Racial Equity in Public Budgeting: An Analysis of Three Pioneer Cases

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Abstract: Over the past decade, pressure has mounted for governments to address the effects of racial disparities and systemic racism. Some governments have implemented racial equity reforms that build on the public budgeting cycle as a system that can help filter new interventions and push for redesigning existing ones. This paper presents in-depth case studies of three local governments that are pioneers in advancing racial equity through public budgeting systems: the City of Austin, TX, the City of Baltimore, MD, and King County, WA. The in-depth analysis shows how reforms in these governments have influenced policymaking processes and how they have affected government accountability. We expect that our findings will provide valuable insights into the key contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of policies aimed at fostering racial equity through the budgeting process, providing key points for practitioners to replicate and directions for academia to move forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Many local governments around the United States are responding to increased citizen pressure to address systemic racism. One of the most common approaches is to develop a racial equity assessment framework and apply it to a diverse range of policymaking processes. For instance, a network called the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, which promotes the use of a racial equity framework has worked with almost 350 local governments in the United States (GARE n.d.). The federal government and some state governments have also taken initial steps to become more intentional in addressing racial inequities (Office of Management and Budget, 2021; Executive Order 13985, 2021; House Bill 1783, 2020).

Despite these advancements, there is little to no academic scholarship that analyzes recent reforms. Instead, while it is agreed that the field of public administration has a role in taking action to tackle inequities (Frederickson, 1971; Gooden, 2014; McCandless et al., 2022), the overall focus of its scholarship has remained on issues of efficiency and effectiveness while paying less attention to promoting equity (Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and Joyce, 2022). Up until recently, the limited literature on equity had focused on measuring the issues instead of taking action to address them (Gooden, 2017). As this focus slowly transitions to more practical aspects, research in the past decade has led to findings such as the tensions that public administrators see between efficiency and equity and the setbacks that may come during implementation (Clark, 2018; Fernández-Gutiérrez and Van de Walle, 2018; Riccucci 2009).

The availability of relevant scholarship has increased in the past two years as the sense of urgency to deal with contemporaneous racial inequities becomes more evident. Some recent publications that directly address the role of race in public administration processes include an analysis of sexual harassment in the military (Breslin, Daniel, and Hylton 2022), racial
representation and policing outcomes (Choi and Hong, 2021), and the barriers to access social
welfare and public services (Butz and Gaynor, 2022; Cheng, Yang, and Deng, 2022). In another
example, a recently published study uses critical race theory to develop a framework to introduce
racial equity in public budgeting processes (Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and Joyce 2022). That
framework describes opportunities within each stage of the budget cycle where policy decisions
can introduce information that can help counter racial biases.

In this study, we build on the framework developed by Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and
Joyce (2022), and we apply it to the in-depth examination of three case studies. We selected three
local governments from the United States that have worked for several years to introduce and
institutionalize a racial equity framework in their budgeting processes. Those governments are
King County, WA, and the cities of Austin, TX, and Baltimore, MD. For each case study we
answer the following three research questions: are governments taking measures to correct racial
biases in past policies? Are governments enhancing the voice of nondominant, intersectional
groups? And are governments analyzing and mitigating potential racial biases in existing
(baseline) and new policies?

Our findings suggest that [PENDING: to be completed after the APPAM conference, as
we finish our discussion section].

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. The next section presents a literature
review of public budgeting reforms and their link to racial equity. The third section describes our
methods. The fourth section presents our findings for each of our three case studies, followed by
a discussion section and ending with some conclusion.

2 PUBLIC BUDGETING AND RACIAL EQUITY
In this section, we go through the existing literature to show how the main orientation of public budgeting has evolved from strict financial controls to a more nuanced view of the goals that governments want to achieve when allocating resources. Overall, we find that equity considerations have seldom been at the forefront despite the significant potential that budgetary processes have to mainstream them.

2.1 From line-item to performance: The evolution of public budgeting

The literature on public budgeting focused, first and foremost, on questions associated with how to determine the allocation of resources across different purposes. V.O. Key’s classic (Key, 1940) question “On what basis shall it be decided to allocate X dollars to Activity A rather than Activity B?” informed early efforts. Key’s point was that, up to that juncture, the focus had been on the technical aspects of budgeting or raising revenues, but not on the most basic question of budgeting. This kicked off greater attention to addressing this question, including the publication of the first public budgeting textbook (Burkhead, 1956) by the mid-1950s.

Next came a couple of notable specific developments in the study of budgeting. First, Aaron Wildavsky and his colleagues (Davis, Dempster, and Wildavsky, 1966; Wildavsky, 1964) emphasized budgeting as an incremental process, where it was highly unlikely to experience significant changes from one year to the next. Wildavsky himself argued that the best predictor of next year’s budget is this year’s budget. Wildavsky emphasized the importance of the budget “base” as a determinant of future budgets. He pointed to budgeting as a political process, and since the political environment does not change substantially from one year to the next, it is thus unlikely to expect the budget to undergo radical change.
Second, and almost simultaneously, Allen Schick suggested, that there were three functions of budgeting—control, management, and planning—in the context of the evolution of the federal budget process embodied in the 1960s Planning-Programming-Budgeting System. The specific evolution that Schick described was a movement from a budget process that focused on line items (control), to one that focused on the connection between line items and outputs (management), to one that emphasized connecting resources to the objectives of programs or policies (planning) (Schick, 1966).

The “performance budgeting” movement came out of this general thread. Performance budgeting has many names, but the common theme is that there should be some connection between resources, on the one hand, and the results of public programs, on the other. Many examples of governments attempting reforms consistent with this movement internationally exist. A recent book includes case studies of performance budgeting across more than 14 high-, middle-, and low-income countries (Ho, De Jong, and Zhao, 2019). They find, predictably, a wide variety of practices, and predictable difficulties in implementing such reforms. Robinson also published an edited book that laid out the challenges inherent in the reform, focusing on topics such as cost measurement, outcome measurement, program budgeting, and incentives for decision-making (Robinson, 2007).

In the United States, state and local governments have been some of the leaders in performance budgeting. Numerous studies have reviewed the experiences of state and local governments with performance budgeting (Jordan and Hackbart, 1999; Hou, 2011; Ingraham, Joyce, and Kneedler, 2003). The U.S. federal government has been active in a renewed performance budgeting effort since the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act in 1993 and that effort continued at least through the Obama administration (Joyce, 2011).
One relatively recent thread, starting with Joyce (2003) and continuing through Willoughby and Lu (2018) is the focus on performance budgeting as a reform that can influence any stage of the budget process and is therefore not limited to only the preparation of the budget by the chief executive or its consideration by a legislative body. In fact, in a report on performance budgeting in the U.S. states, the National Association of State Budget Officers offered a nice summary of performance budgeting, stating that “(t)his paper defines performance budgeting as a budget process where performance information is, in some way, incorporated into resource allocation decisions. It can refer to instances whereby performance information is available and/or used at any stage of the budget process, including budget preparation, budget approval, budget execution, and audit and evaluation” (National Association of State Budget Officers, 2014, p. 3).

