



## REPORT

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Meeting Date: July 20, 2021  
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager of Arts Culture and Community Services and the Chief Equity Officer

SUBJECT: Equity Framework

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- A. THAT Council approve the proposed Equity Framework, which provides common understanding and a united approach to equity, to be used by all City departments.
- B. THAT Council direct the Equity Office to conduct a benchmarking and goal setting exercise in the Focus Areas identified in the Equity Framework, work collaboratively with departments to identify actions and tracking procedures, and provide an update to Council on progress on an annual basis.
- C. THAT Council refer the Equity Framework for consideration of adoption to Vancouver Public Library Board, the Vancouver Police Board, and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation.

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides background on the creation of the City of Vancouver's Equity Framework, summarizes key concepts of the Equity Framework (produced in full in Appendix A), and outlines a plan for implementation.

The work on the Equity Framework began in 2018 as an initiative of staff, and in response to the calls from community members to "get our house in order". Council allocated funding in support of this work in the 2019 budget. The Social Policy team in Arts, Culture and Community Services led the project for over two years and as part of this, identified the need for ongoing leadership within the City. When the new Equity Office was subsequently established in the

Office of the City Manager it assumed shared leadership for the Framework. Should Council approve this report the Equity Office will have oversight over the implementation of the Equity Framework organization-wide going forward.

This work begins with an acknowledgement of wide-spread and profound inequities in our society built on a history of white supremacy and colonialism. Many of these inequities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted by the awakening to racial injustice that has characterized the past year. The Equity Framework builds on and supports (but does not replace) the City of Reconciliation Framework, which remains the central vehicle for delivering on the City's commitments to Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh and to the urban Indigenous communities. It also supports (and does not replace) a host of existing community facing policies and initiatives.

The Equity Framework is a conceptual, foundational document that describes what is meant by the word equity, why doing work on equity is essential, what key concepts orient the City's internal processes and decision making in this area, and how these concepts can be embedded into the City's work through individual and organizational commitments. Crucially, it defines the City's equity work to be centered on four notions: Indigenous Rights, racial justice, intersectionality, and systems approach to change.

The Equity Framework is not an action plan. Instead it lays the foundation for departmental action planning and for culture change within the City of Vancouver as an organization. Accountability for the realization of its vision lies with leaders across all City departments, and with Mayor and Council. It will be most effective when City staff enact the equity commitments in their day-to-day work and routine decision-making. Engagement with equity is an ongoing learning process for the City, and consequently the Equity Framework will need to evolve over time and be renewed every three years or so, to respond to the evolving nature of this work.

Special gratitude for the contents of Equity Framework goes to the many individuals involved in its creation, including members of the External Advisory Committee, Council Advisory Bodies consulted, the Internal Advisory Committee, and the Indigenous, Black and other racialized staff who shared generously of their expertise and lived experience to inform this work.

### **COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS**

*\*Please note: These do not comprise a complete record of all previous decisions by successive Councils related to the issues in this report.*

[Framework for City of Reconciliation](#), 2014

[Healthy City Strategy](#), 2014

[Supporting Trans\\* Equality and an Inclusive Vancouver](#), 2016

[Because it's 2016: Action on Gender Equality](#), 2016

[Access to City Services Without Fear for Residents with Uncertain or No Immigration Status](#), 2016

[Making the City of Vancouver a Living Wage Employer](#), 2016

[Vancouver Poverty Reduction Plan](#), 2017

[Vancouver – A City for All Women: Women’s Equity Strategy 2018-2028](#), 2018

[Accessibility Strategy](#), 2018

[Apology for Historical Discrimination against Chinese People](#), 2018

[Scoping of a Colonial Audit](#), 2019

[Diversity on Council Advisory Bodies Policy](#), 2019

[Culture|Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture, Vancouver Culture Plan 2020-2029](#), 2019

[Motion to develop a comprehensive gendered intersectional strategy](#), 2019

[Resilient Vancouver Strategy](#), 2019

[Standing Up to the Rise in Anti-Asian Racism, All Racism & Hate Crimes](#), 2020

[Safety for Residents with Precarious Status](#), 2020

[Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community Led Safety Initiatives](#), 2020

[Women’s Equity Strategy, Phase II](#), 2021

[Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the City of Vancouver](#), 2021

[Komagata Maru Apology and Remembrance Day Proclamation](#), 2021

Funding for work on redress including anti-Black racism strategy, South Asian apology, Chinatown Transformation, anti-racism action plan, Red Woman Rising and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry recommendations, UN Safe Spaces for Women and Girls Scoping Study is included in the 2021 budget.

### **CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

Subject to Council’s approval, the Equity Framework will set the tone for the City’s efforts to advance equity and provide a basis to align our existing efforts and identify strategic next steps. The City Leadership Team has been engaged in the completion of the Equity Framework and recognizes the necessity for change to the internal culture of the organization to realize the vision articulated in this document. The responsibility for implementation of this essential change sits with the City Manager and the City Leadership Team.

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

### **REPORT**

#### **Background/Context**

Vancouver is located on the unceded traditional territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh). The City acknowledges that these

lands were taken by the Crown without consent, displacing Indigenous communities from their lands and cultural practices. In addition, attempts to assimilate Indigenous cultures, languages, family and economic systems into Euro-centric culture, language, family and economic systems were imposed. Vancouver is built on the history of this colonialism and white supremacy, a history that has and continues to negatively impact us all – but particularly Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, who, by design, have not benefitted. In addition, other intersecting systems such as patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, homophobia, and sexism further coalesce to produce unequal outcomes of benefit and/or disadvantage based on how people are situated within these intersections.

Vancouver is proud of its diversity. As one of the most diverse cities in Canada, Vancouver boasts of a population in which about half the residents are “visible minorities”, according to the 2016 Census. Urban Indigenous communities, Black Canadians and other racialized communities, and in particular those who are new immigrants, currently face significant barriers to thriving in Vancouver, as do those who are marginalized because of their sex, gender identity or expression, sexuality, ability, age and other factors. Struggling -or refusing- to live up to the norms of a middle or upper class, white, heteronormative society underlies many of the challenges ranging from ability to access appropriate housing and jobs, to safety in public space. The 2016 Census showed that only 36% of Vancouverites in Canada’s highest 10% of incomes are Indigenous or racialized. Meanwhile, the percentage of Indigenous and racialized Vancouverites in Canada’s lowest income bracket (bottom 10% of incomes) is 61% and there is significant variation among Indigenous and racialized groups. Council confirmed the need to increase focus on diversity and critical social issues as one of its five key priorities in 2020.

The need for this Framework first emerged in 2017 when staff were working with the community committee created to inform the Poverty Reduction Plan, as part of the implementation of the Healthy City Strategy. Committee members expressed concern that a nuanced and intersectional understanding of equity was not shared consistently across City departments and urged us to do some internal work. Similar calls have been heard from various other community leaders, including from the local women’s movement that has been asking for intersectional reviews of the City’s internal operations and budgets over the years. As a large, public and visible land owner, regulator, service provider, employer, advocate, and convener, the City has influence over many aspects of community life and is called upon to be a leader. Meanwhile, the number of equity-related Council directives and internal staff-led initiatives have multiplied as the societal conversation on justice has intensified, which means that equity related efforts have gone from being the focus for a few staff to the many, without a shared definition or unified approach. The Equity Framework fills a knowledge and coordination gap in this context.

Equity Framework documents exist in some other Canadian municipalities considered to be forerunners in this area.

- In 2019, the City of Edmonton adopted [\*The Art of Inclusion: Our Diversity & Inclusion Framework\*](#), which is an “aspirational view of an inclusive workplace and the path to get there”. Much like the proposed Equity Framework for Vancouver, Edmonton’s document provides definitions, an approach (based on GBA+), and focus areas. Edmonton’s plan also contains a list of objectives and action items for a 5-year period.
- In 2020, Halifax Regional Municipality adopted its [\*Diversity and Inclusion Framework\*](#). HRM’s document provides definitions and delineates roles and responsibilities. It also defines areas of work, objectives, examples of best practices and success measures. Similar to the proposed Equity Framework for Vancouver, HRM’s Framework sets the stage for implementation and evaluation plans to be created by individual business units.

- City of Ottawa has an [Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook](#), first created in 2010 and revised twice. This document provides definitions and core concepts, as well as some relatively specific instructions on how to embed the lens into some aspects of the City's work such as communications, supervising staff, and strategic planning.

