

Equity & Social Justice Division

Equity & Social Justice Division Mission

The Equity and Social Justice Division works with City agencies and members of the public to build equitable and inclusive systems and services for our communities.

Our Definition of Equity

Equity is a deliberate prioritization of those impacted by ongoing systemic injustice.

Our Guiding Principles

We practice trust, joy, disruption, and care in our equity work.

We recognize all systems of oppression are connected and work towards collective liberation.

We center the voices of those who are directly impacted.

We shape change that is accessible, collaborative, and accountable.

As we dismantle oppressive systems, we must also build transformative solutions.

How we work

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Our team integrates disability access and equity, social justice, racial equity, and language access to design systems that work for people. We create the conditions for mutual flourishing.

kristy kumar, ESJ Manager

Focus Areas

Racial Equity and Social Justice

Disability Access and Equity

Language Access



Our Roadmap for Change

Transform government systems and culture so that all members of our community can have a high quality of life.

Transform Government Systems and Culture

- 1 Influencing Policy Change
- 2 Elevating Community Voices
- 3 Developing Internal Infrastructure
- 4 Building Staff Capacity and Leadership
- 5 Cultivating Healthy Workplace Culture

All Community Members Have a High Quality of Life



Wheels & Heels dance performers at the annual Disability Pride Madison Festival



Our annual Freedom Dreaming event, panelists Renesha Carter formerly with Roots, Denise Jess of the Council of the Blind, and Gery Paredes Vasquez, YWCA



A Parks Alive participant getting their face painted

Influencing Policy Change

We develop tools to ensure our plans, policies, procedures, and budgets equitably address the needs of our communities. We train, support, and guide staff on using these tools to create policy changes.

Equitable Hiring Plan: The City's Hiring Plan that embeds equity throughout the process. Most hires require using the Equitable Hiring Plan. NOTE: We updated to a new and improved version!

Racial Equity Analysis: A guide that facilitates conscious consideration of equity and examines how communities of color, low-income populations, and those with the greatest need will be affected by a proposed action/decision of the City. Through the analysis staff and others create strategies and recommendations for equitable solutions.

Equity in the Budget: This process integrates explicit considerations of racial equity and social justice into budget development and resource allocation. Every agency is required to consider a set of questions to assess how budget requests benefit and/or burden marginalized communities. RESJI staff, the Mayor's office, and a management team analyze all budget requests to ensure direct investments are made towards advancing equitable outcomes.

Department Equity Team Action Plans: Every agency's Department Equity Team develops a three-year Equity Action Plan. These agency plans enact institutional and structural change to achieve equitable outcomes. All Equity Action Plans include specific actions, resources committed, indicators of success, timelines, and leads.

Policy Consultation: ESJ staff provide consultation to city staff, the Mayor's Office, Alders, Boards, Commissions, and Committees on the creation of city policies such as Administrative Procedural Memorandum (APMs), ordinances, and resolutions ensuring equity is embedded throughout the policy.

Disability Rights Commission: A Commission staffed by community members knowledgeable of the needs, rights, and collective aspirations of residents with disabilities, an Alder, and DCR Staff that recommends policy to the Mayor and the City in all areas that affect people with disabilities and their families.



Rebecca Hoyt and Kristy Kumar signing "I love you" in ASL. They presented at the 2024 Government Alliance on Race and Equity's annual membership meeting on No Justice without Disability and Language Justice."

Elevating Community Voices

We build and maintain trust, expanding the influence of community members through inclusive and responsive practices.



Bilingual Community Connectors: The Bilingual Community Connectors support language access for Spanish, Hmong, and Chinese communities. Through resident engagement and relationships with community-based organizations, connectors elevate underrepresented voices, facilitate solution-building, and build trust between community members and City government.

Community Radio: Connectors work with local nonprofits to provide monthly radio shows in Spanish and Hmong about city services and news. Our Hmong Radio Show is on WORT: www.wortfm.org/hmong-radio-show/ and our Spanish show is on La Movida: www.lamovidaradio.com/. We created a WeChat community group to share information about City Services and news in Chinese.