These efforts to focus on performance, however, tend to focus on performance in the aggregate, and have not, with few exceptions, focused explicit attention on using the budget process to promote equity. We note the exceptions to this below, particularly the attempts to implement gender budgeting and participatory budgeting.

2.2 Introducing equity into public budgeting

Public budgeting is an appropriate mechanism for intentionally incorporating equity into an organization. Budgeting is an overarching, institutional process that directly affects all programs and policy areas. Historically, mechanisms of institutions such as laws, procedures, and budgets have been used to perpetuate racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013); therefore, it makes sense to use an institutional tool to address systemic racism and its consequences.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) has been an area that has emphasized the role of budgeting in advancing gender equity. GRB is the integration of the gender perspective into
budgeting decisions (Rubin and Bartle, 2005). It recognizes that budgets are often not neutral and, specifically, are often not gender-neutral. As Elson (1999) points out, disparate impacts of budget decision-making on men and women invalidate the notion of gender blindness.

The rejection of neutrality of laws and policies, especially those that represent spending and revenue-raising priorities, is a key argument of critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). The claim of neutrality is dismissive of the social and economic differences among those impacted. The consequences-intended or unintended-of past policies influence current conditions. CRT calls for the recognition and redress of those consequences (Bridges, 2019).

CRT also calls for the honoring of the lived experience of those who are not in the dominant position, “centering the margin” (Ingram et al 2020; Daftary 2018). This is somewhat aligned with the budget principle of transparency and community engagement. Specifically, participatory budgeting as a movement was inspired by the successful work of the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil to allow direct public participation to ensure that funds are redirected to those with the greatest need (Pape and Lerner, 2016). However, this equity-inspired process does not guarantee an equitable outcome because the participants often have competing interests and the preferences of marginalized groups are not centered (Pape and Lerner, 2016; Walker et al., 2015) or engagement strategies are not impacting budget decisions (Ebdon and Franklin, 2004).

Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and Joyce (2022) take a comprehensive approach to incorporating equity into the budgeting process by developing a CRT budget framework. To ensure the institutionalization of equity, the authors emphasize incorporating equity into the four phases of the budget cycle: executive preparation, legislative consideration, budget execution, and audit and evaluation. Within each phase, they provide a three-pronged series of
recommendations and examples that (1) acknowledge and address past discriminatory practices, (2) center the voices of the marginalized, and (3) disrupt the status quo with intentionally equitable practices. Key recommendations include disaggregating and analyzing data to determine past and current disparate outcomes; targeting and incorporating marginalized voices throughout the policy-making, implementation, and funding decision processes; and evaluating the outcomes of policy and funding decisions.

3 METHODS

This paper analyzes case studies of local governments in the United States. Our analysis follows an abductive approach, i.e., it builds on both inductive and deductive theorizing (Ashworth, McDermott, and Currie 2019; Klag and Langley 2013; Tavory and Timmermans 2014). From an inductive perspective, we conduct three in-depth case study analyses that enhance understanding by observing internal processes (Nowell and Albrecht 2019). From a deductive perspective, we use a replicable framework built from the available literature that can be applied to similar case studies (Yin 2009). Through this approach we aim to answer the following questions:

(1) are governments taking measures to correct racial biases in past policies?

(2) are governments enhancing the voice of nondominant, intersectional groups?

(3) are governments analyzing and mitigating potential racial biases in existing (baseline) and new policies?

The examination of each case study was built around a research framework informed by the available literature (see table 1). The framework includes a set of variables that gravitate around the use of a racial-equity perspective in policymaking. These variables are the ones that will most directly respond to our research questions. The other variables included in our
framework are those that previous literature has shown to be important in understanding why budgetary reforms succeed or fail. The inclusion of these explanatory variables allows us to provide a more meaningful analysis of what has happened in each case and make this a replicable framework.

**Table 1. Research Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of Racial-Equity Perspective</th>
<th>Explanatory Variables</th>
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### Correcting for racial biases in past policies
- Quantifying the past negative effects of discrimination to inform potential redresses
- Taking administrative actions to correct for biases in hiring and other processes
- Evaluating the results from restorative efforts

**Enhancing the voice of nondominant, intersectional groups**
- Soliciting input from nondominant and intersectionally diverse groups
- Using input from those groups to allocate resources, design policies, and monitor progress

**Mitigating potential racial biases in existing and new policies**
- Enhancing data requests during budget formulation and approval
- Including equity in performance information systems
- Analyze the distributional effects of existing and new policies

### Leadership Support
- Building support
- Overcoming resistance
- Institutionalizing change

**The capacity of Civil Service**
- Civil service capacity to analyze data
- Buy-in and biases from civil servants
- Training and capacity development

**Formal & Informal Rules**
- Budgetary process rigidities
- Budgetary roles and responsibilities
- Budgetary structure and classifications

**Systems & Resources**
- Resources for reform implementation
- Information management systems
- Guidelines and methodologies

**Contextual Factors**
- Legal and strategic framework
- The economic and political context

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Note: adapted from Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and Joyce (2022) and Martinez Guzman (2022).

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Our case selection focused on the relevance and availability of information. In terms of relevance, we conducted an initial exploration of governments that have implemented and institutionalized budgetary reforms aimed to promote racial equity. Our initial goal was to cover
federal, state, and local governments, but the initial exploration showed that reforms have only been institutionalized at the local level. After developing a short list of relevant cases, we selected those that presented an information-rich environment to facilitate analysis. Our final selection includes King County, WA, and the cities of Austin, TX, and Baltimore, MD.

Data for each case was collected between January and November 2022. The first few months of this process focused on collecting and analyzing public documentation, such as budgets, strategic plans, official reports, and legal frameworks. Interviews started in March 2022 and continued until November 2022. Most interviews followed a semi-structured conversational protocol informed by our research framework and all of them adhered to the processes mandated by the Institutional Review Board. Initial interviewees were contacted through publicly available contact information and/or through referrals made directly to the authors. Subsequent interviewees were recruited using snowball sampling. The focus of the snowball sampling was twofold: getting interviewees from key regulatory institutions - such as central budget offices - and from individual agencies where reforms have been implemented. [Note: we are still conducting interviews. The final version of the paper will include details on the number of interviews, method of interview, etcetera.]

The main limitation of our approach is its capacity to draw inferences about other jurisdictions. Our sampling is neither random nor representative of other local governments in the United States, therefore, we suggest caution when making inferences. Finally, while we cover a comprehensive list of factors based on the available literature, we acknowledge that there might be relevant unobserved factors that could have helped explain the phenomena we observe.