Locally, the work of local governments in this area is in early stages. A 2020 [CBC News analysis](#) of the 21 municipalities in Metro Vancouver found that Vancouver and New Westminster were the only two municipalities that apply an equity or anti-racism policies in a detailed way to their operations. The City of New Westminster Council endorsed an interim [Equity Key Performance Indicators Framework](#) in May 2021, to be used while staff are developing a larger DEIAR (diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism) framework which is expected in 2022. The City of Victoria established an Equity Office in early 2021, and is currently [developing an Equity Framework](#) that will apply an equity lens to all City operations, programs and services.

### **Strategic Analysis**

Historically, efforts to tackle social inequities and injustices have focused mainly on treating everyone the same, with inadequate consideration for how people are situated within our society. In assuming that we all start from a level playing field, the struggle for **equality** misses the mark as it advocates for **universal strategies** that inadvertently reproduces the same inequities it seeks to address. Indeed, research has shown that these efforts are not serving the most vulnerable in our community and have contributed to widening the gap between the have and the have nots.

On the other hand, **equity** acknowledges that because of the ways in which society assigns values and norms, people start from different levels depending on how they are situated. Due to the created uneven playing field, efforts to address inequities require careful consideration of the ways in which people are situated. While we all have shared goals of achieving wellbeing and prosperity for our families and future generations, we need to develop **targeted strategies** that attend to the existing barriers that prevent various groups from realizing our shared goals. In particular, targeted strategies are needed to address the unique nature of inequities faced by Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. It is crucial that we foreground race now, even as we employ an intersectional approach that factors in diversity of circumstances.

As an institution that is implicated in institutional and systemic racism, the City of Vancouver is presented with an opportunity to build on its current work and renew its commitment to eradicate racism, reduce harm and uphold the rights and dignity of all people. The actions that are needed cannot be aimed at restoring our current structures, but must reimagine new ways of valuing and caring for people. That includes getting comfortable with equity over equality. This shift is already demonstrated in many Council decisions and within some City departments. By articulating the need for equity explicitly, the Equity Framework will accelerate the adoption of this mindset across the organization.

### **Project structure and process**

The Equity Framework was developed in a uniquely collaborative way across City departments and in conversation with key partners in the community. Development was led by the Arts, Culture and Community Services (ACCS) department, with a cross-departmental leadership team, affinity staff groups and external advisory groups that informed this work. The Equity Office will lead the development of an action plan and implementation of the Framework.

### City Leadership Team

The City's Leadership Team (CLT) provided strategic oversight and the ACCS General Manager acted as the project sponsor.

### Internal Leadership Team

The Internal Leadership Team consisted of unit directors and managers and key staff working on equity initiatives across departments. This team brought their professional expertise, lived experiences and insights on how their departments function and how change could be supported. It also constituted a type of Community of Practice where emerging practices and other learnings could be shared. This team's composition ensured that change flows from the top of the organization through to the front lines and horizontally across the organization – an approach which recognizes that decisions and leadership should rest at different levels of the organization. As members begin to embed equity in projects within their home departments, they are well positioned to champion and assist with guiding strategic level planning.

### Affinity Staff Groups

The focus of this Framework on Indigenous Rights and racial justice meant that it was important for staff to have conversations about race at the City. Separate sessions were convened for staff who identify as Indigenous, Black, mixed race, people of color and white to create safe spaces for sharing. These affinity groups were modeled after other municipalities that are committed to racial equity and were led by external facilitators. While the affinity staff groups were part of the engagement process for the Framework development, they also provided a culturally safe and reciprocal environment to strengthen networks and connections among staff. Some have since transitioned into ongoing Employee Resource Groups, supported by the Equity Office, to provide a space for staff to collectively determine the types of supports that are needed as staff navigate City structures.

### External Advisory and Council Advisory Committees

Engagement with external partners, including Council Advisory Committees, was a core part of the Framework development process. The External Advisory Committee consisted of leaders with lived experience from sectors such as non-profit, Indigenous organizations, academic, financial and legal institutions. Representatives from Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) participated on the External Advisory and graciously provided a link to MVAEC's board. The Host Nations were informed of the progress of the Framework development process through a series of staff memos (most recently in May 2021).

In addition, Council Advisory Committees informed this work by providing feedback and ensuring that the Framework reflects the priorities of diverse communities. Joint sessions were scheduled for representatives from all the committees to attend, and follow-up sessions were scheduled with individual committees at various times as requested. The following committees were involved: 2SLGBTQ+, Children, Youth and Families, Persons with Disabilities, Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity, Seniors', Urban Indigenous Peoples' and Women's Advisory Committees. As formal advisory bodies to the City Council, support from these committees is crucial to move this work forward.

### Equity in Action: Cross-departmental Testing and Learning

In addition to collaborative work on the development of the Framework, the equity team worked across departments to test various equity concepts and processes. As a City priority, it was important to seek ways to center equity in many of the major City shaping projects that were ongoing. Social Policy staff advised on projects such as Resilient Vancouver, Transportation 2050, Vancouver Plan, Climate Emergency Action Plan, Covid-19 Emergency Operations

Center, and Women's Legacy Project. This process of learning through doing helped to model the commitment to doing equity work and creating spaces for learning across City departments. During the COVID 19 pandemic, there was an urgent need for an equitable approach that would help to respond to the needs of disproportionately impacted communities. Therefore, the equity team in Social Policy was tasked with developing resources that would guide staff in embedding equity in the development and implementation of recovery actions across the City. The Equity Reference Guide and Equity Decision-Making Tool emerged out of this process and are in use beyond the emergency response in various projects across the City. To support continued learning about key equity concepts, the Introduction to Intersectionality – first part of an Intersectionality Toolkit, currently underdevelopment - was also shared internally.

Targeted learning to address the specificity of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism was piloted as part of the Equity Framework development. Working with a Squamish consulting firm, the Internal Leadership Team participated in a *Decolonizing Practices* workshop that began with a smudging ceremony at Council Chambers and participants reflecting on their histories of arrival to these territories. Moving into the in-camera meeting room at City Hall, the facilitators used a life sized, interactive *Sínulhkay and Ladders* board game to create space for participants to identify their practices in engaging with Indigenous communities. This was a powerful experience of reflecting on daily practices and interrogating colonial narratives.

A cohort of senior staff from across departments also participated in a series of three workshops on *Tackling Anti-Black Racism*. Co-facilitated by a team of prominent local Black educators, these workshops addressed urgent issues related to anti-Black racism in Canada with a focus on BC and Vancouver. They focused on the ways in which anti-Black racism has unfolded historically, in the media, as cultural appropriation and with systemic consequences for Black Canadians and African diaspora communities. These series challenged participants to reflect on how their learned experiences and their knowledge gaps regarding Black people and communities influenced their decisions in the workplace and the impact on outcomes for communities. This was a pilot project with plans underway to expand these important conversations across the organization.

### ***Equity Framework – A Summary***

The following is a concise summary of what is contained within the Equity Framework. Please see Appendix A for the full document.

Definition of equity as an outcome and a process. Presently we live in a world characterized by disparities, where Indigeneity and race –among and intersecting with other aspects of identity- determine, to a large degree, one's daily experiences and access to opportunities. Equity as an outcome is the condition that would be achieved if one's identity no longer predicted how one fares. Equity as a process is the replacement of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes or fail to eliminate them.

Equity as distinct from equality. Equality is about treating everyone the same, whereas equity is about being alert to the specific circumstances and barriers faced by specific groups and treating people differentially to get to fair outcomes. This Framework makes the case for an *equitable* approach.

Historical foundations of systemic inequities. Integrated throughout the Equity Framework are references to the history of supremacist ways of thinking – the belief that some bodies and minds are superior to others – and the specific use of these concepts to pave the way for nation

building and wealth building projects in Canada and much of the rest of the world. These historical processes also meant that our legal, political, organizational and other societal systems were made in the image of certain people – often white, middle and upper class, able-bodied, straight, cis gender men– so that even as the supremacist ideologies begin to lose their hold on society, the systems we have inherited continue to benefit certain groups and discriminate against and harm others.

Relationship between equity and the City’s mission and corporate values. The City of Vancouver’s stated mission is to “create a great city of communities that cares about our people, our environment, and our opportunities to live, work, and prosper.” The notion of care is central to the identity of the City and underpins the commitment to equity. The Equity Framework contributed towards the City’s corporate culture goal of fostering a one-team mindset, and to the City’s long-term strategic goal of “an increased focus on diversity, equity, social issues and opportunities” which is also one of the four current City Council priorities.

