several new budget requests for marginalized and/or vulnerable communities, as well as potential barriers or harms to address and adjustments to improve access. It also highlighted a need for broader training to help staff think through how investments, projects, programs, and policies might cause harm or not benefit all as intended, given historic and current disparities and systemic inequities.

The mid fiscal year pilot served as a first step in building a foundation for an iterative process where Metro applies an equity lens at different points through planning, implementation, and funding decisions to ensure that Metro's process and outcomes are more equitable. The MBEAT will apply to new, expanded scope, or reduced budgetary requests. Additionally, the OER is preparing for the development of an agency-wide equity study to assess the equity of the entire budget and existing programs, services, and policies; create a baseline understanding of key disparities, challenges, successes, and opportunities; and develop strategies to address the disparities and challenges, and build upon the successes and opportunities. Lastly, staff will work to finalize an Equity Tool for project and program development, initiate pilot use, and determine the threshold for use of that tool and the Rapid Equity Assessment which the OER developed.

C. Listen and Learn: Supporting More Equitable Community Engagement

Under the Listen and Learn pillar, staff has focused on improving outreach and engagement efforts in target communities and supporting easier and more consistent partnership with Community Based Organizations (CBOs). The Board voted to support Proposition 16 (Prop. 16) on the November 2020 ballot, which would have legalized affirmative action. While Prop. 16 did not pass, staff developed a plan with strategies that better support the Board's desire to rectify any underutilization of people of color and women in employment, education, and contracting, within legal constraints (Attachment C). Accordingly, the OER is working with the Communication Department to develop and use voluntary demographic surveys at engagement and outreach events to establish baseline demographic information to help Metro understand how well we are engaging targeted communities and ensure

representative feedback on our work. We are also preparing to conduct a community survey and other engagement activities on community perceptions of equity and racial justice related to Metro. We will return to the Board with updates on each action before the end of the fiscal year. Finally, to encourage and support Metro engagement with CBOs, OER is working with staff from the Communications and Planning departments and CBOs from across Los Angeles County to finalize Metro's CBO Partnership Strategy. Staff will return to the board in Spring 2021 with an update.

D. Focus and Deliver: Agencywide Project Support

Under the Focus and Deliver pillar, the Executive Officer, Equity and Race has continued to assist with new and on-going projects to help apply an equity lens, grapple with equity related challenges, and support targeted community engagement in this challenging virtual environment. From the Public Safety Advisory Committee to the Joint Development Policy Paper, the Adopt-A-Bike Mini Grant Program to the Fareless System Initiative and several others, she has served on steering committees, consulted on plans, helped apply rapid equity assessments, and otherwise worked to support projects as they explore how to create more inclusive project development processes and plan for equitable project outcomes. These efforts will continue and be enhanced as Metro soon expands the Office of Equity and Race and continues to train its Equity Liaisons and others to support this work.

E. Train and Grow: A Culture of Learning

Under the Train and Grow pillar, staff has focused on supporting a culture of learning, as we strive to build a more equitable and inclusive agency. In December 2020, Metro launched the JEDI Book Club. The book club supports staff development under Metro's Equity Platform and helps normalize conversations and expand shared understandings of key concepts related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. While staff participation is voluntary, it serves as one way to help meet Individual Performance Plan (IPP) goal 5.7 ("Metro will build and nurture a diverse, inspired, and high-performing workforce"). Just shy of 140 people signed up to read, "So You Want to Talk about Race," by Ijeoma Oluo. The first book club event was held on January 27, 2021.

Metro will continue to provide and explore other opportunities for our staff to be trained and grow. The launch of the MBEAT has highlighted a need for a training to help staff think through how investments, projects, programs, and policies might cause harm or not benefit all as intended. Accordingly, OER continues to work with the Office of Civil Rights and Inclusion to explore the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings for all staff. Additionally, the Metro Equity Liaisons continue to meet twice a month, discussing books, articles, and videos to help expand their understanding disparities and systemic inequities in the context of Metro's work. They are also helping with MBEAT implementation within each department, have introduced and encouraged the application of the Rapid Equity Assessment to their respective departments, and will help pilot the project Equity Tool.

In summary, these highlighted initiatives and actions should not be viewed as the only elements that will impact, support, or add to the implementation of the Equity Platform. The Platform will be carried out through an ongoing portfolio of agency actions.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Implementation of the Equity Platform will in many cases involve shaping and adjusting the direction of current projects within existing budgets. In other cases, it will require new activities and program development. Where a proposed equity-based initiative requires stand-alone revenues, a separate budget action would be taken.

Impact to Budget

There is no impact to the existing FY20-21 budget as a result of this Receive and File report.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

This recommendation supports strategic plan goals #1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 by helping Metro to target infrastructure and service investments toward those with the greatest needs and enhancing communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity. Implementation of the equity framework is an explicit recommended action under the goals 1.1 and 3.3, and it supports actions under 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will report on milestones achieved on individual Equity Platform actions and provide overall updates on an ongoing basis, as appropriate.

ATTACHMENTS

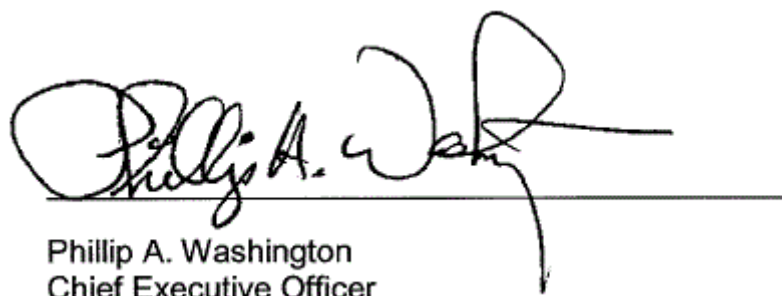
Attachment A - Equity and Race Program Update 8.20.2020

Attachment B - Mid-Year FY 20-21 Budget Equity Assessment

Attachment C - Motion 31.1 Response - Assembly Constitutional Amendment 5

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