Above top: Enoch Melgarejo on the set at LaMovida. Bottom: Ze Yang on the set at WORT radio.

“The Leopold-Arbor Hills NRT’s community supper had over 150 in attendance this year! The event has been growing each year with coordination and support from the NRT members, community organizations, and school staff.

— Linda Horvath, NRT Leader

Neighborhood Resource Teams:

NRTs are one of the City's earliest and longest lasting approaches to racial equity. These teams promote racial equity and improve the quality of life for Madison residents in specific neighborhoods that have endured historic and ongoing marginalization. City staff lead teams of community members, community based-organizations, Alders, and City staff working towards elevating the needs, issues, and priorities of people living in that area.

Disability Rights and Services Program: The DRSP embraces a social model of disability, recognizing that the built world and systemic ableism present barriers to access, not a person’s mind or body. We strive to go beyond legal compliance and collaborate with those most impacted to foster disability-affirming spaces, advance opportunities, and celebrate the diversity of our Disabled residents.

The DRSP collaborates with disability-led organizations to host events that elevate issues important to Disabled Madison residents such as the [Disability Summit: Collective Visioning for a More Equitable Future](#), community conversation about pedestrian safety, and film screenings.

Developing Internal Infrastructure

Establishing the foundational systems, structures, and resources to transform City operations towards equitable solutions.

Department Equity Teams: Every department has a team that works to ensure equity on the department level. Teams work on Department Equity Action Plans and support communication of ongoing equity related trainings, opportunities, and policy change. These teams are essential for spreading the work of equity across our organization to build a culture where all employees are encouraged to engage in equity work as a part of their jobs.

Language Access Program: The City of Madison Language Access Program provides access to City services for people whose primary language is other than English. We support city staff in providing spoken and sign language interpretation, translation, captioning, and video relay services for community members. We also provide consultation to City staff on plain language and inclusive community engagement strategies.

RESJI Teams: City staff across the organization lead our Community Connections, Training and Learning, and Communications teams. These peer-led and cross-departmental teams support development of strategies, tools, trainings, and events to help our organization advance equity. For example, our Community Connections team developed an excellent resource — the [Public Participation Resource Guide](#) — for City staff to use in developing community engagement plans.

“
I had the opportunity
to collaborate with
staff in other agencies
and work together to
effect change in how we
engage with community.

— Erin Nuñez
Community Connections

The DRSP hosts the annual **Inspiring Student Professionals in Residence (INSPIRE)** program in partnership with Human Resources which gives students with disabilities an opportunity to explore careers in public service by shadowing city staff in agencies across the city.



2024 YWCA Racial Justice Summit In-Person Closing Generative Dialogue with Lola Loustaunau, Kristy Kumar, Sarah Noble, Gery Paredes Vásquez, Maliha Nu'man, and Ali Khan

Building Staff Capacity and Leadership

We build City staff's capacity to advance equity at all levels of the organization because equity cannot be the job of a small group of people, it must be embedded everywhere. One way we do this is through our own trainings.

OUR TRAININGS

RESJI Foundations: All City staff are encouraged to attend this training and especially those beginning their learning on racial equity and social justice. This course is for those wondering “What is racial equity? What does it have to do with my job? What can I do about it?”

Plain Language and Effective Communication: This training focuses on how you communicate and the language you use which can serve to disrupt power dynamics, build positive and lasting relationships, help people understand your message, and help people make informed decisions.

Service and Support Animals in Public Places: Focuses on learning to treat people who use service and emotional support animals with dignity and respect while complying with the law. Explore real-world challenges like addressing service animal fraud and best practices for serving people with conflicting access needs.

Models of Disability, Disability Culture and Identity: Examine how models of disability show up in language, how we feel about people, and how we interact with others. In this approachable and conversational training, you will learn (and unlearn) different social narratives of disability and how Disabled people have informed their own sense of identity.