Three imperatives for action towards equity. There are multiple rationales for putting in the effort to make the City a more equitable place to live and work. They can be described as:

1. The justice imperative - points out that moving in the direction of equity is *the right thing to do*, to redress the wrongs of the past and give everyone fair opportunity to thrive.
2. The compliance imperative - points to the Provincial legislation on human rights and workplace safety, and makes it clear that moving in the direction of equity is *the legal thing to do*.
3. The effectiveness imperative - highlights the benefits to an organization and community, of creating better, more innovative solutions by effectively integrating a wider range of voices. As such moving in the direction of equity is *the strategic thing to do*.

Four lenses that define the City’s intended approach to equity at this time. The Equity Framework defines the desired approach to equity as the application of four distinct and related lenses to the City’s work. Every City decision, project or program moves us in the direction of equity when these four lenses are used to frame the problem or opportunity, analyze the situation, decide who to involve, and make decisions on design, implementation and evaluation. The four lenses are:

1. Indigenous Rights – focused on upholding, recognizing, and protecting inherent and constitutionally protected Indigenous Rights
2. Racial justice – focused on understanding and explicitly talking about the implications of race in any given situation, and actively working to elevate racialized voices and dismantle racism in its personal, interpersonal and systemic manifestations
3. Intersectionality – focused on recognizing how different systems of marginalization compound each other, and designing ways to specifically benefit those who are situated at the intersections
4. Systems orientation – focused on recognizing embedded discrimination within systems, and the redesign of the rules and incentives of a system, in order to lead to more equitable outcomes

Six Equity commitments and the culture we intend to build. In order to effectively advance equity, changes in internal culture of the City are required. The Equity Commitments describe what is needed to make this culture change. Should Council adopt this Framework, the commitments would apply to the City as an organization, and to each leader and elected official. They also apply to every individual staff member within their sphere of influence and responsibility. The commitments are:



1. Commitment to doing equity work long term.
2. Commitment to creating spaces for accountable learning
3. Commitment to reflecting equity in City leadership.
4. Commitment to fostering strong relationships.
5. Commitment to adequately resourcing equity work.
6. Commitment to share accountability.

Four areas of focus for a holistic approach. The Equity Framework names major areas of activities in which work on equity should be advanced over the next three to five years. These Focus Areas are defined as Foundational, Internal, External and Bridging, following the Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmarks tool. These areas of work are interdependent and support each other when well coordinated. The implementation phase of this work focuses on highlighting and connecting work already underway in these Focus Areas, identifying new strategic actions, and tracking progress in each of the areas. There is great potential for realizing collective impact through integration of these areas of work.

### ***Moving into Implementation***

While the creation of this Equity Framework marks a significant moment in the City's engagement with equity, it is by no means the starting point. As indicated in the section on Council's previous decisions, many initiatives are presently ongoing to address the needs of marginalized communities. There are also a series of internal initiatives over the past decade that have demonstrated the City's leadership in the area of diversity, inclusion and equity as an employer, consistently securing the City a spot on the list of [Canada's Best Diversity Employers](#).

Part of the challenge for the City has been to make visible the work that is being done in this area, much of which is happening behind the scenes in conversations among staff, as a matter of course in the City's evolution as an organization, and to effectively engage in a public conversation about our progress. Another challenge is to understand the overlaps, distinction and connections between the various bodies of work underway, so as to avoid duplication and utilize synergies, and to be more strategic about the phasing and appropriate order of new actions. Finally, it is difficult to know whether the City's internal work on equity is making a difference in the absence of indicators of success. The implementation approach to the Equity Framework is focused on addressing this set of interlocking challenges.

The Equity Office embarked on an exploration of best practices use by peer organizations to coordinate work on equity in a holistic way. An internationally recognized tool, [Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmarks: Standards for Organizations Around the World](#) (GDEIB) rose to the top in this exploration. Created by the Centre for Global Inclusion, a public charity headquartered in the United States, the GDEIB helps organizations determine strategy and measure progress towards equity. The GDEIB has been created and updated through a systematic and rigorous consensus of 112 diversity, inclusion and equity experts from every continent. It has been used by hundreds of organizations, and Vancouver would be joining a host of other Canadian municipalities – including Montreal and Edmonton – and several local public peer institutions using this tool. Available for free through a user agreement, the GDEIB is the tool the Equity Office will be using to organize and advance the City's work in this area.

The GDEIB provides a comprehensive map for considering all the priority areas in an organization's work where leverage points are likely to be found to move equity forward. These are organized under four Focus Areas named in the Equity Framework and further introduced

by way of 15 categories of actions below. (Note that GDEIB language has been modified slightly to fit the context of the City):

### FOUNDATIONAL CATEGORIES

#### Category 1: Vision, Strategy and Rationale

Objective: Develop strong rationale, vision and strategy for equity, aligned to the organizational goals, so that equity is positioned as central to the organization's mission and day to day work, rather than as a side project.

#### Category 2: Leadership and Accountability

Objective: Put a mechanism in place to hold leaders accountable for implementing the organization's equity vision, setting goals, achieving results, and being role models.

#### Category 3: Structure for Implementation

Objective: Provide visible, dedicated support and structure with authority and budget to effectively implement equity, ensuring meaningful involvement of internal stakeholders and unions.

### INTERNAL CATEGORIES

#### Category 4: Recruitment

Objective: Ensure that attraction, sourcing, and recruitment is done through the lens of equity.

#### Category 5: Advancement

Objective: Ensure that equity is integrated into talent development, performance management, advancement, and retention.

#### Category 6: Job Design, Classification, and Compensation

Objective: Ensure that job design and classification are evaluated for bias and that compensation is equitable across key dimensions of diversity.

#### Category 7: Work-life Integration, Flexibility, and Benefits

Objective: Achieve work-life integration, make flexible work options available whenever possible, and offer equitable benefits to employees.

### BRIDGING CATEGORIES

#### Category 8: Assessment, Measurement, and Research

Objective: Develop an evidence-based approach to equity, where audits, assessments, surveys and other data gathering tools are used intentionally and ethically to guide equity decisions.

#### Category 9: Communications

Objective: Make communication clear, simple to understand, and a crucial force in achieving the organization's equity goals.

#### Category 10: Learning and Development

Objective: Educate all to achieve a level of equity competence and confidence needed to create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.

#### Category 11: Connecting Equity and Environmental Sustainability

Objective: Connect the organization's equity and sustainability initiatives to increase the effectiveness of both.

### EXTERNAL CATEGORIES

#### Category 12: Partnerships, Grants and Government Relations

Objective: Be proactive in working with community groups, non-profit organizations, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, senior levels of government and agencies towards common equity goals.

#### Category 13: Planning and Service Provision

Objective: Embed equity in all services provided to diverse residents by identifying systemic forms of discrimination and barriers to meaningful inclusion, rethinking and rebuilding policies, procedures and practices accordingly.

#### Category 14: Public Engagement and Customer Service

Objective: Integrate equity considerations into engagement with residents and the provision of customer service (Revenue Services, Permitting, 311, Information desks throughout facilities etc).

#### Category 15: Finance and Purchasing

Objective: Embed an equity lens into budget decisions, and practice responsible and ethical purchasing that values difference, and actively attracts, develops and nurtures underrepresented suppliers.

Note that the Equity Framework corresponds directly to Category 1 – Vision, Strategy and Rationale - in this model. Also note that Category 13 – Planning and Service Provision – is a large category for a municipal government as it can be understood to include most of the work that most of the City's departments carry out in service to residents, ranging from fire and rescue services, to arts and culture, long range planning, zoning bylaws and building permits, and design and construction of streets and essential infrastructure.