4 FINDINGS
A few governments have introduced equity-oriented reforms aimed specifically at budgetary decisions. In this section, we present the findings from our three case studies: the city governments of Austin, TX, and Baltimore, MD, and the county government of King County, WA. [Note: our case studies will eventually be re-edited to have the same structure. We welcome comments on what would be the ideal structure.]

### 4.1 Austin, Texas

“Austin is Most Economically Segregated Metro Area” was The Texas Tribune’s headline in February of 2015, which was based on a story originally published in the Washington Post a few hours earlier (Badger 2015a; Badger 2015b). Specifically, the University of Toronto’s Martin Prosperity Institute study examined the geography of economic segregation in America. The author’s used a three-pronged measure of economic segregation: income, occupation, and education as well as determining overall economic segregation (Florida and Mellander, 2015).

Austin ranked third among all metros in overall economic segregation, and first most economically segregated among large metros (populations of at least one million). More specifically, Austin ranked first among large metros for the segregation of those without high school degrees (4th among all metros); fifth among large metros for overall educational segregation (7th among all metros). Austin was seventh and eighth among large metros for the segregation of the creative class and the service class, respectively, and second in most working class segregation among large and all metros. Finally, Austin’s fourth and seventh place rank for most overall occupational segregation, respectively, among the largest and all metros complete the components of Austin’s classification as one of the most overall economically segregated metros in America (Florida and Mellander, 2015).
The following month in response to the Martin Institute study, the Austin City Council passed Resolution No. 20150507-027. The following is an extract from that resolution:

The City Manager is further directed to coordinate with the working group and City of Austin Budget Office staff and other departments to evaluate the impact that existing City policies and practices have on equity, evaluate best practices in other cities, and develop recommendations for addressing current race and socioeconomic-based inequities throughout the City in terms of economics, working conditions, local health outcomes, and participation in public affairs. The recommendations should include, but not be limited to the development of an equity assessment tool to be used by every City department during the budget process.

Main components of the reform

The Equity Action Team (EAT) is an organizing coalition of city officials and community members that maintained pressure to ensure the execution of the resolution. In 2016, the Equity Office was created to advance equity throughout City operations. The Equity Office provides services such as one-on-one equity consultation as well as equity training for city officials and community members. They also review and provide recommendations regarding policies, services, and programs to address the concerns of city officials and community members.

A primary component of the equity efforts in Austin includes the creation and implementation of the Equity Assessment Tool that was co-created by the Equity Office and the Equity Action Team. The departmental self-assessment tool covers 4 sections: Department Culture, Community Engagement, Budget, and Alignment with the Strategic Direction of 2023.
Its purpose is to require departments to critically examine their “policies, procedures, planning, programs, personnel, and budgeting through” an equity lens. The first cohort, in 2017, consisted of 12 departments, including the CFO/Budget Office, Water Utility, Economic Development, Water Utility, Parks and Recreation, and Transportation Departments. The goal was to have all City departments cycle through the 3-year process by 2020 (City of Austin’s Equity Office, 2021a).

These departmental self-assessments are publicized on the EAT Dashboard, which provides a link to each departmental dashboard. The departments provide information in six areas. First is the department’s response to the Assessment Tool. As a link to the strategic plan, the departments also provide the results of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The third is the Equity Action Plan which provides implementation steps to addressing equity concerns and an implementation graph of progress. The “Listening to the Workforce” section of the departmental dashboard publicizes the results of the annual employee survey which includes five equity questions. The final two areas of reporting are the departmental employee demographic data and the staff who have completed “undoing Racism” training by members of the EAT (City of Austin’s Equity Office, 2021a).

Two other components of the equity efforts in Austin are equity-related reports and grants, which can be accessed via the EAT Dashboard. The reports have included policing and racial profiling, transportation, and land use, the COVID response, and the 2018 bond projects equity analysis.

The office has also developed equity grants: Equity Mini-Grant and Immigration Integration. The equity mini-grants are intended for grassroots and local community organizations that address major quality-of-life disparities. The immigration integration mini-
grant is awarded for grassroots efforts to eliminate structural barriers and improve the quality of life of the City’s immigrant community (City of Austin’s Equity Office, 2021b).

Influence on policymaking

The forty-seven-point equity assessment tool requires departments to thoroughly and critically evaluate equity in their processes. As it pertains to departmental budget making and spending, departments must indicate how they pursue racial equity throughout the budget planning. They are also expected to address how they incorporate the voices of marginalized communities. For instance, they must indicate how they involve marginalized communities of color in the budget process and how much funding goes to those efforts. Departments must list the opportunities offered to residents to provide recommendations on programs, policies, and plans and how much funding is allocated to that effort.

To assess the departmental equity efforts, departments must indicate the specific practices or funding. For instance, they must indicate the budget amount used to support awarding grants to programs and services that are designed to advance equity for communities of color. They must also address the process and funding for translating public documents, policies, applications, and notices for persons with hearing and English proficiency limitations.

In addition to engaging communities of color regarding budgeting, policies, and access, departments are required to list a year of their community engagement activities and the stage in the decision-making process do they engage the community. They list strategies employed to ensure departmental accountability to communities of color in their planning process. They are asked to indicate the number, demographics, and feedback of their community engagement efforts.
Culturally, departments report on the demographics of employees, clients, contractors, and consultants. They also report on the funds allocated towards increasing diversity within the departments and equity training opportunities for staff. Departments report staff onboarding practices that orient staff to historical and current inequities. Specifically, departments are asked to provide strategies for understanding the lived experiences of members of marginalized communities.

Given the City of Austin’s whole-of-government approach to equity, the long-term impact on the policymaking process is still unclear. The assessment tool does attempt to address accountability by asking for specific activities towards advancing equity and the funding allocation for those activities. Furthermore, the departments’ self-assessments are available online via the EAT Dashboard. However, at the time of this study, there is no external review of departmental progress. In other words, the quality of departmental responses to the assessment tool as well as progress towards advancing equity may vary greatly across departments, but there is not an official external review and reporting on the department’s progress in advancing equity or their use of the assessment tool. Consequences for not reporting or not advancing equity are not indicated. Therefore, there is no independent verification of the departments’ stated progress.

According to an interviewee, self-assessments should take place every three years, and all departments should have completed their first cycle of self-assessment by 2020. At the time of this study, only two of four cohorts reported the first cycle of their self-assessment on the EAT Dashboard. Impacted by the COVID pandemic, EAT members are still meeting monthly, and there are plans to use consultants external to the State of Texas to provide an evaluation of the equity program.
Finally, while the Equity Office has provided equity-impact analyses in several areas, there is no indication that such analyses have become a procedural norm in the policy-making and decision-making process. The assessment tool and department’s equity action plan do not ascertain the use of or require an equity analysis as a policy for certain programs or services. Therefore, if such a practice exists, the assessment tool and equity action plan may not capture it.