ADA and Effective Communication: Public entities are required to ensure all services, programs, and activities are readily accessible to and usable for people with disabilities. This training is offered to support agencies to learn more about their legal obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and to remove access barriers.

Creating Accessible Virtual Spaces: This training focuses on strategies to make your trainings and meetings more inclusive and effective for people with disabilities. This session will broaden your perspective, and you will leave with actionable tips to use in future trainings and meetings.

On-Demand Spoken and Sign Language Interpretation: This pre-recorded training provides an overview of how to use on-demand spoken and sign language interpretation for community members when they come to a city office building or call a city telephone number.

Public Participation Training: This training focuses on facilitating communication and input from the Madison community, engaging everyone, including those we don't often hear from.

Professional Development Opportunities: Each year, we fund employee participation in professional development opportunities provided by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), The YWCA's Racial Justice Summit, and Black Women's Wellness.

We also host our own events such as the annual Freedom Dreaming generative panel with local equity practitioners.

“ This is by far the best
and most useful course
I have ever taken.

— RESJI Foundations attendee

Cultivating a Healthy Workplace Culture

Building a pro-equity organization and workplace culture where every employee experiences inclusion, belonging, and wellness at work.

Affinity Groups: Affinity groups are voluntary, employee-led groups that are organized around social identities, marginalization, and life experiences. We along with Human Resources support affinity groups with strategic planning and resources so their respective teams are able to achieve their goals.

Coffee with RESJI: Our pop up outreach events, hosted by the Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative (RESJI), meet staff in locations throughout the City, offer coffee and donuts, and learn from staff about their questions, ideas, and concerns related to equity. We also share information about RESJI and employee wellness resources. Through these collaborations, the City of Madison will continue to grow into a place where equity leads and informs our work.

Connection Events: We host events to connect city staff across the organization engaged in equity efforts to find places of support, alignment, and joy. These include training opportunities, film screenings, volunteer opportunities in the community, speaker series events, end of year gatherings, and potlucks!

Culture Surveys: We work with HR and Affinity Groups to support development, implementation, and after action reviews of all employee culture surveys. These surveys help our organization at large gather employee feedback to understand and improve workplace culture, identify areas for improvement, and measure the effectiveness of programs like our harassment and prohibited discrimination policy.



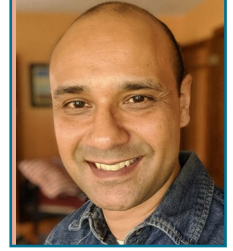
The ESJ partners with HR to support various affinity groups. This group photo of staff from across the City was taken at a fall 2024 gathering.

The Team Behind the Work



Left to right: Holly Chen (she/her), Chinese Community Connector; Enoch Melgarejo (he/him), Spanish Community Connector; and Ze Yang (she/her), Hmong Community Connector

Left to right: Donna Collingwood (she/her), Communications Coordinator; Rebecca Hoyt (she/her), Disability Rights and Services Specialist; and Tariq Saqqaf (he/him), RESJI and Neighborhood Resource Team Coordinator



Left: kristy kumar, she / her, Equity and Social Justice Division Manager

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

— Lilla Watson, *Aboriginal elder*

Leading Equity in Madison and Beyond

Our team is a leader in equity work providing training and consultation locally and nationally. In 2024 and 2025 we've lead presentations at the Municipal League of Cities, YWCA's Racial Justice Summit, Facing Race Conference, Government Alliance on Race and Equity, Dane County Court Observers, Sun Prairie Equity Gym, Wisconsin ADA Coordinators Association, Dane County Shelter Services Committee, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Madison Planning Organization Equity Working Group, American Planning Association Wisconsin Conference, and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

Check out manager, kristy kumar, who was featured on [“The State of Inclusion Podcast”](#) discussing [“Finding Joy in Working Toward Equity.”](#)

Thanks for reading! We hope you enjoyed this content. Please feel free to share feedback.

Contact newsletter editor at dcollingwood@cityofmadison.com



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