### **Next Steps**

The Equity Office, supported by the Business Planning and Project Support unit in the City Manager's Office, and in partnership with Human Resources, Civic Engagement and Communications and Arts, Culture and Community Services, has begun work on the following steps towards implementing the Equity Framework using the GDEIB as a tool:

- Communicate draft key messages of the Equity Framework to all City employees through visuals, memos, information sessions, and online interactive means. (to commence should Council adopt the Equity Framework)
- Select the categories under which the City's equity work can be organized, using the GDEIB as a starting point, and identify responsible departments and units for each category. (completed)
- Convene the responsible departments along with a cross-section of employees (and union partners, when appropriate) to benchmark the City's current practice in each of the 15 categories of work. Benchmarking will consist of evaluating the City's practices against the benchmarks provided by the GDEIB tool, to assign a designation of

“Inactive”, “Reactive”, “Proactive”, “Progressive” or “Best Practice” in each category. (planned for fall 2021)

- Incorporate the findings of the City’s Employee Benchmark Survey, conducted in April 2021, into the above benchmarking exercise. (planned for fall 2021)
- Based on the evaluation of the current state, decide on the appropriate goal in each category in the next three years. For example, when the current state of the organization is assessed as “Reactive” in one of the above mentioned categories, the goals may be to reach the “Proactive” stage in the next three years. (planned for fall 2021)
- Convene conversations to decide on some key overall metrics and success indicators to measure movement in the direction of equity, as described in the Equity Framework. Develop mechanisms for measurement. (to begin in winter 2021)
- Build a public dashboard. Under the goal in each category, populate with the specific actions currently underway to achieve the goal. Many departments have action items on their work plans that contribute to these goals, but these actions are not currently visible to other employees or to the public. (early 2022)
- Work with departments to identify and prioritize additional appropriate actions needed to achieve the goals in each category, incorporating the lenses articulated in the Equity Framework. Build these into the work plans for departments and individuals, and populate into the public dashboard. (2022)
- Update the public dashboard with the status of action committed to by each department, and report on Council on an annual basis. (ongoing)
- Every three years, repeat the assessment process to gauge movement in the direction of equity goals, update the Equity Framework and set new goals as needed. (ongoing)

### ***Financial***

The implementation of the Equity Framework will have financial implications related to resourcing the work on equity which is required for the successful implementation of this direction. In the immediate term, staff are assessing internal resources and opportunities for prioritization to resource this work. The departmental and organizational needs will be incorporated in the City’s 2022 annual budget process for Council’s review.

Please note that the successful implementation of the Equity Framework is closely linked with the successful implementation of the Reconciliation Framework, as equity cannot be achieved without justice for Indigenous peoples. As such the City’s Reconciliation work also needs to be prioritized in budget decisions to move this work forward.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The Equity Framework represents a significant opportunity for the City of Vancouver to approach every aspect of its operations with a sharper and more nuanced equity lens. Its strength comes from the many community and staff voices that have engaged in its development over a period of three years. The adoption of this Framework solidifies the foundations for significant internal work that the City needs to do.

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## *Getting our house in order:* The City of Vancouver's Equity Framework

### Our Place on Unceded Lands

The Equity Framework is built on the recognition that what is now known as Vancouver is located on the unceded lands of the  $x^w m \theta k w \acute{a} y \acute{a} m$  (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) who have lived here since time immemorial, who are Rights holders and stewards of these lands and waters.

The word 'unceded' means 'taken without consent' and refers to a process by which settlers from Western Europe sought to replace Indigenous laws and take Indigenous land, for the purpose of building wealth. This process, called colonialism, used force to intimidate, manipulate and physically remove Indigenous peoples from their land and extinguish their cultures. It also depended on social and political ideologies such as white supremacy – the assertion that the white race is superior to others- to mask the brutality of this attempted genocide. Colonialism and its accompanying ideologies (including racism, patriarchy, paternalism and capitalism) are entrenched in the political, bureaucratic, legal, economic and other systems that shape our modern society. In many ways, these systems reproduce and maintain injustice and inequity, and are a continuation of the violence experienced by Indigenous people.

*City of Reconciliation's vision: form sustained relationships of mutual respect, incorporate perspectives, and provides services that benefit local First Nations and the Urban Indigenous community*

Several political commitments and streams of work have confirmed the City of Vancouver's recognitions of Indigenous Rights. These include the City's commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice, and the Red Women Rising report recommendations. Under the umbrella of the [City of Reconciliation](#) and [Park Board's Reconciliation](#) work, these commitments are acted on through specific projects, programs and partnerships. These remain the central channels for addressing the specific types of injustice and inequities suffered, historically and presently, by Indigenous peoples.

The City of Vancouver's Equity Framework is a document that has risen out of the need to address injustices and inequities experienced by a broader cross-section of our society – including Black and other racialized people, women and gender-diverse people, and people with disabilities. The starting point for this Framework is the assertion that the ongoing colonialism faced by the Host Nations and urban Indigenous people is unique and separate from the oppression that other equity-denied groups face. At the same time, there are some common root causes for these inequities. The efforts toward Reconciliation and equity can inform one another, and solidarity between Indigenous people and equity-denied communities can be beneficial to both. Accordingly, the Equity Framework centers Indigenous Rights, with the

aspiration that this Framework is supportive to the City's ongoing work towards coming into right relations with Indigenous communities, without in any way replacing Reconciliation efforts.

### Why We Need This Framework

The need for an Equity Framework emerged in 2017 as City staff worked with the Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee comprised of community stakeholders including people with lived experience. Work on poverty reduction brings existing inequities in our society into plain sight as poverty rates are dramatically higher for Indigenous people, Black Canadians, and racialized new immigrants, underscoring the linkage between race and class. The Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee members expressed concern that a nuanced understanding of these issues was not shared consistently across City departments. The Committee urged the City to "get your house in order", calling on the City to examine all parts of the organization – not only those parts explicitly dedicated to addressing social issues – to coordinate and reorient in the direction of equity<sup>1</sup>.

In a similar vein, when the City asked organizations requesting grants to submit their equity policies as part of their application, some organizations asked "where is yours?" When the City, in which close to half the residents are racialized, made statements on anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism in the context of the massive awakening to racial injustice of 2020 – against the backdrop of COVID-19– community members and City staff alike asked the City to "show, don't tell." The local intersectional feminist movement has been asking for intersectional reviews of the City's internal operations and budgets for many years. As a large, public and visible land owner, regulator, service provider, employer, advocate, and convener, the City has influence over many aspects of community life, and is called upon to be a leader.

Meanwhile, the societal conversation on equity has expanded and evolved rapidly. The number of equity-related motions and directives, and internal staff-led initiatives has also multiplied. This means that equity related efforts have gone from being the focus for a few staff to the many, without a shared definition or unified approach.

***The Equity Framework exists to create a unified vision and shared understanding of equity across City departments, and to define the City's orientation to this work.***

The Equity Framework is the City's response to the above. It exists to fill a basic knowledge and coordination gap in the City's equity work, and to invigorate these efforts, so that the City can live into the leadership role expected of it. The Framework contributes to the City's corporate culture goal of fostering a one-team mindset. It does not replace the work that departments have been doing on equity – rather it seeks to unify and amplify them.

The Equity Framework is not an action plan. It is a conceptual, grounding, foundational document, out of

which a number of toolkits and action plans flow, and from which ongoing departmental strategies will be drawn going forward. The Equity Framework lays the foundation for culture change within the City of Vancouver as an organization. Accountability for the realization of its vision lies with leaders across all City departments and governing bodies. It will be most effective when everyone working on behalf of the City enacts its principles in their day-to-day

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<sup>1</sup> The work on poverty reduction was mandated by the Healthy City Strategy, the City's social sustainability strategy, focused on creating conditions for well-being of all. As such, the Healthy City Strategy is the City's first community-facing equity strategy and is a predecessor to this Framework.

work and routine decision-making. Given how quickly the conversation on equity is evolving, the Equity Framework will need reviewing and refreshing every few years.

The work on the creation of the Equity Framework began in 2018 with courageous conversations among staff on how racism showed up in the internal dynamics of the City and in connection with community. Staff across all ranks and all departments informed this Framework, and in many cases engaged in their own learning and unlearning, shared from lived experience, and effectively formed into communities of care and responsibility in the process. The creation of the Equity Framework was led by the City's Social Policy team. The City's new Equity Office joined as a partner and will have oversight over implementation. This work was shaped by the voices of staff affinity groups, Council advisory bodies, a dedicated cross-departmental leadership team, and an external advisory committee comprised of scholars and practitioners with a depth of experience and expertise in equity. The resulting Equity Framework reflects a vision arising out of their conversations. It attempts to strike a balance between being clear and directive, and being spacious and non-dogmatic, with the hopes of creating room for a diversity of approaches under a unified umbrella.

### What do We Mean by Equity

If you were born in Vancouver today, your social identity – your race, ability, class and gender – would predict your likelihood of rising to positions of power, influence and material success in your lifetime and, similarly, your likelihood of struggling to make ends meet. It doesn't mean that Raven, an Indigenous Elder, will never get a job as a senior director, or that Tyrell, a Black single father living with a disability is destined to live in poverty<sup>2</sup>. It means that the odds are against Raven and Tyrell thriving, because of the way dominant cultures and dominant structures are set up to discriminate against them.