**Key strengths and obstacles**

According to an interviewee, the “buy-in” of the department head is critical in determining the progress toward’s equity. Public Health, Watershed Protection, and Economic Development, all from the first cohort, were identified as examples of progress. The public health department’s COVID response to testing clinics is an example. Economic development has seen an increase in small business support for racial minority business owners, and there was a redesign of the cultural arts division funding that resulted in more support of artists from marginalized groups. The watershed protection department has created a floodplain fund to evaluate homes. The development of the largely white and elevated area of west Austin leads to the flooding of largely minority southeast Austin.

As a sign of their continued interest in advancing equity, the City Council passed a resolution in 2021 that apologized for the 1928 Master Plan and decades of land, housing, and urban renewal policies that were discriminatory against Black Austinites. The 1928 Master Plan was a segregation plan that forcibly removed Black Austinites from west Austin to the “Negro District” in east Austin under the threat of losing access to public services if living outside of the district. The dispossessed Black owners were not compensated for the value of the land taken. According to an interviewee, the population of Black Austinites in east Austin is now declining due to the increased cost of gentrification. Resolution No. 20210304-067 commissioned a study
in partnership with the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs and Huston-Tillotson University. The purpose of the study is to quantify the economic value of the “harm caused through economic, health, environmental, criminal injustice, and other racial disparities” (City of Austin Resolution No. 20210304-067, 2021, p. 6).

However, there is a concern that the City Council is sending mixed messages and bends to pressure from certain groups not wanting the focus on equity. For instance, an equity assessment of the police division noted problems with the academy. Specifically, Black cadets were being injured and kicked out. Despite the recommendation to close the academy, the academy was reinstated and police funding was increased “against public wishes” according to an interviewee.

Austin’s equity efforts do address the 3-pronged framework offered by Martinez Guzman, Jordan, and Joyce (2022). The equity assessment tool directly addresses two of the prongs. First, the departmental self-assessments do address the incorporation of the input and feedback of marginalized populations throughout the budget and policy-making process. Second, the tool also expects departments to collect disaggregated and demographic information so that they can measure and identify disparate outcomes of departmental programs and services. In addition to the assessment tool, the third prong is Austin’s acknowledgment, apology, and commissioning of a study of the economic and other consequences of the 1928 Master Plan and other racially discriminatory practices conducted by the city. However, the apparent stall in the reporting of the assessment tool results is troubling. Department Cohorts are behind schedule in developing equity dashboards and implementing the assessment tool.

Finally, Austin is in the state of Texas. The state legislature and governor have been decidedly against efforts to advance equity. There have been efforts to abolish the terms like
racism and limit teachings on slavery. State elected officials have issued concerns about the discomfort of white children. Therefore, one interviewee expressed concerns that any effort to redress the practices of the 1928 Master Plan will be political and will need to walk a fine line and avoid controversial terms like reparations.

4.2 Baltimore, Maryland

Unlike many other cities in the U.S. where the leading push for equity reforms came after the killing of George Floyd in 2020, the City of Baltimore saw its main reckoning event in 2015 when Freddie Gray died after being injured in police custody (Baltimore Sun 2016). Gray’s death was followed by 17 days of public unrest amid calls for the government to take action. Multiple interviewees highlighted the death of Freddie Gray as the catalyst point that helped formalize some individual initiatives that had been brewing in some departments. As government officials looking for ways to make equity a more central part of policymaking, some were pushing to build from existing initiatives – including some assessments being conducted by the Department of Planning – and to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions. Regarding the latter, 18 months after the death of Freddie Gray the Baltimore Bureau of Budget & Management Research (BBMR) engaged in a collaborative meeting with the City of Seattle to share their most innovative budgetary practices. In this meeting, officials from Baltimore shared their experience with outcomes-based budgeting and learned from Seattle’s use of a racial equity toolkit (Bureau of Budget & Management Research 2018).

Shortly after the exchange with Seattle, Baltimore’s intention to use a racial equity lens became official with the passage of two bills. The City Council Bill 18-0223 created the equity assessment program, which requires agencies to “proactively develop policies, practices, and strategic investments to reverse disparity trends based on race, gender, or income”, and to “act to
eliminate structural and institutional racism and discrimination of all kinds.” This bill also established requirements to develop action plans, conduct equity assessments, and submit annual equity reports. The second piece of legislation, City Council Bill 18-0222, created the equity assistance fund which is a “non-lapsing fund for purposes of assisting efforts that reduce inequity based on race, gender, or economic status in Baltimore.” Finally, the fact that this bill amended the City Charter meant that it had to be approved by voters. On November 6, 2018, the bill received overwhelming support and was approved with 79.80% of the vote (Guerrero 2019).

*A Description of the Reform*

With the legal framework in place, the City of Baltimore developed the institutions to operationalize it. While the bills passed in 2018 gave the Department of Planning a leadership role, by the end of 2019 the city created the Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR) to take charge of the equity assessment program, following the recommendation of a multi-agency committee created to determine the structure of a new equity division (Office of Equity and Civil Rights 2020). An expanded version of that committee remains in place -now referred to as the Mayor’s Equity in Government committee – to oversee the work of the OECR. The OECR now oversees a structured system with multiple components: the equity assessment program, the equity assistance fund, the annual equity report, and a network of equity coordinators in each city agency. These components are completed with reforms directed by the Department of Planning, the BBMR, and the Mayor’s Office.

The equity assessment program requires each agency to develop a framework to analyze if its policies are equitable. While in theory agencies have some liberty in deciding how to assess equity, in practice, the self-assessment tends to run annually and focus on a set of questions developed by the OECR. The self-assessment questionnaire, which was made public in the first
annual equity report, consists of 11 eleven questions, including a specific question about equity in budgeting decisions (Office of Equity and Civil Rights 2020). Each agency is required to have an equity coordinator to lead the program, which in some agencies has been translated into a full-time position, while in many others this role is assigned to an existing member of the organization (Office of Equity and Civil Rights 2022). The OECR has a legal mandate to translate the information from the equity assessment program into annual equity reports.

The equity assistance fund, per the City Council Bill 18-0222, must have “a mandatory annual appropriation in the Ordinance of Estimates of an amount equal to at least 3% of the amount appropriated for the Police Department of Baltimore City.” The fund could also be increased through grants or donations and would keep unspent balances within the fund, prohibiting reverting them for general use. This bill also detailed the four policy areas that the fund will serve:

1. Provide equity in housing;
2. Provide equitable access to education;
3. Assist efforts to redress past inequities in City capital budget spending; and
4. eliminating structural and institutional racism and other forms of discrimination based on immutable characteristics.