This discrimination is produced by daily occurrences over a lifetime that have impacts across generations: growing up in a neighbourhood where parks and schools are overcrowded and under-funded, foster parents whose ambitions for you are too small, family struggling with intergenerational trauma<sup>3</sup>, kids who bully you on the playground, authorities who are harsh on you, institutions that don't meet your accessibility needs, university application processes that require extra-curricular activities your family couldn't afford, absence of social networks to access jobs, absence of a family safety net when you make a mistake, discrimination when you try to rent an apartment, denial of promotion because your belonging and cultural fit is always in question, being followed around stores or treated as suspicious on the bus, suffering from depression and the long term impacts of prejudice, acts of discrimination and violence. The cultures and structures of this society were not set up with your thriving in mind. To thrive, and even to survive, you have to work much harder than many others, and you likely have to work hard at masking significant, valuable aspects of your identity in order to fit in. This is what inequity looks like. The pursuit of equity, then, is about recognizing harms and correcting for discrimination experienced over life times and generations, while dismantling discriminatory rules, societal systems and cultures.

Striving for and moving in the direction of an equitable society has a longstanding history in Canada and BC, including, for example, abolition of slavery (1834), expanding voting rights to women (1918), to Asian Canadians (1948), and to Indigenous people (1960), elimination of the Chinese head tax (1947), access rights to public spaces for blind persons with a guide dog

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<sup>2</sup> Read Raven's and Tyrell's stories in the Introduction to Intersectionality tool.

<sup>3</sup> Intergenerational trauma is trauma that gets passed down from those who directly experience an incident to subsequent generations. In the Indigenous context, intergenerational trauma often refers to the trauma experienced by survivors of the Indian Residential School system, passed down to their children and grandchildren.

(1979), reinstatement of Indian Status to women who had lost it through marriage to men without status (1985), introduction of employment equity legislation (1986), and legalization of same-sex marriage (2003). A more equitable society is a happier, more desirable society for all<sup>4</sup>.

There is an important distinction made between equality and equity. Although both have an eye to fairness, equality tries to achieve this through treating everyone the same, regardless of need, opportunity and circumstances, and in so doing can in fact reproduce uneven outcomes. Equity, on the other hand, tries to achieve fairness by treating people differently based on a context of need, opportunity, circumstance and consideration of historic and structural inequities<sup>5</sup>. By framing the work of the City around equity, this Framework clarifies that targeted differential treatment is valid and even necessary in some circumstances, because people and communities are situated differently from each other. Targeted interventions require thoughtful consideration and design. What we need to avoid is inadvertently creating further unintended inequities through an attempt to correct for existing inequities.

We define equity as both an outcome and a process.

***Equity as an outcome is the condition that would be achieved if one's identity no longer predicted how one fares.***

***Equity as a process is the replacement of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes or fail to eliminate them<sup>6</sup>.***

Equity as an outcome is dependent on equity as a process. It is impossible to move in the direction of an equitable society without the process of identifying and eliminating subtle and explicit forms of discrimination. How we do this matters. Generally speaking, equitable conditions cannot be arrived at through patronizing and colonial approaches where those in power, once again, assume their own superiority and attempt to impose their will on those who have been oppressed. Instead, equity as a process is participatory and seeks to integrate the views of those impacted by a decision, particularly those who have been underrepresented and underserved. It requires listening to and co-creation across differences in identity and power. It requires redistributing power across different groups.

## Our Equity Statements

Equity is both an outcome and a process.

Equity names and addresses systemic inequities that benefit and favour some groups and often disproportionately impact cultural communities, Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (IBPOC). Individuals and communities with intersecting identities of Indigeneity, race, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation, ability and class can be, and often are, negatively affected by favoured social systems.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Government Alliance for Race and Equity's "[Why working for racial equity benefits everyone](#)"

<sup>5</sup> Note that in the Canadian legal discourse, treating everyone the same is referred to as *procedural equality* while treating people different to get to same outcomes (what is referred to here as equity) is called *substantive equality*.

<sup>6</sup> Developed based on a definition of racial equity attributed to [Center for Assessment and Policy Development](#)



Therefore, equity efforts seek ways to transform current structures, policies, and processes in order to balance power and influence, expand access, and create new ways of walking together that nourish all people by embedding intersectionality in institutional and sectoral change.

Equity amplifies and affirms the dignity and rights of all people by centering the diverse voices of Indigenous and racialized peoples and communities in creative and resilient processes, informed by Indigenous knowledge and different world views across the ways we do our work.

## Our Equity Commitments

The Equity Commitments are statements about our willingness to do this work in a good way, and set up our equity efforts for success. The commitments apply to the City as an organization, and are to be upheld and enacted by leaders and elected officials. They also apply to every individual staff member within their sphere of influence and responsibility. Managers will lead their teams to include equity in departmental practices and in team and individual work plans. When embedded, the commitments may manifest as new projects and new ways of doing work *and* as relatively small changes to the work we are already doing or that we routinely do.

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### **We commit to doing equity work long term**

As both an outcome and a process, equity work is ongoing. Recognizing that the societal interest in these efforts may fluctuate, we commit to equity work as a long term project that is about making meaningful culture change. We will seek short term transformative practices during this journey while working towards systemic shifts. Doing this work includes listening, learning, and addressing systemic issues, including those that impact Indigenous, Black, and other racialized staff, using an intersectionality lens, on an ongoing basis.

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### **We commit to creating spaces for accountable learning**

The City of Vancouver will be a learning organization. We recognize that expertise in equity is a real expertise, though the learning is never complete. We recognize the knowledge held by those have lived their lives in bodies experiencing inequities and we seek and honour this knowledge, regardless of rank or professional expertise. We will foster an organizational culture that has capacity to hold difficult conversations. We expect and normalize personal discomfort when working on equity, and will help each other through it. We will create spaces and tools for reflection and learning from action. We will not be afraid to make mistakes and we will share our learning publicly as we go, before we get it right.

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### **We commit to reflecting equity in City leadership**

We acknowledge that currently the City's leadership does not reflect the diverse communities we serve, and the relative absence of Indigenous, Black and other racialized leaders is particularly noticeable. We commit to seeking every opportunity in our hiring, retention, and succession processes, to transform this picture, and will make concerted efforts to remove barriers to involvement in local politics faced by equity-denied groups.

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### **We commit to fostering strong relationships**

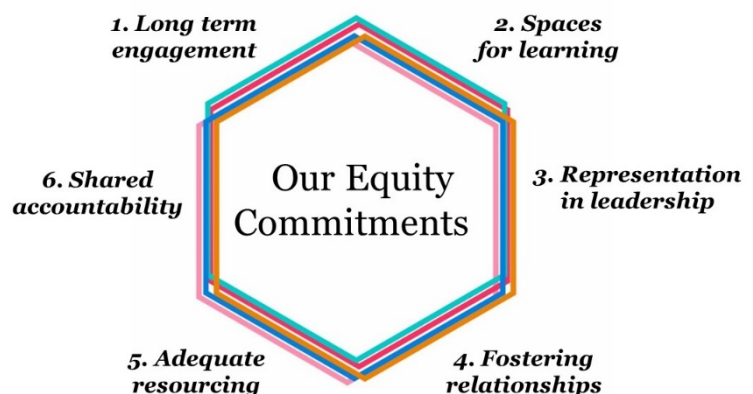
Through the lens of equity, all people are people, not cogs in a machine. Equity work engages both hearts and minds, and requires us to relate to each other as humans first. We commit to valuing and fostering relationships, moving at the speed of trust while honoring the need for urgency for equity-denied staff, using power consciously, listening better to understand the impact of often good intentions, and embracing difference so that there is room for all people to contribute. Fostering strong relationships also includes resisting dominant

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|---|---|
|   | practices of cultural assimilation and creating an atmosphere to thrive, not despite, but because of our diversity.   |
| <b>We commit to adequately resourcing equity work</b> | Work on equity cannot happen off the sides of desks and deserves to be valued. We commit to ensuring that both central and departmental equity functions are adequately resourced at the City. We also commit to reimagining how the City resources communities and community partners who are carrying out important work on behalf of equity-denied groups across our neighbourhoods.   |
| <b>We commit to shared accountability</b>             | Addressing systemic inequities is everyone’s responsibility and different actors at the City will have access to different levers to move the dial. We commit to recognizing equity as part of all staff, departmental, and institutional-wide work plans, with performance reviews and measures in place to evaluate our progress on an ongoing basis. We will develop equity metrics and share our results publicly so that communities and sectoral partners can continue to hold the City accountable and partner with us towards shared goals. |

*“We consent to learn in public. We will make mistakes. We will sit with those mistakes, be transparent about them, and use them both to learn and to teach.”*

*-Vancouver Park Board Reconciliation Vision-*



### Three Imperatives for Doing Equity Work

The City of Vancouver has nine long-term strategic goals, the third of which is “an increased focus on diversity, equity, social issues and opportunities”<sup>7</sup>. This is also one of four City Council priorities. As such, there is a mandate to “alleviate barriers to our citizen’s well-being such as mental health challenges, addictions, social isolation, poverty and racism”.

At the same time, equity work is not only something that staff do in support of community and by directive from leadership. Doing equity work is personal and can be confronting as it highlights power and privilege. Different people and different teams may have different motivators for undertaking work on equity. It is not essential that everyone comes to this work with the exact same motivation. It is, however, essential that there is some understanding for *why* we are undertaking equity work, to sustain the momentum and impact.

At the City of Vancouver, three sets of equity imperatives co-exist.

<sup>7</sup> See City of Vancouver's Corporate Plan, 2020. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/corporate-plan.pdf>

## 1. *The Justice Imperative*

As social creatures, most of us have an intuitive preference for integrity and fairness<sup>8</sup>. We want to do the right thing, are distressed when we observe oppression and injustice, and even more so when we realize we have been participating in it. It feels inherently wrong, for example, to realize that the safety some of us take for granted walking down a Vancouver street in day light, is entirely unavailable to some of our fellow Vancouverites, simply because of how they look. The personal and organizational motivation to be ethical, to be accountable for past evils and to make things right, is at the heart of the transformative potential of this moment, and constitutes a primary impetus for the City of Vancouver's work on equity.

The justice imperative is notably activated when we study history. It is important to understand, for example, the history of racialization and its ongoing impacts. In the 17th Century, Western Europeans began to arrive in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia, looking to build wealth. Europeans used pseudo-science to identify physical features among the local people, constructing images of "the other". They attached meaning to skin colour, shape of the nose and size of the forehead, to claim that the people on these lands were unintelligent, slow, mischievous, inflexible, foolish, greedy or wild. Thus, "race" was socially constructed. White Europeans were declared "the most beautiful race of men" and *superior* to all others<sup>9</sup>. Some groups – for example the Irish, Italians, Greeks, and, notably, Jewish people- were at various times excluded from the category of whiteness as was useful to those in power.

White supremacy paved the way for dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands, enslavement of African peoples, racial segregation, and denial of personhood and political power. Over time, race continued to gain social currency, with a growing ability to distribute unequal power and privilege, translating into uneven outcomes for various racial groups<sup>10</sup>.

Supremacist thinking – the notion that one's value is a function of one's appearance or behaviour - has also historically shaped the reality of numerous "others". For example, people with disabilities have been consistently oppressed by ableist thinking that dominates our society. Ableism is prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that bodies and minds that function - walk, see, hear, think, feel, present and express - in what society constructs and portrays as "typical" and "able", are superior. Thus, "ability" is socially constructed<sup>11</sup>. Disabled persons are defined by their impairment and the need for fixing. Central to this ideology is the capitalist notion that one's value is dependent on one's ability to work and produce, or reproduce. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, persons with disabilities were commonly put away or disposed of: confined to their homes, asylums or prisons, where many were severely neglected and abused<sup>12</sup>. Legislators and regulators actively enabled these practices, and at the same time built and supported societal systems – education, employment, leisure, public transportation, housing, family and social life – to the needs of typical bodies and minds, so that even as attitudes towards persons with disabilities change, our environments remain inaccessible and exclusionary.

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<sup>8</sup> Lieberman, M. D. (2013). *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. Crown Publishers/Random House

<sup>9</sup> Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

<sup>10</sup> Castagna, M & Dei, G. J.S. (2000). An historical overview of the application of the race concept in social practice.

<sup>11</sup> Note that in presenting race and ability as social constructs, this Framework subscribes to the social model of identity construction (as opposed to medical or biological models). Social models make clear that systems that create social constructs, not the individuals who are boxed in by them, are to blame for exclusion.

<sup>12</sup> For a history of disability rights and justice see <https://www.djno.ca/history-of-disability-justice-right>

Supremacist ideologies were not rare or accidental. Rather they were foundational to the building of Canada and its cities. They generated tangible benefit for those whose ways of being were positioned as the cultural norm and whose wealth and political power they were determined to protect and expand. They were the basis of voting rights, immigration laws, labour laws, policing, education systems, land use plans, zoning, design, the arts, language, access to employment opportunities, codes of professional conduct and so much more. Supremacist ideologies are so omnipresent, and so powerful in imposing the bar we each need to meet to be considered desirable and valuable, that they impact us all. We do not have to have a disability to experience ableism, or be a person of colour to be subject to white supremacy. We are *all* set up to thrive for untenable ideals set by supremacist ideologies.

Though much has been done to undo the more explicit features of supremacist ways of thinking, much remains to be undone as they are woven into the cultural and economic fabric of Canadian cities. An appreciation for the magnitude of the harm that has been done can be a strong ethical motivator for the transformations we need to generate.

*From a justice perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by measuring, for example: indicators of community health and wellbeing (see [Healthy City Dashboard](#)), strength of relationship with Host Nations and urban Indigenous communities, number of City policies and programs significantly modified to remove barriers for equity-denied<sup>13</sup> communities, representation of equity-denied groups in workforce, elected and leadership positions, and their self-reported sense of belonging and wellbeing at work.*

## 2. The Compliance Imperative

As an employer, the City of Vancouver is bound by legislation which prohibits discrimination in employment and requires the creation of a culture of safety. The British Columbia Human Rights Code prohibits employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, and criminal conviction unrelated to employment (known as *protected grounds*). WorkSafeBC legislation also applies, requiring the City to provide both physically and psychologically safe workplaces for employees. This includes protection against bullying and harassment, including where such behaviour is linked to racism, sexism and other forms of identity-based aggression.

As a local government organization, the City is also required by law to provide members of the public with access to its services and facilities in a non-discriminatory way. The Human Rights Code prohibits the City from denying or otherwise discriminating against any person in the provision of services or facilities on the basis of any protected ground.

As such, equitable treatment of the City's thousands of employees, and hundreds of thousands of residents, is a legal obligation. When individuals comply with expectations of treating each other respectfully and equitably, they prevent harm to colleagues and residents. Compliance with these legal requirements is a basic, widely applicable motivator for equity efforts.

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<sup>13</sup> The Federal Employment Equity Act introduced the term *equity-seeking groups* to refer to the four designated groups facing discrimination (women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities). The term *equity-denied groups*, used throughout this document, is an alternative to that term, which more explicitly recognizes the refusal to include certain groups (not strictly limited to the four designated by the Federal government). Since equity benefits all people, everyone should be *seeking* equity, though only some have been *denied* equity.

*From a compliance perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by tracking, for example, strength and accessibility of internal policies and procedures, and trust in the City as an employer.*

### 3. The Effectiveness Imperative

There is an ever-growing body of research<sup>14</sup> showing that equity in the workplace - along with its closely associated concepts, diversity and inclusion - amplifies excellence and makes organizations more effective. It has been shown, for example, that organizations making genuine efforts to advance equity are more successful in retaining talent and have lower levels of employee turnover. They experience reduced instances of interpersonal aggression and an increase in engagement and trust. Teams that are diverse are more likely to include different viewpoints or thinking styles, and, in the presence of psychological safety, these teams solve problems faster and come up with more creative solutions.

***For younger job seekers, workforce diversity and clear commitment to anti-racism are likely to be requirements, not just preferences.***

Similarly, equitable and inclusive engagement with diverse voices in community is key in delivering effective municipal services and legislation. It is well understood that nuanced conversations with local residents improves City decision making, by illuminating opportunities and risks, identifying innovative solutions, and simplifying implementation by building support for projects. As Vancouver grows increasingly more diverse, the City's effectiveness, and the strength of our local democracy, depends on low-barrier and relevant engagement with all residents.

Besides being the right thing to do, prioritizing equity efforts may also be one of the most strategic directions an organization can take. In the short term, grappling with the tensions and practical dilemmas that arise when we go about dismantling oppressive systems and including diverse voices may be experienced by some as a diversion from the tasks at hand. However, from a long-term perspective, creating the conditions to unlock every person's potential leads to a better performing City that is more accountable and responsive to the communities it is here to serve. Equity does not only benefit marginalized groups. Rather, everyone gains when we have a more fair and effective system.