The capital budget of the City of Baltimore is directed by the Department of Planning through the development of a six-year capital improvement plan. Over the past few years, the processes to determine the capital improvement plan have been modified to bring equity considerations directly into decision-making. Arguably the most important change is that agencies are now required to submit an equity evaluation explaining the demographics and geographic location that will be impacted by their projects, as well as detailing the level of
community involvement. Another innovation at the Department of Planning is the introduction of a participatory process called the ‘planning academy’, which trains community members on urban planning processes so that they can participate and engage more efficiently. The academy consists of a free six-week course offered twice each year.

The BBMR also runs systems that can provide a direct link between equity considerations and the budgeting process. For the past decade, Baltimore’s budgeting processes have been marked by a program budgeting structure called outcome budgeting. This system divides the budget into five ‘priority outcomes’ developed by the Mayor’s Office and creates results teams composed of city employees and members of the public. All budgetary documents follow those priority outcomes and detail how much of each agency’s budget is linked to each of them. Also, BBMR is responsible for public hearings mandated by the City Charter known as taxpayer nights. These hearings provide a potential channel for underrepresented minorities to have a voice during the budget process.

The Mayor’s Office also runs a managerial tool, known as the CitiStat, that predates equity reforms but that could be directly linked to them. The CitiStat is a performance monitoring system with a longstanding and well-documented tradition in the City of Baltimore (Abramson and Behn 2006, O’Malley 2014). In an article published after the death of Freddie Gray, Radin (2015) argued that the CitiStat system might unintendedly result in inequitable outcomes, such as the acceptance of discriminatory measures as long as they bring good results in terms of efficiency. The specific format of the CitiStat performance management meeting has changed with each administration. As explained by one interviewee, its current format includes bi-weekly meetings with some specific agencies, like the police, another set of bi-weekly meetings that are problem-oriented – for example, keeping the city clean- and that involve
multiple agencies, and a set of monthly meetings that dig into larger projects and involve collaboration with external partners. That same interviewee explained that CitiStat meetings aim to discuss “what is the impact of services, what are their challenges, what is going well.”

*Current Practice and Progress*

The equity-oriented reforms in the City of Baltimore have had a positive impact on some policymaking processes, but their relevance remains low in many others. In terms of budgetary processes, the capital budget formulation is being conducted in a manner that considers equity implications as a relevant input. The same is not true for the operating budget, where equity has, at best, a tangential role. However, it is important to note that the equity-oriented reforms are still in the development stage and there is the expectation that their influence on policymaking will increase in upcoming years.

Requiring an equity analysis for capital project proposals has directly brought equity consideration into the budgetary process. This information translates into yearly reports titled ‘Capital Improvement Program Equity Analysis’ which have been published for the past three years and are publicly available online. Furthermore, the Department of Planning created a capital improvement plan oversight committee which is comprised of members of different agencies including the OECR. All interviewees at the Department of Planning who have had direct exposure to the capital improvement plan agree that equity has become a significant factor in funding decisions. One of those interviewees explained that as agencies compete for funding, they are making a significant effort to show that their projects are equitable so that they can convince evaluators that their proposals should rank higher. At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that equity considerations are limited to the budget formulation phase as the City
Council tends to have a very limited impact on the budget during its approval, and monitoring during budget execution remains financially oriented.

While the reforms led by the Department of Planning are influencing budgetary decisions, the same is not true for most other reforms. Based on the information provided by interviewees from multiple departments, it became clear that the equity assessment program run by the OECR, the CitiStat performance monitoring meetings run by the Mayor’s Office, and the outcome budgeting system run by the BBMR do not coordinate with each other. For example, one interviewee explained that the budget formulation process temporarily included a question about equity, but this was suspended until it gets better coordinated with the work being done through the equity assessment program.

The equity assessment program and the equity assistance fund are key components of Baltimore’s reforms that are not living up to their expectations. The expectation -and legal mandate- was that the information for the equity assessment program would translate into annual equity reports. Meeting this new mandate, the OECR published the first annual equity report in 2020. The report starts with the history and methodological approach of the reforms. The report includes a transversal analysis of the situation in the city government by rating agencies in four areas\(^2\). This analysis shows that between a third to half of the agencies that submitted their self-assessments were not completing the initial goals, and an additional group of agencies did not even comply to submit their self-assessments. On the other hand, the report also shows that there were a decent number of agencies that had made significant changes to become more equitable. Some positive examples include the creation of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for very low-

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\(^2\) These areas are agencies’ commitment, leadership, & governance; equity policies & implementation practices; departmental climates, cultures, trainings, & communications; and service-based equity.
income households, and the development of new equity-oriented internal processes – such as the creation of an internal Office of Equity and Environmental Justice - at the Department of Public Works, among others (Office of Equity and Civil Rights 2020). However, at the time of this writing, the first annual equity report remains the only report ever published. Interviewees from city agencies confirmed that they have submitted three annual equity self-assessments but that the OECR has not translated those into comprehensive public reports.

Similarly, the equity assistance fund has not evolved as required by the legal mandate. Even though the City Council Bill 18-0222 requires the equity assistance fund to receive an annual appropriation equal to at least 3% of the amount appropriated for the Police Department of Baltimore City, at the time of this writing the equity assistance fund has never received any appropriations. No interviewee was able to explain the two-year gap in the publication of the annual equity report and the lack of appropriations for the equity assistance funds. Members of the OECR did not respond to multiple inquiries on this issue.

Interviewees from individual agencies described other initiatives that aim to make their work more equitable, and which are commonly led by each agency’s equity coordinator. Unlike the transversal reforms described earlier, these initiatives are often targeted at a specific issue. The Baltimore Police Department is home to multiple of those initiatives including one for women in law enforcement, one to make police interactions with the youth more equitable, and one to recruit talent from historically black colleges and universities, among others. Another example is the Framework for Community Development which the Department of Housing and Community Development created as a strategy for investing in long-divested communities.

Finally, reforms in the City of Baltimore appear to have had a positive role in enhancing the voice of nondominant groups. The results from the planning academy are a prime example.
As of 2022, the academy has trained about 200 residents (Baltimore City Department of Planning 2018). The targeting of participants has aimed to ensure a diverse composition, although there is no clear evidence to judge its diversity and no particular strategy to ensure that intersectionality gets addressed. While it is difficult to track the impact of the planning academy on policymaking, one interviewee provided qualitative examples of how people who were part of the planning academy moved on to impact planning and the capital improvement plan.