*From an effectiveness perspective, we might gauge progress towards equity by assessing, for example: participation and trust in government reported by marginalized groups, level of interest from equity-denied groups to work at the City, success in promotion and retention, prevalence of outside-the-box solutions, and overall corporate performance.*

## Our Vision and Approach

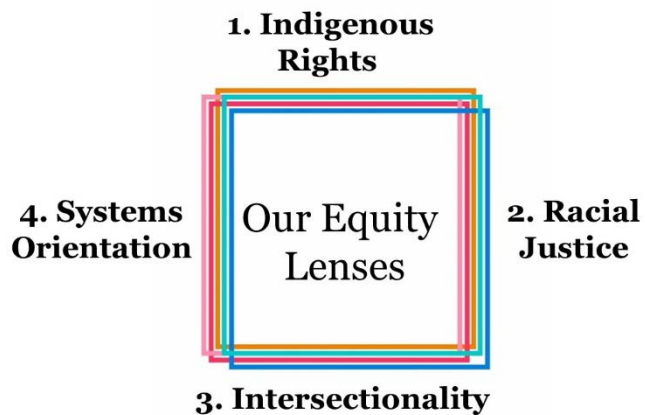
The City of Vancouver's stated mission is to "create a great city of communities that cares about our people, our environment, and our opportunities to live, work, and prosper." The notion of *care* is thus central to the identity of the City. Care is a central driver for a majority of those engaged in public service and local politics, and positions *people* at the centre of the City's efforts and concerns. Accordingly, an ethics of care provide the foundation for the City's work on equity.

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<sup>14</sup> Summarized here [Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter: Quick Take | Catalyst](#)

***We envision a city where those who are most marginalized are not excluded from care and opportunity for flourishing, rather, they are systemically prioritized for it.***

Implicit within this vision is an approach to the design and implementation of our initiatives. This approach can be described as the application of four distinct and related lenses: Indigenous Rights, racial justice, intersectionality, and systems orientation. Every City decision, project or program moves us in the direction of equity when these four lenses are used to frame the problem or opportunity, analyze the situation, decide who to involve, and make decisions on design, implementation and evaluation. Together these lenses provide the special ingredients that define the flavour of our equity efforts under this Equity Framework.



### ***1. Indigenous Rights***

The City of Vancouver, like all governments, has a responsibility to uphold and protect Indigenous Rights and take effective measures, in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, to redress and improve economic, social and environmental conditions of Indigenous communities. In order to achieve this goal, equity work must be centered on upholding, recognizing, and protecting inherent and constitutionally protected Indigenous Rights. This responsibility must be enacted with resolve and a commitment to respectfully engage with the three Host Nations and urban Indigenous communities in ways that foster sustained and strong relationships. In order to move in the direction of equity, the City of Vancouver needs to fulfil its promise as a City of Reconciliation as a priority.

Reconciliation is often defined as a process of establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, which requires awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behaviour<sup>15</sup>. For the City of Vancouver, Reconciliation is about the work of repair we do with Indigenous communities. On the path to Reconciliation we also need decolonization, which is an inward looking process - it is about the City's work with itself. Decolonization is the process of surfacing the colonial assumptions, narratives and beliefs that individuals hold *and* that are embedded in the City's ways of operating, and beginning to dismantle

***The City of Vancouver acknowledges the colonial system on which it was built and commits to addressing past, current and future harms.***

<sup>15</sup> Based on definition of Reconciliation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

and reshape these structures. As such, decolonization can be done on every project that the City is involved with, in day-to-day practices, and in lifting the voices of Indigenous staff and community members. While these transformations do not equal Reconciliation, they pave the path to repair and make it more possible for the City to come into right relations with Indigenous communities.

Reconciliation efforts and decolonization efforts are both central to advancing Indigenous Rights and they are therefore central to advancing equity. They represent important opportunities for fostering solidarity and community building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Vancouver. As stated in the opening section, solidarity is key but the distinctness of Indigenous sovereignty must be upheld.

*Examples of an Indigenous Rights lens in action:*

- *Partnership with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations' development corporations on infrastructure planning, and development of specific sites*
- *Allocation of secure, long term spaces for gathering, healing and support programs for urban Indigenous Communities, and for Indigenous City staff, with support from the Host Nations*
- *Understanding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice and identifying roles the City can specifically play to advance specific Calls*

## 2. Racial Justice

As a key process of colonization, racism creates unequal power in which those who are not white have unequal access to opportunities for economic, political and social mobility. While racism is compounded by other forms of discrimination (classism, ableism, sexism, trans antagonism, homophobia, etc.), naming it and taking deliberate steps to tackle it is integral to our equity work. We are unlikely to be able to advance the interests of women and gender minorities, people with disabilities, queer communities and others, without specifically considering the intersections of these identities with Indigeneity and race.

Over the past decade, leadership tables at large organizations have become more diverse, but only in the sense that they now include white women and LGBTQ+ people, in what Canadian scholar Malinda Smith has called “diversification of whiteness”. Black and other racialized people, who make up about 50% of the population of Vancouver, and roughly 40% of the City’s employees, have not gained substantially from equity efforts, and the conversation on race has remained somewhat off limits until recently. As such, a racial justice approach is needed to close existing gaps and provide access to opportunities for all Vancouverites.

***In the past, diversity and inclusion efforts in Canada have typically not named race specifically, and in doing so have failed to address inequities for racialized communities.***

As a City that has defined itself by its cultural diversity and welcoming people from all over the world, racism is a difficult topic to raise as it runs counter to this collective identity. We need to name racism as a key barrier to this collective identity and commit to normalize these conversations as part our equity efforts. A racial justice approach is part of our institutional

direction that states our agreement to sit with discomfort and work through the complexities that come with these conversations.

*Examples of a racial justice lens in action:*

- *Designation of geographic areas in the City that are of significance to racialized or ethno cultural communities as a step towards redress*
- *Targets for representation of persons of colour in leadership roles, and a succession planning process that gives explicit consideration to race and racial dynamics*
- *Funding awarded to projects that bring together multiple racialized and multi-racial communities working together in solidarity towards shared goals*

### **3. Intersectionality**

Rooted in Indigenous and Black women's activism and further theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black legal scholar, the term *intersectionality* was developed to explain how race intersects with gender to produce barriers for Black women<sup>16</sup>. Crenshaw used the metaphor of a traffic intersection to explain the concept: While traffic collisions can happen anywhere on a road, they are more prevalent at intersections. Furthermore, the exact cause of accident is more difficult to determine at an intersection, compared with elsewhere on a road, because traffic flows from four directions into an intersection. Similarly, when Black women face discrimination, it is hard to say whether racism or sexism was at play. It is likely that we are looking at a combination of two forms of discrimination at the intersection of race and gender.

Today, the term intersectionality is used more broadly to examine how multiple forms of systemic discrimination, including classism, homophobia, trans antagonism, ageism and ableism create compounding negative impacts for groups situated within these intersections. An intersectional approach helps to identify where there are multiple forms of marginalization and where these combine. This combination of identities means that people can be negatively impacted differently and more intensely by policies or programs that don't consider identities in a more holistic way. Intersectionality provides a lens through which these issues can be addressed as a whole rather than individually.

*Examples of an intersectional lens in action:*

- *Data collection forms that don't default to "male and female" identity boxes, but instead ask about gender outside the binary, race, and any other demographic information pertinent to purpose of collection*
- *A model for Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that allows for the creation of groups along intersections of identity such as QTPOC (queer and trans people of colour), and WOC in STEM (women of colour in science, technology, engineering, math).*
- *Accessible, below-market housing that is built specifically to the needs of Indigenous woman-led families*
- *Focused consultations with the most vulnerable of working people, including owners of small ethnic corner stores, older migrant workers, and trans sex workers to inform future economic planning*

### **4. Systems orientation**

Historically, the efforts to reverse inequities have focused on interventions that are individual in nature: to help a child with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) keep up in school,

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<sup>16</sup> See Introduction to Intersectionality and Intersectionality Toolkit



assign them a support worker. To have more women in leadership, identify promising women, mentor and accelerate them through the ranks. To address racism in the workplace, create a strong anti-discrimination policy so that incidents can be reported, investigated and addressed. To move people out of homelessness, build shelters.

These efforts are incredibly important and necessary. And over time we have come to appreciate that they are not adequate on their own, because inequities are not just a problem of a few people falling through the cracks of the system, they are created by the systems themselves – sometimes unintentionally, often by design.

Bayard Love and Deena Hayes-Greene have used the metaphor of groundwater to explain this phenomena<sup>17</sup>: If we came to a lake and saw a dead fish floating on the water, we would ask what happened to this fish? But if we came to a lake with hundreds of dead fish, we would ask what is wrong with the lake water? And if we observed that there were hundreds of dead fish across the lakes in the region, we would have to ask what's going on with the groundwater that connects all the lakes? We would understand that to "fix fish" or clean up one lake at a time simply won't work, because we would be putting fixed fish back into toxic water or filtering a lake that is quickly re-contaminated by the toxic groundwater. A systemic approach to inequity treats it as a groundwater problem: when we see that equity-denied groups are struggling across our institutions - in the education system, at work, in the judicial system etc. – we look at structural and cultural factors at play across the system and concentrate some of our interventions at that level.

***“Racial equity recognizes that the systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-Indigenous racism have a larger impact than individual acts of racism based on consciously held beliefs of racial superiority and the way whiteness is positioned as the cultural norm”***  
***– Culture|Shift –***

A systemic intervention usually involves uncovering the underlying assumptions, values and norms on which systems are built, recognizing that they are in fact not neutral, and then shifting or broadening them to influence the dynamics that produce the inequitable outcomes. For example, to help the child with ADHD, perhaps we re-think the assumption that children should be able to sit in chairs for long hours every day, and we instead build in more flexibility and permission to move in the classroom for all children. To help women and racialized people succeed in the workplace, perhaps we re-think the cultural norms and practices of the workplace, including the hours we work, where we socialize, how our meetings are facilitated, what data is valued, how productivity is defined, whose art we display on our walls, whose days of significance we recognize, and what range of emotions we allow. This is by no means a trivial task. The implications of these shifts need close examination and new arrangements may well be needed to make it work – but these shifts have a transformative potential that goes far beyond “fixing” the child, the woman, or the person of colour, or helping them fit into a system that was designed in somebody else’s image.

Systemic interventions often have an element of structural change – e.g. laws, policies, operative procedures, funding mechanism etc. – and they have an element of culture change – e.g. how people relate to each other, how power is shared, how much uncertainty is tolerated.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/groundwaterapproach>

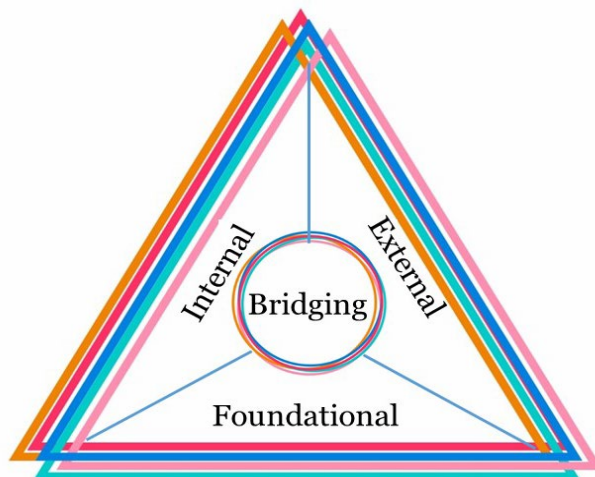
When we consider systemic interventions to address inequities, the process can feel frightening because it can bring into question everything we thought we knew and could rely on including the foundations of our thinking formed by family, religion, and academic or professional disciplines. For those who have thrived within the current systems, the questioning might feel threatening, as is always the case with processes of change. It is important to acknowledge and work through this individual resistance in order to enable systemic change.

*Examples of a systemic lens in action:*

- *Conducting a colonial audit to diagnose the colonial processes, systems, mechanisms, policies, ideology, and discourse that is institutionalized within City operations*
- *Integrate an equity lens into the City's budget process to identify strategic opportunities for shifting investment in the direction of equity*
- *Introducing onboarding processes that ask all new employees, as a matter of course, about their accessibility needs, so that it is not up to the persons with disabilities to breach the subject with their supervisor*
- *Rethinking the concept of "professional conduct" in a work context to be more inclusive of different cultural norms of expression such as how people dress and to what degree emotions are acceptable*

## Priority Areas

As the City's Equity Commitments make clear, embedding equity in our work is needed in all parts of the organization, though it is clear that some departments will have a more central leading role on various aspects of the work. Inspired by the [Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmark tool](#), we are grouping the work that needs to be done into four groups of activities described below: Foundational, Internal, External and Bridging.



## Our Priority Areas

The Equity Framework does not prescribe detailed action that need to be taken within each of these categories, but the implementation of the Equity Framework involves identifying and tracking progress of ongoing and new actions within each category. Some actions – particularly those in the External group – are policy directions that require motions to move forward. Others – particularly in the Foundational, Internal and Bridging groups – are about organizational culture, or administrative and operational procedures, and actions in these areas will be determined and directed by staff. It is the responsibility of each department at the City to align their strategic plans, annual work plans, and day-to-day decisions with the directions provided by the Equity Framework.. The City's Equity Office will act

as a resource to support this work, and as an oversight body to ensure accountability.

*Foundational: vision, leadership, governance*

The foundational group of activities is about designing the infrastructure for advancing equity, and ensuring that it remains coordinated and connected as different parts of the organization advance this work. It involves developing a rationale for doing equity work, and providing an overall vision and commitments, aligned to other City goals. That is the work of this Framework – to be refreshed regularly - and may be supplemented at the departmental level to reflect the specific language and culture of the department.

The foundational group of activities also includes growing leadership that is increasingly fluent around Indigenous Rights, racial justice, intersectional, and systemic equity challenges and opportunities, and sustaining an accountability structure that distributes the responsibility for this work among members of the City Leadership Team. Activities also include convening an ongoing interdepartmental Equity Council, a network of Employee Resource Groups, and ongoing conversations with the unions. This work will be led out of the City Manager's Office by the City's Equity Officer to ensure appropriate authority, visibility and ability to coordinate across the City.

*Internal: human resources functions*

The second group of activities have to do with growing a workforce that represents the communities we serve, and providing City employees with opportunities to thrive. As a major employer in Vancouver, the City has a significant impact on equity through its internal operations.

Internal activities include advancing equity approaches in the recruitment process, ensuring that equity is integrated into professional development; performance management, advancement, and retention; working with unions to ensure that job design and classification are evaluated for bias and that compensation is equitable, and that flexibility and benefits are available to City staff whenever possible. This group of activities will be led by the City's Human Resources department in collaboration with all other departments.

*Bridging: learning, communications, finance*

The activities in this group provide linkages between the foundational, internal and external work at the City. It would be difficult for the work in the other categories to advance without effective work in the Bridging Group.

Activities in this group include educating the City on equity. This includes working with managers across departments to socialize their teams on the definitions and approaches put forward by this Framework and embedding them into day-to-day practices ranging from how meetings are held to whom we go to for advice. Training and ongoing internal communications are a key component in this group of activities. It also includes the creation of an overarching tracking system that explicitly names objectives and committed actions in each of the areas named above and reflects progress on these actions over time. Finally, this group connects the City's equity work with finance, legal, sustainability and other key departments at the City. Responsibility for this group of activities will sit with the City Manager's Office and will include partnerships across the organization.

*External: community-facing functions*

The final group of activities concerns the ways that equity should be integrated into the City's work with communities. This is a large category reflecting the work of the City in so many different areas ranging from parks and recreation, to fire and rescue services, arts and culture, zoning bylaws and building permits, design of streets and waste collection – all of which could be examined over the next few years with an intersectional, decolonial, racial justice, and systemic equity lens. This group also includes civic engagement and public consultation, how the City works with residents, in partnership with the Host Nations, and other levels of government. Finally it includes all areas of planning and service provision that focus on addressing the needs of equity-denied groups, brought together under the umbrella of the Healthy City Strategy. Success in all these efforts requires capacity building for staff and decision-makers to apply the lenses described in this Framework.

The latter set of activities – those focused directly on the needs of equity-denied groups in community – will continue to be led by Arts, Culture, and Community Services. All other community-facing departments at the City, meanwhile, will be involved in activities within this category as it pertains to their own areas of work.

**Towards Collective Impact**

The completion of this Equity Framework marks a moment when the City of Vancouver makes a significant commitment to move in the direction of equity as one organization. The potential impacts that different arms of the City can have when acting in alignment with each other can be far bigger than the sum of those efforts in isolation from each other. As the vision and concepts from this Framework infuse the City's culture, they will influence mindsets, interactions and practices in the course of every employee's daily work. The transformative shifts that our communities are asking for require that we act collectively inside the City, and with partners in community. This Framework is an act of hope in that direction.

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