*Challenges and Future Plans*

The main challenge for upcoming years is that the separation in the roles that each regulatory institution has for each relevant system (such as the equity assessment program, outcome budgeting, CitiStat, and others) has informally evolved into separate silos that prevent collaboration. Working in separate silos, each team has taken some early steps to include equity considerations in decision-making processes. The CitiStat system has started to analyze which areas of the performance framework that they have for each type of meeting could be enhanced with equity measures. For example, in a document made available for our review, the PoliceStat meeting has identified five areas that could include equity-specific measures. The BBMR is working on including equity questions in the results teams’ analysis. But overall, the lack of coordination leads to sub-optimal outcomes, including the missed opportunity to embed equity considerations into the operating budget, the fact that measures from the outcome budgeting system have become outdated, and the duplicity of work for agencies that must deal with competing assessments. This might be changing in upcoming years as interviewees from those three departments highlighted the importance to develop channels for coordination. From a practical standpoint, interviewees from BBMR confirmed that they have meetings scheduled with the OECR to start discussing potential changes to the budgetary process.
In contrast, other areas where coordination has been present are already showing positive outcomes. Interviewees from agencies reported attending equity meetings that involve the OECR and equity coordinators from other agencies. All interviewees with knowledge about these meetings described them as very helpful. These meetings have a collaborative approach with agencies discussing their innovations and detailing what has and has not worked. In addition, all the agencies interviewed for this study reported having equity committees of their own. For example, interviewees from the Department of Planning explained that they have both an equity committee (which predates the OECR reforms) and an interagency capital improvement plan oversight committee. The latter has become an instrumental input for capital budgeting decisions, as members of the committee review a subset of projects using the capital evaluation criteria and, as argued by one interviewee, their reviews become an input for resource allocation decisions. An interviewee at the Department of Public Works reported that they have an equity committee that is comprised of about 70 members of their organization. Their committee currently meets bi-monthly and coordinates tasks such as training and workshops directly related to equity.

Another important challenge lies in the details of participatory processes. It is unclear whether taxpayer nights and the results teams associated with outcome budgeting are bringing equity considerations into policymaking. Some interviewees argued that the suggestions presented through these processes can influence the mayor’s budget recommendations and bring equity considerations to the table. However, these processes have not been adapted to introduce an intentional equity approach and most of its documentation is not available to the public. In addition, even though most interviewees highlighted the importance of intersectionality, there are
no specific strategies to ensure it is addressed. There is space for a more intentional and targeted recruitment process to ensure that participants meet specific diversity targets.

One important limitation of all the reforms is that they are strictly forward-looking, meaning that they lack any relevant effort to quantify the effects of historical discrimination and take corrective action. The only exception is the equity assistance fund, which has a mandate of redressing past inequities in capital budget spending, but it has never received the resources to accomplish this goal. While multiple interviewees candidly acknowledged and denoted the importance of past discrimination, their focus is not currently on reparations but on the seemingly more urgent front of ensuring that their current and future work does not repeat past failures.

There was general agreement among interviewees on the need to further train civil servants on the nuances surrounding equity. Through multiple qualitative examples, interviewees explained that many employees still do not understand key concepts, for example, the difference between equity and equality. While this is being ameliorated through training led by equity coordinators, the City of Baltimore would benefit from a more systemic approach to ensure that its workforce is well-versed in the equity consideration that it should be introducing to its day-to-day operations.

Very few interviewees mentioned the lack of availability of resources as a constraint for their work. This view is consistent with the fact that many offices are in the process of expanding their equity teams and that rollout of reforms is still moving forward. Interviewees from agencies that have no more than one full-time person working for equity initiatives said that the workload is manageable because there are committees that get the involvement of many individuals. However, this situation might change once reforms become more institutionalized and the
requirement for each agency becomes more systematic and burdensome. Finally, interviewees from regulatory agencies – like Planning and BBMR – argued that their information systems have significant limitations that should be addressed.

Finally, interviewees said that leadership and buy-in from civil servants, which can often become important challenges, have instead been two critical enablers of progress. The involvement of leadership was mentioned by all interviewees and included senior officials within individual departments, as well as broader political support within the executive branch. Regarding civil servants, no interviewee could think about a single instance of active resistance to reforms. Some interviewees suggested that they still need to be prepared because resistance could arise as reforms become more institutionalized.

4.3 King County, Washington

King County, Washington, the county in which Seattle is located, launched an Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) initiative in 2008. This was initiated by former county executive Ron Sims, and was designed to encourage departments to “use an equity lens” in “policies and decisions, organizational practices, and engagement with the community”. Under the subsequent county executive (Dow Constantine) and the county council, the ESJ was incorporated into the county strategic plan in 2010. Then, in 2016, this eventually led to the development and enactment of the 2016-22 Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, which was created “with input from form than 700 employees and more than 100 organizations” (Valenzuela, 2017, p. 2).

In developing these initiatives, particularly the ESJ Strategic Plan, King County cited, and defined, current inequities as being “systemic and patterned” and noted that the achievement
of equity would necessarily require “intentional and systemic pro-equity processes, practices and tools that disrupt the status quo” (Valenzuela, 2017, p. 2).

**A Description of the Reform**

The ESJ Strategic Plan (King County, Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, 2016) lays out pro-equity agendas covering eight policy areas and six goal areas. The latter goal areas largely represent cross-cutting processes and management areas that need to be addressed to focus on promoting equity.

The Plan defines “pro-equity” as involving:

5. Targeted universalism, meaning defining outcomes for all, and identifying obstacles and tailoring strategies to address these barriers.

6. “Dismantling systems of power, privilege and racial injustice in factor of equitable access to resources and decisions.”

7. Focusing on the people and places where needs are greatest. This includes low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant and refugee populations.

8. Creating inclusive processes and including people early, continuously, and meaningfully.“

The Plan outlines a pro-equity policy agenda, which specifically targets commitments to advancing equity in the following eight policy areas, over the three years after the adoption of the Plan (King County, Pro-Equity Policy Agenda, 2016).³

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³ As the Plan covered 2016-2022, this would imply making progress by the midpoint of the six years, or 2019. This was not stated explicitly. While these other documents are undated, we are assuming that the various follow-on documents concerning implementation and accountability are also from 2016.
• **Child and Youth Development:** This covers both progress in early childhood (prenatal to 5 years of age, and later childhood (5 to 24 years of age). For the former group, it addresses the needs of new parents and other caregivers and high-quality childcare. For the latter group, it addresses the reduction of negative risky behaviors, meeting health and behavior needs, connections to families, and stopping the “school to prison pipeline”.

• **Economic Development and Jobs:** This covers access to private and public sector jobs (focusing on reducing bias in general, but also focusing on barriers faced by particular groups, such as criminals, veterans, the disabled, and women of color. It also focuses on the quality of jobs available to these groups, promoting higher wages, and helping small businesses.

• **Environment and Climate:** This includes improving “racial, gender, age and location diversity” in environmental governance processes, promoting environmental justice in siting and design of infrastructure, and prioritizing equity in the development of energy efficiency and renewable energy strategies. This latter involves focusing attention on those most vulnerable and at risk concerning climate change impacts.

• **Health and Human Services:** Included in this initiative are increased opportunities for community engagement, changing contracting requirements so that small non-profits that serve BIPOC and low-income populations can participate fully, and fostering community partnerships. It also calls for the use of data to address inequalities and prioritize public health, particularly by focusing on disease prevention and substance abuse.

• **Housing:** In housing, the focus is to target capital funds toward affordable housing, particularly around high-capacity transit sites, and address Seattle’s substantial homelessness problem. It also focuses on the housing challenges of particular
populations, including the mentally ill, the drug dependent, and veterans, and homeless families.

- **Information Technology:** The focus in this policy area is on reducing the gap between the technology “haves” and “have nots” by increasing the availability of broadband, increasing the availability of online services, and reducing technological disparities between schools.

- **Justice System:** Included in the changes desired in the justice system, are, first and foremost, ending the “school to prison pipeline” by developing partnerships between the community, schools, and the justice system to keep youth from entering the system to being with. This is to be done explicitly by addressing the disproportionate effects of policies and practices on communities of color, supporting efforts to address mental health and substance abuse issues among these communities, and understanding and reducing traumatic experiences felt disproportionately by these populations. Notably, this particular policy area includes many specific strategies that will be pursued by many different criminal justice agencies, including the sheriff’s office, prosecutors, course, and correctional agencies.

- **Transportation and Mobility:** In transportation, particularly mass transit, the focus is on improvements in the quality of service, and the access to service of particular communities (BIPOC, rural residents, seniors, the disabled). The Plan also proposes increasing partnerships with community organizations, smaller employers, and other groups to provide more access to transportation for low-income workers.

In addition to these policy areas, the Plan outlines six “goal areas”, which are presumably cross-cutting administrative and other processes that are not related to a particular policy area but
are designed to promote equity more across the board (King County, Six Goal Areas, 2016). It is clear, however, that many of these process improvements would enable the achievement of many of the policy goals outlined above. These administrative changes include:

- **Leadership, Operations, and Services:** The county seeks to have “county operations, programs, and services (be) pro-equity and reflect ESJ values”, is to promote ESJ values in elected leaders and employees, and to promote ESJ-focused community partnerships.

- **Plans, Policies, and Budgets:** Agency business plans and budgets are to reflect ESJ values. This means, in part, developing better data that can inform such an improved allocation, a more participatory budget process, and advocacy at the state level such that state resources are better targeted toward more equitable allocation of resources.

- **Workplace and Workforce:** This particular change is focused on workplace culture, equitable access to development and opportunities, and a culture of shared decision-making. This means, in part, removing barriers to advancement for BIPOC employees, investing in opportunities for lower-salaried employees, and evaluating leaders based in part on their commitment to equity.

- **Community Partnerships:** This initiative argues for the promotion of pro-equity contracting processes that promote access to contracts for more community-based organizations. A particular emphasis is placed on promoting investment in those organizations that would promote economic development in disadvantaged areas.

- **Communications and Education:** The county seeks, in its public-facing communication, to conduct it in languages that are consistent with the demographic changes facing the county. To promote that, it proposed making training and resources available to staff that will enable them to better communicate with these disparate populations. Further, it
would promote technology access for those who have not had such access, and provide additional ESJ training to supervisory staff.

- **Facility and System Improvements:** The plan seeks to have capital plans and budgets to be “pro-equity”. Specifically, capital plans should be informed by equity considerations, and this means, in turn, that those employees involved in developing capital plans need to be trained and have the resources to recognize ways in which these allocations can be made more pro-equity.

The county also published an implementation plan for the six goal areas that included specific actions that would be taken over the 2016-2018 period to carry out actions that would address the elements of the strategic plan. Significantly, this included many performance targets and metrics that would be used to evaluate progress toward the six goals (King County, Implementation Plan, 2016).

*Current Practice and Progress*

While the plan itself is very impressive and far-reaching, the county has not made nearly as much progress in reporting the results of its activities. It is important to note at the outset that this does not mean that progress has NOT been made, only that it is difficult to find documentation of it. There is a link to a site purporting to report progress on the implementation of the strategic plan,\(^4\) that says that reports on progress against the six goal areas (and presumably the implementation plan) are “coming soon!”, it seems notable that some of the performance targets were for 2018 to 2020, and none have been reported publicly. The same site also reports progress by the agency (King County, Progress by Department), but only three of

those agencies-- the Department of Information Technology, the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, and the Department of Community and Human Services--have any information. Each of these three cases presents information on progress made across four areas: Investing Upstream and Where Needs are: Investing in Community Partnerships; Investing in Employees; and Transparent and Accountable Leadership. There are minimal performance measures, and the measures that do exist stop in 2017, with some suggesting that the 2018 data will be posted at a later time. In two of these cases, there are short videos outlining the Department’s commitment to equity. Again, these are the only three agencies where there is any reporting at all. There are 15 other agencies where the website says that the data are “in progress”.

A “tools and resources” link on the county website includes two elements. First, a statement on racial justice that was last updated in March of 2017 (more than five years ago) and includes links to other documents and resources that are even older (for example, an equity infographic from 2015). Second, demographic maps were last updated in 2014.

Interviews with King County officials confirm that they were building toward a reporting system in 2017 and 2018 but that the system has not yet progressed to a point where data can be reported publicly. A software system that was attempted fell short of being able to do what the county wanted in terms of reporting. Part of this lack of progress can be attributed to the pandemic, which understandably diverted attention to more important matters. There are, nonetheless, internal reports and accountability systems in place in many county agencies. In the Department of Public Health, for example, there are implementation plans and measures associated with the 6 goal areas, and directors have success in equity accountability woven into
their performance assessments. There are also specific measures of workplace and workforce equity, some of which are informed by employee surveys. (Interview with King County Official, 2022).

For the county’s revised plan that is currently under development (see discussion below) there is a specific goal of having a public-facing dashboard. One challenge in developing ESJ measures is that the county already has several requirements for performance reporting, and the process of developing requirements for new measures should ideally be accompanied by getting rid of some current requirements for measures that are of questionable value. One interviewee acknowledged that, historically, the county has been “good at Plans..but not good at measures” even though a plan without measures can end up being of limited usefulness. (Interview with King County Official, 2022). The measures that are developed in the next round need to be specific. And if measures are developed, there currently are several venues, including meetings that the budget director has with department heads, where these measures could be the focus.

Even though the reporting of performance measures has been disappointing, it is notable that equity-oriented practices have continued to evolve since 2017 in King County’s budget formulation process. Equity considerations are now a standard component of budget analysis, together with more traditional components like financial and strategic reviews. In the most recent internal budgetary instructions – which were made available for our review - the executive requires departments to present business plans that explain how their budget requests will help the county meet the goals stated in the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan (King County, undated internal guidance). In the current COVID-19 context, the executive’s budgetary instructions required departments to ‘reallocate existing resources, change policies and systems, and adjust timelines to advance equity in their base budget even without new funding proposals.
The COVID-19 context is not the only challenge to advancing social equity through budgetary processes. As is the case in other local governments, a majority of King County’s budget must meet dedicated purposes established in their revenue collection mechanisms. Additionally, the budget formulation process includes an overwhelming amount of information that makes it challenging to conduct a comprehensive analysis. King County’s process does include both general and dedicated funds in its equity analysis but narrows the volume down by focusing on requests for new or expanded programs. To mitigate administrative burden, the equity analysis has been embedded transversally within the regular analytical process, instead of transforming it into an additional bureaucratic layer.

The case of King County includes additional budgetary innovations that lay beside the regular budget process. One is a new equity-oriented participatory budgeting process designed to invest $10 million in bond-backed dollars within local communities. The participatory budgeting process is being driven by a committee composed of 21 local citizens who are expected to build on community participation and use racial equity as a core guiding principle. At the time of this writing, it was not clear what the role of the committee will be after they allocate the funding, or whether this participatory process would become recurrent.

Perhaps the most significant single more recent development concerning King County’s anti-racist efforts was the June 2020 declaration by the county of racism as a public health crisis. This was in direct response to the George Floyd murder made in June 2020 and was a response to demands from both the public and county employees (Interview with King County Official, 2022). This statement, made jointly by the County Executive and the Public Health Director, declared that “Seattle and King County and all of King County government are committed to implementing a racially equitable response to this crisis, centering on community.” The statement went on to
commit to working with a community organization, providing resources to those organizations, and using data to develop sustainable solutions (Public Health Insider, 2020). As a part of this initiative, in March 2021 $25.6 million of the $600 million COVID-19 rescue budget were allocated to a participatory budgeting fund to improve economic opportunities of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community.

The FY21-22 biennial budget (King County, Office of the Executive, 2020) was particularly encouraging, as the proposed budget included an entire goal area entitled “Becoming an Anti-Racist County” that outlines a significant number of changes designed to make progress toward that goal. The goal itself is rooted, as noted above, in a declaration that racism is “a public health crisis” requiring a racially just response. The main focus of the budget was on trying to use general funds (those where there is flexibility) to combat racism. For example, there is a major push, in the county jail, toward trying to switch the focus of funding away from criminal justice toward behavioral responses. This includes a specific pledge to close the juvenile detention facility by the end of 2025.5

There are places where there are explicit connections between the 2021-22 budget and the goals of the ESJ Strategic Plan, although there are often no direct references to that Plan. These include, but are not limited to:

- A big major focus on criminal and legal reform and alternatives to incarceration. This included investing $6 million to divert 40-80 percent of juvenile offenders from the legal system to a comprehensive set of community-based resources;

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5 Interview with King County Official, August 2022.
• A focus, in the Parks department, on putting parks where the people are, even though this is much more difficult;
• Behavioral health interventions in urban unincorporated King County;
• Changes to mass transit fare enforcement to attempt to address the disproportionate effect of current policies on communities of color;
• Efforts to vacate various criminal fines, particularly for (previously illegal) marijuana offenses;
• Reserving funds for environmental projects that will create green jobs, especially for those in under-represented communities;
• Investing in capital projects in areas of the county where BIPOCs are located;
• Funding a translation program for the King County website to ensure that information is available in the six most-spoken languages in the county; and
• The hiring of additional county employees and the training of employees to deal with issues of racial and social justice.

Challenges and Future Plans

There are two significant efforts underway that focus on the future. The first is the County Executive’s 2023-24 proposed budget, which is, as of this writing, under consideration by the County Council (King County, Office of the Executive, 2022). This budget continues the focus on anti-racism and maintains the goals of combatting racism in the county. It appears that many of the efforts from the previous biennium are proposed to continue, including those focused on environmental justice, criminal justice reform, and information. The budget explicitly states that “advancing the anti-racist and pro-equity agenda requires changes in what King County
government does and *how* it does it” (King County, Office of the Executive, 2020, p. 8). The anti-racist and pro-equity agenda is listed as one of four “key investments” in the budget and includes:

- **$10 million** for the second round of participatory budgeting for residents of urban unincorporated King County. The first round of participatory budgeting concluded successfully in August 2022, with residents selecting 45 capital projects to fund in their communities.

- **$710,000** to provide ongoing support for King County’s Pro-Equity and Anti-Racist Community Co-Creation team, which creates community opportunities to participate in transparent and accountable governance through groups such as the King County Equity Cabinet, the Racism is a Public Health Crisis Gathering Collaborative, and the Coalition Against Hate and Bias.

- **$1.7 million** to improve language equity, including expanding translation of the King County websites.

- **$4.8 million** to build King County’s internal organizational capacity for pro-equity, racial, and social justice work, including providing additional staff training, improving capacity for community engagement and co-creation with community-based organizations, and developing strategies to advance disability justice.

Second, there is currently a major effort underway to revise the Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan. The current Plan, as noted above, “expired” in 2022, although one interviewee acknowledged that they should not have put an end date on the prior Plan, lest anyone think that the goals listed therein had an explicit end-point. There was never any intent to communicate to anyone that when the last year of the Plan ended, that would mean that people should stop working,
or, as one interviewee put it, that somehow “racism has been ended”. (Interview with King County Official, 2022).

The new plan will build off of the existing Plan, and the revision effort includes community members, ESJ staff, and others. Inter-departmental teams are working on the new plan. This includes all of the departments plus representatives of the parts of the county that are governed by elected officials. Probably will continue through the middle of next year. They will build off of the existing plan.

Community groups are being engaged now, including mainly the equity-focused groups of different departments. There is an equity cabinet overall, plus some departments have their advisory groups (for example, the Public Health department has a pandemic and health advisory group, and the Transit agency has an equity and mobility group). There will ultimately be more than 1000 community organizations involved. They are trying to ensure that they do move too far internally before gaining community input, lest they end up sending these groups a plan that looks fully (or even mostly) cooked, which could come across as something that has already been half-baked without adequate opportunity for input. Also feeding into the plan is a conceptualization of the determinants of equity, which should be revised by around the first quarter of 2023. The new strategic plan is scheduled to be delivered to the county council by the end of the calendar year 2023.

5 DISCUSSION

[PENDING: to be completed after the APPAM conference].

6 CONCLUSIONS

[PENDING: to be completed after the APPAM conference].
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